

TEASER

INT. MAR VISTA ARMS APARTMENTS - POOL AREA - DAY

Post WWII. Clean and affordable. A POOL MAN is working his net. Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" PLAYS OVER. It's coming from a balcony apartment as it all too endlessly does. Now we hear the RINGING of an old-fashioned phone.

PAN ACROSS the pool to the source of the sound at the chaise lounges. There's a man sprawled out sleeping in last night's clothes, a few empty Tecates and an In and Out Burger bag on the cement next to his chaise.

The RINGING wakes him. The sun is blinding. The music is cloying. The sound of the phone is coming from his sports coat, thrown nearby. He gropes for his cell and answers.

SKIP

Skip Tracer.

Listening, SKIP TRACER rubs his face.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Yeah, I'm up. I am. I'm almost out the door.

He shuts the phone. He looks up towards the music. The Pool Man shrugs.

POOL MAN

Must've stopped taking her meds.

INT. SKIP'S ONE BEDROOM APT - DAY

In disarray -- housekeeper comes on Thursdays. Skip enters, tosses his stuff, presses the blinking light on the phone. As he pulls his shirt off --

SPEAKER PHONE

Skip? Hi, it's Carla Wolff. I was wondering if you had some time today...

IN THE BATHROOM

Skip throws water on his face, takes a belt of Listerine. From the next room --

SPEAKER PHONE (CONT'D)

...I remember you mentioned once you sometimes used decoys, you know, something in a short skirt, see if they'll take the bait?

Only half-listening, Skip feels his stubble as he checks himself in the mirror -- we see a man in his early 30's, surfer good looks with a bad-boy spin. He sees something that'll do -- spits mouth wash and heads for --

THE BEDROOM

Digs for a clean shirt in the closet. From the next room --

SPEAKER PHONE (CONT'D)

And I know you think there's nothing going on, but -- the guy's never home and if he thinks I'm just going to sit here....

THE LIVING ROOM

Skip comes in, buttoning his shirt, throws food in the fish tank, grabs his jacket, shades, cell, a Coke from the fridge.

SPEAKER PHONE (CONT'D)

So call me, okay? I've got Pilates at twelve. But we could do lunch? Ivy at the Shore? Or Sushi Roku, I'm dying for a hand roll --

Skip hits a button on the phone and he's out the door.

EXT. MAR VISTA ARMS APARTMENTS - DAY

Skip comes out to the drone of a leaf blower, Whitney Houston, the glare of the sun. He puts on his shades and is headed for his parking space when he's intercepted by FLORENCE, a mummified 70 in sleeveless housedress, sunglasses and lipstick, on her way back from corner store with cigarettes and coffee.

FLORENCE

Good. You're up. I need a word with you, mister.

SKIP

Swear to God, I was on my way over there and something came up.

FLORENCE

That's what I'll tell you next time your plumbing goes out. What did I expect? Just some old man. The police blew him off too.

SKIP
(checks watch)
I'm gonna go. I'll go.

FLORENCE
That's a good boy.

Whitney Houston crescendos. The volume's been cranked. They look towards the sound.

SKIP
You got to tell her to knock it off.

FLORENCE
She's fragile. Her boyfriend left.

SKIP
Ten years ago?

FLORENCE
I don't hear it anymore really.

Skip opens the door to his Monte Carlo coupe.

SKIP
Y'know, Florence, you're gonna blow away if you don't eat something.

FLORENCE
I think you missed a button on your trousers, mister.

He looks down to where she probably shouldn't've been looking.

SKIP
Ah, Florence.

Buttoning, he gets in the car and goes.

EXT. OLD MAN DICKENS' HOUSE - DAY

A shabby bungalow in need of paint and now a roof, tar paper undulating in the heat. OLD MAN DICKENS' face set bitterly. Skip is descending a creaky ladder.

OLD MAN DICKENS
They ripped the shingles off and said they were coming back in the morning.

SKIP

Mr. Dickens, I'm sorry but they probably skipped Mar Vista soon as they got your money.

OLD MAN DICKENS

(sarcastic)

Gee, you think so?

(then)

Filthy Gypsies, they know the Irish are susceptible to 'em. The question is what are you going to do about it?

The old man spits Copenhagen, wipes the dribble from his chin with a filthy sleeve.

SKIP

Nothing if you keep that mouth up.

OLD MAN DICKENS

(suddenly emotional)

I'm on a pension. This little house is all I got.

SKIP

Lloyd, take it easy. Can you tell me what they were driving?

OLD MAN DICKENS

Some kind of van. Blue maybe. They were dragging an asphalt rig. (sarcastic again)

And no, I did not get the license plate. I got glaucoma in one eye here.

SKIP

Blue...? Dark, light?

OLD MAN

Blue, I don't know. The hood was yellow though. Must've been in a wreck. One of 'em even had a little baby she was toting around, trying to throw my thoughts off. I even gave 'em water.

Dickens spits again, wipes.

SKIP

Yellow hood, that helps. I'll see what I can do.

OLD MAN DICKENS
Florence said this'd be pro bono.

SKIP
She did? She told me you had a
hundred grand stuffed in your
mattress.

OLD MAN DICKENS
That's a damn lie!

SKIP
So you give it but you can't take
it, huh?

A small jet banks overhead, Skip takes note. To Lloyd --

SKIP (CONT'D)
That's my eleven o'clock. You take
care. And if it's too good to be
true, old man, it probably is.

END OF TEASER

ACT I

EXT. SANTA MONICA AIRPORT - TARMAC - DAY

A bygone era of Quonset huts and prop planes. A NetJet taxies up. Skip approaches as the cabin door opens, the stairs unfold and down comes CONRAD COLBERT, 50's, too tan from the Arizona sun, too soft for an ex-athlete. Skip extends a hand and they shake.

SKIP

Mr. Colbert, Skip Tracer.

CON COLBERT

Call me Con. How goes it, Skip?
Sunny Southern California, huh?
But you get the real sun in
Phoenix.

(taking a snapshot out of
his breast pocket --)

So here's Stacie's picture. Her
teeth are capped though now. This
was at Ruth Chris's. She finished
that entire steak.

INSERT PHOTO

Con and a much younger woman. Slavic good looks.

RESUME

SKIP

I'm impressed.

CON COLBERT

I don't know how she did it, never
got fat. Pirogi, sausages.
Polish. I must have told you that.

SKIP

Did you think of any other
specifics? Hobbies? A cocktail
she liked?

CON COLBERT

Just the shoes. That was her
hobby, shoe shopping. And I loved
buying them for her. That's why I
was sure she was coming back,
'cause she left half her shoes.

(going emotional)

I just want to know what's going
on, if there's somebody else...

SKIP

If she's here, we'll find her.

CON COLBERT

She'd hang on the phone for hours talking Polish to some relatives in L.A. Cousins, I think.

SKIP

Yeah, you mentioned that.

CON COLBERT

I don't even want the money back, I just want her.

SKIP

Money?

CON COLBERT

(shrugs it off)

Around ten grand. My Keno winnings. We were in Vegas. It all went to hell that weekend. I asked her to marry me and I might have freaked her out. There's somewhat of an age difference.

SKIP

Right.

At which, Con keys in on Skip, studies him.

CON COLBERT

I suppose a handsome young guy like you doesn't have these kind of women problems. Probably beating back with a stick. Maybe you could send a couple my way if this thing doesn't work out with Stacie. What do you say?

SKIP

I do all right. I want you to know, Mr. Colbert, it's a real honor for me to meet you. I was at Dodger Stadium the day you pitched the no-hitter.

CON COLBERT

(dismissive)

Ah, I was only up at the show for a drink of water.

SKIP

If you hadn't torn your rotator cuff...

CON COLBERT

Best thing that could have happened to me. Made a pile in commercial real estate. Just find the girl. Here's a couple grand for expenses. Call the office if you need more.

SKIP

Where are you staying?

CON COLBERT

(his face shuts)

The office knows how to get a hold of me.

Con goes and gets in the waiting Town Car into which his luggage has been loaded. The Driver shuts the door and goes around. Skip watches the Town Car drive off.

INT. SKIP'S OFFICE - DAY

Boxes piles around. Teetering stacks of videotapes. Skip is at the computer on a search engine, scrolling. The DOORBELL BUZZES. Skips glances to a --

SECURITY MONITOR

On screen, a guy fish-eyeing the lens, giving the finger.

RESUME SKIP

Turning back to the computer, he buzzes the visitor in. A big man enters. It's PARKER TUFFEY ESQ, a beefcake with too much beef, a sad sack with tie loosened, shirt-tail pulling out, suit straining a bit. He sets down a big cardboard box which doesn't seem to weigh much, just bulky. Skip stays on task at his computer.

SKIP

F. Lee Bailey. What's up? That your lunch?

PARKER

That? That's a hat.

SKIP

A hat?

PARKER

What are you up to? How'd it go
with Colbert?

On task, Skip points to a photo on the corkboard.

SKIP

You didn't mention the bad plugs.

PARKER

Attorney/client confidentiality.
So what'd he come in on?

SKIP

A Raytheon 400.

PARKER

With his dough?

Parker takes the photo down and examines it.

PARKER (CONT'D)

Oo-la-la-ski.

SKIP

You'd think the guy'd know where
this is going.

PARKER

Cooz-phasisia. You never heard of
it? Donald Trump, Paul McCartney,
it's a rich guy's disease.

SKIP

One minute he's in a slough of
despond and the next he wants me to
line him up with some fresh stuff.

Bored with the photo now, Parker pins it back on the board.

PARKER

Objectively, he could get another
one. Maybe she's got some special
abilities.

SKIP

Or maybe the guy just doesn't like
to be told no.

PARKER

What's become of us? A couple
cynical bastards. Maybe he loves
her, how 'bout that?

(MORE)

PARKER (cont'd)
They say everybody has a soulmate.
I had one.

On the computer, Skip calls up a fresh program.

SKIP
A hundred bucks a month and this
search engine crawls.

PARKER
I knew instantly. I saw Maryanne
that first time and I said to
myself, "Oh, there she is. So
that's the one."

SKIP
(on task)
She was great.

PARKER
(deflating completely)
It's like yesterday...

Skip turns to his friend, knows where this is going.

SKIP
Parker, c'mon. It was an accident,
man.

PARKER
That's what they ruled it.

SKIP
'cause it was.

PARKER
I just put one foot in front of the
other. People said time would
help.

To deflect, Skip goes over to the box.

SKIP
So what's with the hat?

PARKER
Hat?
(then, realizing)
Oh. I need to leave it here.

SKIP
Why?

PARKER

Two brothers are fighting over it.
Well, stepbrothers.

SKIP

A hat?

PARKER

Well, it's Hoss Cartwright's hat.

Parker opens the box and takes out a he-man-size, tall-crown, silver-beaver-felt rolled-brim hat.

SKIP

Whose?

PARKER

Bonanza. The Ponderosa. Lorne
Green? Little Joe?

SKIP

Drawing a blank, man.

PARKER

It's a sorry situation. Disputable
probate. Father dies. They both
want the hat. It's always messy
without a will. Remember that.
And you're never too young.

SKIP

So why do you have to leave it
here?

PARKER

I might need you to trace its
provenance.

SKIP

And?

PARKER

(conceding)

Its ownership may be in question.
It would be better if I didn't have
it in my physical possession.
Legally.

SKIP

But it's okay for me?

Skip puts the hat back in the box.

PARKER

If their old man could see this.
Nice guy. I represented him in a
DWI.

(drifts off)

Alcohol. Thank God that wasn't it.
If I had of been drinking that day
I would've had to kill myself.

Skip sees where it's going again, swivels back to his work
on the computer.

SKIP

I do appreciate you sending me
Colbert. I been running on fumes.

PARKER

But we're still going out, right?
On the anniversary? Five years
and it's like --

Suddenly keyed on the computer, Skip waves him silent.

SKIP

Wait a minute. Presto. This has
gotta be it.

PARKER

What?

SKIP

Stacie Williams. Fresh address two
weeks ago, new PG&E....

Parker looks over Skip's shoulder as Skip hits print.

PARKER

That's in South Central. I thought
she was Polish.

SKIP

It's a neighborhood in transition.

PARKER

(as Skip collects pages)
To Latin. -- Jesus, I got a
deposition downtown.

SKIP

Your hat!

But Parker is gone.

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL STREET - DAY

A bodega on the corner. A chicken shack cheek by jowl with a taco stand. Homes with bars on the windows and Corollas in the drive. A black man waters his car. A Mexican kid rides a bike past a Monte Carlo coupe. HOLD on coupe.

INT. SKIP'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Skip's parked, eating a burrito, watching a house, logged onto the Bonanza web site on his portable, the show's THEME SONG PLAYING softly. His CELL PHONE vibrates to life on the dash. He checks the number and answers anyway, muting the computer.

SKIP

Mrs. Wolff, how you doing?

(then)

Yeah, I'm sorry, I had a previous luncheon engagement. But this decoy, thing...

He sets the burrito down just as a car pulls up at the house he's watching. A HEAVYSET AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, 25, gets out with groceries, a Five-Year-Old Boy in tow.

SKIP (CONT'D)

...my years of experience, your husband's not messing around, and you came to me for peace of mind remember? Plus, deploying a decoy, it can get very expensive, and much as I like cashing your checks --

(she interrupts, then)

Uh, no, Carla, I don't think that would work. Because if I thought having cocktails with my clients in the hot tub was a good idea, I'd put a hot tub in my office.

Suddenly, an AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, 40, appears in Skip's side window.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN

Can I help you?

SKIP

(holds a finger up; to cell)

You got a nice husband, Mrs. Wolff, and right now I've got a meeting so -- I wish you the best of luck.

He shuts his phone, relieved.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN
You the police?

SKIP
Actually, I'm looking for somebody.
A runaway from Arkansas. Maybe you
could help me.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN
Arkansas?

Skip hands over a snapshot.

INSERT SNAPSHOT

A 14-year-old AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRL.

RESUME

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN (CONT'D)
Nope.

SKIP
I have reason to believe she's in
that house.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN
Not that house, that's a woman and
her little boy.

SKIP
Are you sure?

Just then, the heavysset woman we saw going in comes out and
hangs a Myna bird on a hook on the porch.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN
That's her. Stacie Williams.
They just moved in.

STACIE WILLIAMS makes a few kissing noises at the birdcaige
and goes back inside. On Skip, poleaxed...

END OF ACT I

ACT II

EXT. STACIE WILLIAM'S HOUSE - DAY

The Nosy Neighbor watching from a distance, Skip knocks on Stacie's door. Stacie opens it a crack and peers out.

STACIE WILLIAMS

Yeah?

SKIP

Stacie Williams?

STACIE WILLIAMS

If you're from the bill collector, that's all straightened out and you can call Andrew Passeri at Citibank.

As she shuts the door, Skip stops it with his foot. Through pain, as she tries to shut the door --

SKIP

Do you know another Stacie Williams? Because somebody might be using your identity.

She stops with the door.

STACIE WILLIAMS

Might be? I don't know why they can't catch her. They catch me.

SKIP

The one I'm looking for had a speeding ticket in Rancho Cucamonga that went to warrant.

STACIE WILLIAMS

That's where the trouble really started for me. Before that it was just the Mastercard and then all the other charges she opened up. Six hundred dollars for a pair of heels at Neiman Marcus? Now all of a sudden I'm stopped for a busted tail light, the cop runs my name, next thing I know I'm in the position against the hood. Maybe I resisted arrest -- because I hadn't done anything! And then it just snowballed...

SKIP

Do you know where you might have left the card?

STACIE WILLIAMS

Mastercard already went down that road. Besides, you don't have to lose it for them to steal it.

MYNA BIRD

(licentious deep voice)

Come on, baby, it's okay. Come on, baby.

STACIE WILLIAMS

(to myna)

Hush, Shaquille.

(to Skip of bird)

Belonged to my ex.

Skip takes the "Stacie" snapshot out.

SKIP

Maybe if I showed you this Stacie's picture.

STACIE WILLIAMS

(taken aback)

She's white.

SKIP

She's from Poland.

STACIE WILLIAMS

That her father?

SKIP

Not exactly.

STACIE WILLIAMS

Hm. So, what are you trying to find her for?

SKIP

Class reunion.

STACIE WILLIAMS

You locate this witch, she owes me seven thousand dollars. And that's not the half of it. I had a nice condo in El Segundo, good job. But I lost everything.

(MORE)

STACIE WILLIAMS (cont'd)

After I got out of jail, I was so depressed, I went into a tailspin. I'm just pulling out of it now.

SKIP

So you don't know her.

STACIE WILLIAMS

(studies photo)

Look at her smiling after the hell I've through.

(then)

Wait a minute. It's that girl Cathy. She does nails at Nails of Westchester. And they are all Russian or something.

SKIP

Use your credit card?

STACIE WILLIAMS

(it dawns)

She had my phone number and address and everything. I'll wring her scrawny little neck.

INT. NAILS OF WESTCHESTER - DAY

A narrow storefront in a strip mall. Smocked Slavic women hunch over hands and feet, meticulously filing nails and clipping cuticles. Skip shows "Stacie's" photo to BEBE, 50, a barrel-chested Bulgarian, the boss.

BEBE

Nope.

SKIP

My friend's positive she worked here.

BEBE

Sorry. There's more shops on Sepulveda.

She turns to go.

SKIP

This friend of mine had her credit card swiped here eight months ago. I'd hate to think it was one of these other girls and get the police involved.

BEBE
 Nobody is swiping cards. This is
 an honest place.

SKIP
 (reads name tag)
 Bebe is it? I know you got a good
 place here. I'm just trying to
 find the girl for the guy in the
 picture, that's all.

BEBE
 What, you are a detective?

SKIP
 I'm a skip tracer.

BEBE
 What's that?

SKIP
 I find people and things that are
 missing.

BEBE
 He should leave her missing then.
 He's better off without her.

SKIP
 Why's that?

BEBE
 If she's a thief? I thought she
 was only lazy, didn't want to work,
 all day long with her eyes on the
 clock. That one liked after work.

SKIP
 Give me her name and address and
 I'll forget I was here.

BEBE
 I don't want to get involved.

He peels off two twenties. She stares at him. He peels off
 another. She takes the money.

BEBE (CONT'D)
 Her name isn't Cathy, it's Ludmila.
 I don't know the last name. A girl
 brought her in used to work for me,
 Bozena Gazda, but she went back to
 Poland.

SKIP
Do you know where she lived?

BEBE
Bozena?

SKIP
Ludmila.

BEBE
Palms somewhere. Who knows? Some
of my girls have been here twenty,
thirty years. The others, pfft.

MONTAGE - PALMS - VARIOUS SHOTS - MOS

EXT. EUROPEAN BAKERY - DAY

Sign in the window says "Pirogi's."

INT. EUROPEAN BAKERY - SAME TIME

Skip takes a bite of pirogi, shows the Plump Proprietress the
snapshot. She shakes her head no. Sorry.

INT. BEER HALL - DAY

Dark. Soccer on TV. Skip, with beer stein, shows a Bosomy
Bartender Ludmila's picture. The bartender shrugs nope.
Then leans in to return the snapshot, purposely displaying
cleavage. Sees Skip looking. He smiles. She smiles. Skip
puts bills on the bar and goes.

EXT. SHOES BY PAULA OF PALMS - DAY

Skip glances at the display of women's shoes. Goes inside.

INT. SHOES BY PAULA OF PALMS - DAY

The 40-ish Salesman is with a customer at the cash register
when Skip enters. Skip absentmindedly picks up and studies
one, then another high heeled pump. Salesman finishes with
his customer and with a glance to Skip's feet, signals one
minute and comes back with a man-sized high heel shoe. Skip
shakes his head and brings out Ludmila's photo. Clearly
disappointed, lips pursed, the Salesman shakes his head no
and returns to the pump to its rack as Skip departs.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. KIELBASA SHOP - DAY

Skip, with a brat and kraut, watches the POLISH BUTCHER, 50's, behind the counter study Ludmila's photo.

SKIP

Fella said she loved Polish sausages. I thought she might have been a customer here.

POLISH BUTCHER

My clientele? I'd remember this. When you find her tell her I'd like to slip her a free sausage.

SKIP

Sure thing, pal.

Skip takes the photo back and goes.

EXT. POLISH SAUSAGE SHOP - DAY

Skip comes out. He looks at the hot dog, tosses it in the trash. His CELL RINGS. Skip checks the number, private caller, answers anyway, talks as he walks.

SKIP

South Bay Investigations.

(then)

Mr. Colbert, hi... No, not yet, but I got a couple leads. For one thing --

(stops walking)

I don't know if you know this but her name's not Stacie Williams, it's Ludmila, I don't have a last name yet. Right now I'm rattling trees, see if anything shakes out.

(listens, then)

Mr. Colbert? Hello?

(then)

Hey, hey, I know these things can take an emotional toll, but -- we'll find her. Lot of times, they just don't know how to come back. They get embarrassed for their impetuosity, they're confused. But a lot of the time it works out.

Skip rubs his face, hating himself for b.s.'ing the guy.

SKIP (CONT'D)

So okay? Just hang in there, okay?

Skip shuts his phone. Hating himself for having this job today. He rounds the corner.

EXT. PALMS ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Skip heads for his car. Just then, another car SCREECHES UP and two strong young guys, ZENEK and KAMIL, bail out.

ZENEK

Hey, you!

Skip looks for an exit. Gauges the distance to his car. Trapped, he goes insouciant.

SKIP

What's going on, guys?

KAMIL

Gimme the picture.

SKIP

What picture?

ZENEK

Leave my cousin alone. Get outta here.

SKIP

I'd like to get out of here, trust me.

KAMIL

Zenek, take the picture.

Skip holds a hand up in surrender.

SKIP

Okay, guys, I'll give you the picture.

And uses the split-second of surcease to cold-cock Zenek. Zenek reels.

ZENEK

Ah!

Kamil lunges at Skip who sidesteps and hits him in the gut.

KAMIL

Oof.

Now Zenek's back and throws a punch to Skip's head, only grazing him but opening a cut.

Skip kicks the feet out from under him. Zenek lands on his ass as Kamil charges Skip who blocks and hits Kamil's button -
 - POW! Kamil staggers back and Skip goes in for the knock-out when -- KABAM! Zenek gets him square in the back with a broken lawn chair. Skip goes down to his knees. Kamil shoves him down onto the ground. The men stand over him.

ZENEK

Leave her alone.

KAMIL

Tough guy.

ZENEK

Tell that old man he makes her sick. -- Kamil, the picture.

Kamil gets the photo from Skip's pocket, roughly shoves Skip one more time. The men run to their car and get in. Skip glances up to see the butcher behind the screen of the alley door, watching, wiping his hands on a rag and smiling as he disappears back into his shop. Skip grabs his CELL, snaps --

A FRAMED SHOT

As seen through the cell, of the DEPARTING LICENSE PLATE.

RESUME SKIP

On the ground, now seeing something that astounds him.

A BLUE VAN with a YELLOW HOOD

trundles down the alley his way. It swerves to miss him but keeps going. Skip raises his cell phone again in time to shot of the receding van, trailing its asphalt hot wagon.

RESUME SKIP

He shoots another picture with his cell.

A FRAMED SHOT

through the cell, but only the asphalt trailer is captured, obscuring the license plate -- if there even was one.

RESUME SKIP

Defeated. He tries to get up to pursue, but lies back, hurt and spent. He feels his fist to see if anything's broken.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. MAILBOX ETC - DAY

Skip sits in a chair behind the counter. JENNIFER ORELLANA, the pretty Latina clerk, 20-something, tends the cut above his eye with Mercurochrome and butterfly bandage. There's blood on his shirt and he holds a plastic bag of ice on the knuckles of one hand. As she dabs at his wound --

SKIP

Ow.

JENNIFER

You want it to get infected?

SKIP

I only wore this shirt twice, three times. At least I know she's around somewhere.

JENNIFER

Should of let me do the legwork. I could've said she was a classmate or something. Plus it's less likely to get confrontational with a woman. That's what my professor said.

SKIP

Yeah? You and that Polish butcher? First remark about his kielbasa, I'd be bailing you out for battery one.

She "dabs" with the Q-tip.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Jennifer, ow!

JENNIFER

So, you want another wake-up call tomorrow? And what's up with that decoy job? I nailed that last litch. Like I'd really go with him to Big Bear. His poor wife.

As she finishes her work on Skip, he takes the memory card from his cell phone and holds it out.

SKIP

You wanna help, pull up the last two pictures on this card.

JENNIFER
So the decoy thing? What?

SKIP
Sorry, the husband's not cheating,
the wife's just lonely. Mrs. Wolff
just wanted somebody to pay
attention to her and I don't need
money that bad. Yet.

Jennifer brings up an image on the computer screen.

JENNIFER
(too casual)
What, she was coming on to you?

SKIP
Zoom in on the license plate.

Skip jots the numbers. Jennifer brings the next photo up.
It's the asphalt rig.

JENNIFER
What's this?

SKIP
That's a missed opportunity. I do
have something you could do.

JENNIFER
Yeah?

Skip takes a paper out of his pocket and hands it over.

SKIP
A property trace. I need to find a
trail from the original owner.

Just then a UPS GUY enters pushing a hand truck, cradling a
tray with a couple tall coffees and a bag of pastries.

UPS GUY
Hi, Jennifer.

JENNIFER
(to UPS guy)
You can just leave the packages
there.

UPS GUY
I had a delivery at Starbucks,
thought you might like a
frappaccino and a turnover...

JENNIFER
I'm kinda busy, Gary.

UPS GUY
I'm ahead of schedule, I can wait.

SKIP
(amused)
I'm on way out, enjoy.

JENNIFER
But don't we need to talk about
this?
(off paper)
Hoss Cartwright's hat? Who's he?

SKIP
It's all there. He's in an old
time television program. Have your
coffee.

JENNIFER
(as he goes)
Skip, y'know, tomorrow there's an
FBI profiler speaking at school
tomorrow. Wanna come?

SKIP
Tomorrow? I gotta go see my mom.

HARD CUT TO:

PRISON GATE SLIDING SHUT

Behind Skip.

EXT. CHOWCILLA WOMEN'S PRISON - PATIO VISITING ROOM - DAY

Families, kids. Bolted-down picnic tables. Skip comes in. Sees his mother DONNA KING, 50-something, dressed in prison denim, come in. We see where Skip got his good looks, though life inside and her turn-on-a-dime personality have taken their toll. She opens her arms.

DONNA
My handsome boy.

They enjoy the allowed fleeting embrace.

SKIP
How you doin', Mom.

DONNA
 (of his bandaid)
 You hurt yourself!

SKIP
 It's nothing.

They sit, her fond eyes on him.

DONNA
 Look at you. How are you?
 Did you bring the Creme de la Mer?

SKIP
 Oil of Olay, okay? The other stuff
 is a hundred and fifty dollars a
 jar.

DONNA
 Well that's why it's good.

SKIP
 The lady said it was the same
 thing. I'll take it back.

DONNA
 Don't be ridiculous. It's just the
 water here is so alkaline. Look at
 this skin.

Skip sighs heavily, the weight of the world. Mom keys in.

DONNA (CONT'D)
 What's the matter, baby? It takes
 fewer muscles to smile than to
 frown.

SKIP
 Nothing. Work. Crazy world.

DONNA
 (singing Carole King)
 "When your down and troubled and
 you need a helping hand, and
 nothing, nothing is going right,
 just close your eyes and think of
 me and call my name out loud..."

Skip can't help smiling.

DONNA (CONT'D)
 There. See? Now tell Mama.

SKIP
You got your own problems.

DONNA
No, c'mon...

SKIP
Lot of unhappy people out there,
that's all.
(then)
Remember Con Colbert?

DONNA
No.

SKIP
He played on the double A team when
we lived in San Bernardino.

DONNA
Baseball? That's right, you were a
bat boy, weren't you.

SKIP
Sure was.

DONNA
Always a bat boy never a bat.

SKIP
(ignoring the slight)
He's a client now.

DONNA
Who?

SKIP
Connie Colbert. The pitcher. He's
just some pathetic old rich guy now
blubbering over some young
nogoodnik.

DONNA
What do you expect, your job?
Chasing down these deadbeats and
lonely-hearts. I told you with
your looks you could've gone into
acting, commercials. Good money
and it's not too late.

SKIP

But this guy was amazing. When he went up to the majors, it was like I went up to the majors, even knowing somebody like that. Dad took me to Dodger Stadium to see him pitch against the Mets.

DONNA

That's just 'cause my mother was visiting.

SKIP

We had a great time, all right?

DONNA

Lucky you.

SKIP

Can't I just have that? It doesn't take away anything from you.

DONNA

You already did a bang-up job of that.

SKIP

I don't want to do this.

DONNA

Well that's too bad. You brought it up.

SKIP

I was talking about a baseball game, Mom.

DONNA

Don't Mom me.

SKIP

All roads lead to your injustice.

DONNA

Don't you dare go all high and mighty on me.

SKIP

I'm not.

DONNA

If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be in here.

SKIP

I didn't shoot Dad, you did.

DONNA

It was whoever got to that gun first. It was self-defense. I'll say that to my grave.

SKIP

You shot him in the back.

DONNA

He was going for the lamp!

They're starting to draw stares.

SKIP

Calm down, okay?

DONNA

Don't tell me to calm down! I've been in this stinking hellhole for eighteen years! My good name ruined! And all because you couldn't keep your mouth shut! Mr. Truth Teller! Mr. Goody Two Shoes!

SKIP

I swore on a Bible, Mom.

DONNA

(wild now)

How could you do this to your own mother! My only child! My baby!

SKIP

I was eleven years old! I'm sorry!

She's pounding on him now.

DONNA

Just get out! Get out! Get out of here! Leave me alone!

TWO FEMALE GUARDS come over and grab Donna.

GUARD ONE

Donna, c'mon, let's go.

DONNA

My own son!

GUARD TWO

She doesn't mean half of what she says.

GUARD ONE

A parole hearing next month and this is how she behaves. And she wonders why she never makes it.

DONNA

(as they remove her)

It was self-defense! To my grave! Self-defense!

And she's gone. Skip rubs his face.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Gate rolls shut behind Skip. He looks wiped. CELL RINGS. He answers, on automatic.

SKIP

Skip Tracer...

(placing himself)

Oh. Yeah. Yeah, thanks for getting back to me, pal. I need an address on a license plate.

Skip takes the paper with numbers out, reads it off.

SKIP (CONT'D)

California plate, Sam Oscar X-ray three six four...

EXT. PALMS STREET - DAY

Little box houses with cement lawns in the West L.A./Palms glare. Skip's in his car with coffee and the paper, keeping his eye on a house down the street.

He's hitting the scan button on the radio, but it's all Spanish, Korean, Rush Limbaugh. He finds Jim Rome's Jungle Sports Talk and is about to settle back when he sees the door to the house he's watching open. He grabs his binocs.

THROUGH BINOCES

We see LUDMILA ZEZULA. She's got all the assets, with a face to match. She sashays to the curb, warily scoping the street, looking much more expensive than the small Hyundai she lowers herself into.

OVER SKIP -- HIS POV

She starts the car and drives off. He starts his and follows.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Through Palms...West L.A...Pico... to the back streets of Beverly Hills.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS STREET - DAY

High class apartment houses and shrubs. Ludmila whips into a parking space. Skip drives past and parks up the street. Ludmila's out now, headed down the block. Skip follows. Feels his phone buzz in his pocket, checks the caller, answers.

SKIP

Jesus, Park, sorry, man, we were gonna play golf. But I located the Polish girl off that plate. Actually, I'm in Bev Hills, tailing her...

Ludmila rounds a corner, then Skip. Skip realizes where they are headed, sees...

EXT. PENINSULA HOTEL - DAY

Ludmila struts up the sidewalk by the drive. The Bellmen and Valets seem know her, leer behind her back. Skip stops.

SKIP

(on phone)

...to the Peninsula. Whoa. I see how she's paying for those shoes these days. Gonna be somebody's luncheon special. Later, man.

Skip shuts the cell, nods smoothly to the doorman, enters --

INT. PENINSULA HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

He glances in the shadowy bar.

PENINSULA BAR - SKIP'S POV

She's already on a stool next to an Old Guy in a suit, her long legs crossed. She turns this way -- but it's not her!

RESUME SKIP

Skip goes to the --

ELEVATOR BANK

In time to see Ludmila in an elevator as the doors close. He sees it stop at four. Jumps in the next elevator up.

INT. PENINSULA HOTEL - FOURTH FLOOR - DAY

Skip comes out, looks up and down the hallway.

END OF LONG HALLWAY - SKIP'S POV

The door to the Peninsula Spa shuts behind Ludmila.

INT. PENINSULA HOTEL - SPA - DAY

Skip comes in. Spa Workers in white cross back and forth, Hotel guests to the gym. No Ludmila. To look casual, Skip grabs a magazine, an apple from the bowl, leafs through the magazine.

After a few beat, Ludmila comes out. She is wearing a white pants uniform and carrying a pedicure tub full of water. She looks lovely in her simple clothes and simple white shoes as she heads out to the pool with her tub of water. Not at all what Skip expected. Struck, he looks after.

EXT. PENINSULA HOTEL ENTRANCE - SIDEWALK - DAY

Skip dials his cell, agitated and pacing.

SKIP

Hey, Park. Guess what? I'm a shmuck. The girl's not turning tricks, she's doing nails here.... Yeah, as in manicures.... Yeah, she could be trolling for her next meal ticket, it occurred to me. But maybe it is what it looks like, she's trying to get away from that guy, make a fresh start. And here I come just 'cause the rich old SOB's paying me. At least she walked away from it.... No I haven't lost my mind, it's just -- you know what? Go back to your internet porn, I'll talk to you later.

Skip shuts the phone and looks to the hotel.

INT. PENINSULA HOTEL SPA -- WAITING AREA - DAY

Man reads a newspaper. When he turns the page, we see it's Skip.

LUDMILA

Mr. Clark?

Skip gets to his feet.

SKIP

Hey.

LUDMILA

I'm Cathy. Nice to meet you. This way.

Skip follows her outside.

EXT. PENINSULA HOTEL POOL AREA - DAY

They cross the lunch patio with its navy umbrellas and go up to the pool area, a lovely, monied roof oasis of cabanas and chaises surrounding a sparkling pool, everywhere a view of L.A. and the tops of palms.

They walk past beautiful people in swim suits to the nail cabanas. Ludmila stops at hers to show Skip in. He just stands there. This is unfamiliar territory for him.

LUDMILA

Sit and take off shoes please.

Skip sits in a white leather Lazy-boy, takes off his shoes. Ludmila sits on her low stool and rolls up his trouser legs. She smiles at him, sizing him up. He smiles at her, sizing her up. She guides his feet into the tub of water.

LUDMILA (CONT'D)

Is too hot?

SKIP

I don't think so.

LUDMILA

(washing his feet)

You want to cut or I just file?

SKIP

Uh, whatever you think.

She takes a foot out and files in silence. She's not afraid of silence. She glances up at him from time to time. He can see a lovely bit of cleavage from here. Finally --

SKIP (CONT'D)

So, Cathy, that's a lovely accent.

LUDMILA

It's Polish.

SKIP

How do you say Cathy in Polish?

LUDMILA

You don't. My name is Ludmila but here they think it sounds strange. It's very common in Poland, Ludmila. You think it's weird?

SKIP

It's different.

LUDMILA

I'll get my own nail shop and then I'll be myself.

SKIP

And who's that?

Disarmed, she smiles at him. Takes a moment to consider.

LUDMILA

Immigrant. Maybe I came with too many delusions. You live and you learn. And then you learn some more.

SKIP

Like what?

LUDMILA

I have a whole list. You don't imagine.

SKIP

Try me.

She blinks. Her radar's up. Working on his other foot, she takes in the cut above his eye, the bruised hand. Then --

LUDMILA

How did you hurt your hand?

SKIP

Some ape ran into it with their
face.

She dries that foot and puts it down and puts the water tub
aside. Then --

LUDMILA

You're him, aren't you? My cousin
told me what happened.

SKIP

Con wants you to come back.

LUDMILA

I can't.

SKIP

Well, maybe you should tell him
that yourself.

LUDMILA

Why, does he know where I am?

SKIP

Not yet.

LUDMILA

Please don't tell him. Tell him
I'm gonna pay the money back.
That's why I'm working.

(sniffing)

I only took it to get away. I'm
only twenty-six. I want my own
life.

SKIP

Are you going to pay Stacie
Williams back too?

LUDMILA

I'm not a criminal. They said you
don't have to have to pay for the
credit card in America if someone
takes it. The bank pays.

SKIP

You stole her identity, Ludmila.
She lost everything.

LUDMILA

Oh no. I didn't know. Please
don't tell Connie where I am.

(MORE)

LUDMILA (cont'd)

He'll have me arrested if I don't go back there.

SKIP

I really doubt it.

LUDMILA

He fooled you then. He fools everybody because he was such a big important baseball player. He's jealous and mean. I was like a prisoner. I was so young and stupid. I wanted the things I saw in magazines. I didn't want to work in some nail parlor for minimum wage. Now I feel blessed by God to do it.

Skip slips his shoes on. Ludmila panics.

LUDMILA (CONT'D)

You're going? You don't want the massage? And you're down for a manicure. What are you going to do? Are you going to tell him? I'll just run away someplace else.

SKIP

Where? People aren't that hard to find.

LUDMILA

I got family. I like it here. I didn't mean to hurt anybody. Please don't tell him. You hold my life in your hands.

Skip goes. She dabs her nose with a Kleenex.

INT. FANTASY ISLAND - BAR - NIGHT

Under-employed Hollywood hopefuls dance near-naked on poles. Skip and Parker drink at the bar, watch and mull.

PARKER

The one with the red spangles, wasn't she on Survivor Three?

SKIP

Will you listen?

PARKER

It's too much for you I won't throw any more business your way.

SKIP
He's your client.

PARKER
I played golf with the guy.

SKIP
She thinks he'll have her thrown in jail if she doesn't go back to him. And it was no bed of roses back there.

PARKER
Skip, she is, technically, a person of interest to the authorities on a couple chargeable felonies.

SKIP
I'm serious.

PARKER
So am I.

SKIP
Imagine moving to Poland, you don't know the language, you don't know anybody.

PARKER
No thanks.

SKIP
He said he didn't care about the money she took. In a way, she earned it.

PARKER
You want to know what I think?

SKIP
Yeah, of course. I've been asking you.

PARKER
I think you ought to tell the guy where she is, get your money and move on. -- And what's going on with the hat?

SKIP
I'm working on it.

They watch the dancers a beat. Then --

PARKER

Okay, the little pirogi, I know.
Look, I don't care if she held up a
bank, personally. But you sound
like a knight errant here.

SKIP

I hold this girl's life in my
hands.

PARKER

That's what I'm saying. What else
of hers you like to hold in your
hands?

SKIP

I'll admit she's attractive. Maybe
I am being led by a body part other
than my head.

PARKER

(going morbid)

I envy you. Full of hope.

SKIP

So what am I supposed to do?

PARKER

Me? I'm gonna have another one.

(to bartender)

Tammy!

Bartender turns. Parker puts up two fingers.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. MAR VISTA ARMS - SKIP'S APARTMENT - DAY

Door opens, Skip peers out to the new day. Puts dark glasses on and comes out. Florence is combing a mangy toy poodle.

FLORENCE
Another hard night, huh? Oughta
give your liver a rest, mister.

SKIP
How's Benji?

FLORENCE
It's emphysema. The vet told me I
had to stop smoking inside.

The dog coughs.

SKIP
I saw your boyfriend.

FLORENCE
Yuck, I don't know what my sister
saw in that guy. He needs his
money though.

SKIP
He needs social services. He might
be losing it.

FLORENCE
Speaking of which, you hear that?

SKIP
What?

FLORENCE
(gestures to balcony)
Sound of silence. They came and
got her. Checked herself into
Aurora for a little rest.

INT. SKIP'S OFFICE - DAY

Skip feeds paper into a shredder. The noise hurts his head. He checks his watch as he eats aspirin, chugs Coke. DOORBELL BUZZES. He looks to the --

SECURITY MONITOR

His appointment, RON and KELLY COLBERT, Con's grown children, 30's, nicely dressed and groomed, Arizona tanned.

Skip opens the door.

SKIP
How you doing? C'mon in.

RON COLBERT
Thanks for seeing us on such short notice. I'm Ron Colbert and this is my sister Kelly.

KELLY COLBERT
Hi.

They all shake hands.

SKIP
Have a seat.

Skip clears files and stuff off a chair. As they all sit --

SKIP (CONT'D)
So what's up? What can I do for you guys?

RON COLBERT
We know you're trying to find Dad's "girlfriend." You'd be doing everybody a big favor if you just stop.

SKIP
Why's that?

RON COLBERT
My father's a wealthy man. It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

KELLY COLBERT
I thought when she left that would be the end of it. But he's worse than ever.

RON COLBERT
He's obsessed with her.

SKIP
I'm a little confused. If she's after his money, why'd she leave?

KELLY COLBERT
Obviously she doesn't know what's going on.

RON COLBERT
(a warning)
Kelly.

Kelly clams up.

SKIP
Why, what's going on?

RON COLBERT
Nothing. How much is my father
paying you?

SKIP
That's between me and him.

RON COLBERT
Just tell me how much it's gonna
take. I'll write you a check right
now.

Skip gets to his feet.

SKIP
I think this meeting's over, isn't
it?

KELLY COLBERT
I knew this was a stupid idea.

RON COLBERT
Why don't you have one then?

SKIP
I think you should listen to your
sister more.

And Skip shows them out of there. Watches the --

SECURITY MONITOR

As, arguing, the two recede.

SKIP

Waits a beat, then grabs his jacket and goes out too.

EXT. SKIP'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He comes out, stops.

SKIP'S POV - STREET

Kelly and Ron get into a rented red Mustang convertible.

INT./EXT. SKIP'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Through West L.A. streets into Beverly Hills, up Robertson. Ahead, he sees the red car pull into a parking garage beneath a building. Skip pulls over. He looks up.

HIS POV - BUILDING

The sign says "Oncological Hospital of Beverly Hills."

INT. MAILBOX ETC - DAY

Jennifer and Skip. Skip is getting mail from his PO Box.

JENNIFER

Cancer?

SKIP

Some kind of blood thing. Multiple myeloma. The nurse said they're giving him eighteen months.

JENNIFER

Nurse, huh? Isn't that stuff supposed to be confidential? How'd you get her to talk?

SKIP

That's what they don't teach you in that school.

Skip takes his mail over to the counter.

JENNIFER

So if they don't want you to find her, they don't want her to know.

SKIP

Sure. They're worried she'll ace them out of the will.

JENNIFER

I dunno, maybe she does know. That's why she left. It freaked her out.

SKIP

She would've said something.

JENNIFER

So those two are scared if she finds out the clock's ticking on the guy she'll come running back.

SKIP

You got it.

Jennifer studies Skip as he looks through his mail.

JENNIFER

Maybe you should tell her.

SKIP

(of mail)

Where's that check from the runaway?

JENNIFER

It didn't come. -- But I'm serious. Tell her he's toast and see if they're right about her just being a gold-digger.

SKIP

So what'd you find out about the hat?

JENNIFER

At least then you'd know what she's made of. Or don't you wanna know?

(sing-song)

She's so pretty. The poor immigrant.

(then)

You wanna hear a story, talk to my grandfather.

SKIP

Hoss Cartwright's hat?

JENNIFER

There's a lot of these hats. They were a big auction item at celebrity events. Tree People and whatever. I haven't traced any of them to anybody in this family though yet. But you can buy a brand new one on the web, a Hoss beaver skin for seven hundred dollars.

SKIP

They don't want a new hat, they want that hat. The father used to play with one son with the hat. Then he left that family and played with the new son with the hat.

JENNIFER

The stuff people fight about.

SKIP

Hey, it pays the bills.

JENNIFER

So are you going to tell Miss Poland about her boyfriend?

SKIP

I don't know.

JENNIFER

I don't care what she does, personally. I wouldn't go out with some geezer no matter what. Anyway, besides, why shouldn't he be happy in his last days? What's the harm in that? Unless you have some personal objection to that....

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Con Colbert drifts, hooked up to IV's and monitors, TV on an old CSI. Skip comes to the door.

SKIP

Mr. Colbert?

CON COLBERT

Huh?

SKIP

It's me.

CON COLBERT

(weak, covering)

Oh, yeah. Hey, c'mon in. I got myself in a little trouble here.

SKIP

I know.

CON COLBERT
They had this new protocol.
Somebody knew somebody it worked
for but they don't see the same
outcome for me.

SKIP
I'm sorry.

CON COLBERT
What are you doing here anyway?
How'd you find me?

SKIP
That's my job. Actually, your kids
paid me a visit and I tailed them
to this place.

CON COLBERT
What'd they want with you? Let me
guess. Did you find Stacie?

Con turns off the TV.

SKIP
Yeah.

CON COLBERT
(as it sinks in, eyes
filling)
Jesus. I don't want her to see me
like this.

SKIP
So she never knew you had this
blood thing?

CON COLBERT
Hey, there was nothing wrong with
me down there. How is she? Little
bitch. Who's she with?

SKIP
I don't think anybody. She's
trying to make a life for herself.
Got a little job, lives with
relatives.

CON COLBERT
How long's that going to last?

SKIP

And her name's not Stacie. It's
Ludmila.

CON COLBERT

You said. Sounds like a girl with
thick ankles and hairy arms,
doesn't it?

SKIP

So what do you want to do now?

CON COLBERT

Find a cure for cancer.

SKIP

I mean about Ludmila.

CON COLBERT

I know what you mean. Dammit
dammit dammit.

(then)

So what'd those two ingrate kids of
mine want? It's none of their damn
business.

SKIP

They wanted to pay me to stop
looking for the girl.

CON COLBERT

Pathetic.

SKIP

They're concerned about her
intentions if she found out about
your, you know, situation.

CON COLBERT

You can dispense with the
euphemisms. It's the bottom of the
seventh. So, y'know what? Screw
'em. Why shouldn't I go out
swinging?

SKIP

But you were a pitcher.

CON COLBERT

It's a metaphor. Money. What good
is it? Tell her. Tell Stacie I'm
sick and I want her.

SKIP

Ludmila.

CON COLBERT

Don't throw cold water on me, son.
Tell her I need her back. So it
takes a few bucks to get my hands
on that little Pollack again. I
can't take it with me, right?

SKIP

Yeah, right.

INT./EXT. SKIP'S CAR - PALMS STREET - DAY

Skip pulls up and parks. He looks across at Stacie/Ludmila's
cousin's house. After a beat, he gets out and heads to the
house.

EXT. STACIE/LUDMILA HOUSE - DAY

Skip rings the doorbell. Knocks. Zenek answers, stands in
the doorway with a mouthful of lunch, napkin in his hand.

ZENEK

What, you want some more? You
crazy?

SKIP

I need to talk to Ludmila. And by
the way, you owe me eighty-eight
bucks for that Joseph Abboud shirt.

ZENEK

Ludmila's gone, okay? Now get out
of here.

SKIP

She walking the dog? Her car's out
front. I got a message for her,
that's all. Tell her Con Colbert's
very sick.

ZENEK

Good.

As Zenek's about to shut the door, Ludmila appears and stops
him. We see Zenek's Wife peering from the archway of the
dining room, a Kid clinging to her knees.

LUDMILA

Connie's sick? What do you mean?

SKIP
He's got a bad illness. It doesn't
look too good.

ZENEK
If it's AIDS I'll kill him.

LUDMILA
(in Polish)
He doesn't have AID's. We were
both tested. I want to talk to
this man.

ZENEK
(in Polish)
We're in the middle of lunch. What
is there to talk about?

LUDMILA
(in Polish)
Don't boss me around.

ZENEK
(in Polish)
My wife sets out a nice meal. We
open our house. An American snaps
their fingers and you come running
like a little dog.

LUDMILA
(in Polish)
Screw you. Don't project your self
esteem issues onto me.

Ludmila steps outside and shuts the door behind her.

LUDMILA (CONT'D)
Please excuse him. In Poland he
was an engineer.

SKIP
What is it with that? Every guy
you meet from a Slavic state was an
engineer.

LUDMILA
So this is true about Con? What's
wrong with him?

SKIP
It's a blood cancer.

LUDMILA

Oh my God. But he was fine when I left. He wasn't sick.

SKIP

Apparently he didn't want you to know. He's been battling it for a while.

LUDMILA

Poor Connie.

SKIP

Well, he wants you to know now. They're giving him a year, year and a half at the outside. He's going back home. Flying out of the Santa Monica Airport this afternoon. He wants you to go with him.

LUDMILA

You told him you found me? I begged you. If I don't go with him he's gonna put me in jail.

SKIP

I don't think vengeance is high on Con Colbert's list right now. And me telling him I found you -- frankly, I don't know if I would have if I hadn't found out he was sick. And I'm not real pleased with myself about that. He was a client and I shouldn't let my personal feelings get mixed up in it.

LUDMILA

You have personal feelings?

SKIP

Just, it wasn't cut and dried, that's all. Listen, he wanted me to tell you and I've told you and the rest is up to you.

LUDMILA

You're a nice guy.

SKIP

Nice has nothing to do with it.

A moment between them and Skip goes. She watches, turns to go back into the house. On the sidewalk, Skip stops, turns.

SKIP (CONT'D)

Ludmila!

(she turns)

Remember, you owe me a manicure.

Ludmila breaks out in a warm smile.

LUDMILA

That's right.

Skip's CELL RINGS. He waves goodbye, checks number, answers.

SKIP

Parker, what's up?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

JUDGE RIGOBERTO PADRON, 65, sits at the head of the table, Parker Tuffey and his client JARED HARGROVE, mid-20's, a tattoo'd hipster on one side; ATTORNEY MARK MCGANN with Hank's step-brother and HANK HARGROVE JR, 40, on the other, Hoss Cartwright's hat in the middle of the table before them. Skip observes from the sidelines.

JUDGE PADRON

Let me get this straight. The deceased came into possession of the hat sometime during the run of the series Bonanza. Now that was a good show.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

Dad was a second A.D. He took me to the set.

(of his stepbrother)

He wasn't even born yet.

JARED.

So what, you went to the set.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

Well, if you don't know man.

JUDGE PADRON

Gentlemen. This isn't the family dinner table. Everybody'll have a chance to present their side.

PARKER

I think it's pretty clear, Your Honor, since my associate here --
(indicates Skip, who nods)
-- found no traceable provenance of ownership. The hat was in my client's possession, and that's nine-tenths of the law.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

He was living at home because he's a deadbeat coke-head.

ATTORNEY MCGANN

Henry, please. -- Your Honor, you've seen the photograph of my client as a boy with his father and the hat. Clearly he has some claim.

JUDGE PADRON

Clearly both sides do.

PARKER

Your Honor, I think there's an almost Solomonic significance to the fact that my client is not the one suggesting the hat be sold on Ebay like some piece of junk from a garage sale.

ATTORNEY MCGANN

All due respect to my colleague, if we're going to talk about Solomonic justice -- the young man loves the hat so much, he could give it to his stepbrother here and allow it to remain in the family.

JUDGE PADRON

With the King Solomon already. This isn't a child we're whacking up, it's headgear. This arbitration is going to find that the hat be sold at auction and the proceeds divided equally among the heirs to the estate, so that's, let's see...

(consults notes)

(MORE)

JUDGE PADRON (cont'd)

...these gentlemen are each entitled to a one quarter share of the two-thirds interest in the monetary value of the hat. Case concluded.

ATTORNEY MCGANN

Thank you, Your Honor.

Hank Jr. gets to his feet.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

No! Let the little bastard keep the hat! I'm not going to have some stranger wear Dad's hat!

Hank Jr. storms out, Jared calls after.

JARED HARGROVE

I'm selling it for coke, you jerk.
(to the others)
I'm kidding. I'm clean.

Skip and Parker exchange a look.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Skip enters, is heading for the urinal when he hears weeping. He peers into a stall. It's Hank Jr. He sees Skip.

SKIP

You did the right thing.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

This is, like, the third time I've lost my father. Now he's really gone.

Hank Jr. comes out, blowing his nose.

SKIP

It's tough.

HANK HARGROVE JR.

I was ten when he walked out on my mother and me. I was so ashamed I never told anybody at school that I didn't have a daddy any more. I was only ten years old. To lose your father? You can't imagine how much it hurts.

SKIP

Yeah.

He pats Hank Jr.'s shoulder, goes to the urinal. Parker enters.

PARKER
What'd I say? Couple of nut-balls,
huh?

Skip gives him a warning look, points with his chin. Parker sees Hank Jr. at the sinks splashing water on his face.

PARKER (CONT'D)
(to Hank Jr.)
These family things can really be
emotional.
(to Skip)
So how 'bout those Lakers?

Unbuttoning at the urinal, Skip just shakes his head, suppressing a smile.

PARKER (CONT'D)
No, I mean it, I can get tickets
for the game tonight.

SKIP
I dunno. I gotta see Con off, and
then I'm kind of hoping to have
other plans.

PARKER
Good luck with that. And I mean
it.

Parker faces the urinal.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

EXT. SANTA MONICA AIRPORT - TARMAC - DAY

The NetJet awaits with its staircase down. The Towncar driver is loading Con's luggage as Skip comes up. Kelly is helping her father to the plane. Only slightly slow of gait, he's impatient with her hovering.

CON COLBERT

Be there when I really need it.
I'm not an invalid yet.
(seeing Skip)
Hey, so what happened? You talk to her?

KELLY COLBERT

Talk to who?

Ron Colbert sticks his head out of the plane.

RON COLBERT

What's with the deli tray? There's supposed to be lox and bagels.

KELLY COLBERT

She's bad news, Dad. You're better off without her.

CON COLBERT

Help your brother deal with the bagels. I wanna talk to Flip.

SKIP

Skip.

CON COLBERT

That's what I meant.

KELLY COLBERT

(to Skip)
How do you sleep at night?

CON COLBERT

I said scram.

Kelly reluctantly goes into the plane.

CON COLBERT (CONT'D)

So what'd she say?

SKIP

She was sorry to hear you were sick.

CON COLBERT

So that's it? Is she coming or not?

SKIP

I don't know. I don't think so.

CON COLBERT

You don't know? What do you mean you don't know? I'm not paying you not to know.

SKIP

You paid me to find her. I can't make anybody do anything they don't want to do.

CON COLBERT

What do you know about it? What do you know about what that little girl wants? You two got a little tete a tete going on, is that it?

SKIP

Hey, man, I know you're sick and it's too bad and you're way too young, but that's not a free pass.

CON COLBERT

I should have known.

SKIP

She's trying to make a life for herself. It's got nothing to do with me.

CON COLBERT

Well, she's got expensive tastes, Stacie. Grunhilda. Whatever her name is. -- Here's the rest of your money. This'll keep her in shoes for a while.

With a wry smirk, he takes an envelope out.

SKIP

Keep your money.

CON COLBERT

Boy, are you thin-skinned. You'd think somebody in your line of work'd be a little tougher.

Kelly pokes her head out.

KELLY COLBERT
The pilot's ready to put the wheels
up, c'mon, let's go.

Ron appears.

RON COLBERT
Some idiot stuck the bialies in one
of the overheads.

Con turns to go in the plane. He seems resigned.

CON COLBERT
The hell with her then.

But now a bright green Culver City Taxi cab pulls up.

KELLY COLBERT
Oh no.

RON COLBERT
I don't believe this.

CON COLBERT
I knew it!

The Colbert kids come downstairs and watch with Skip and Con as the cab door opens and Ludmila gets out and teeters their way in spikes and full boy-toy finery.

LUDMILA
Hallo! Connie! I made it! Thanks
God!

CON COLBERT
Baby doll, oh! Here's your big
daddy.

RON COLBERT
I'm gonna puke.

KELLY COLBERT
(to Skip)
What'd I tell you?

Ludmila's got her arm through Con's now. The plane steward takes Ludmila's bags from the back of the taxi.

LUDMILA
 (to Con)
 Something like this, you really
 find out where your heart is.

CON COLBERT
 C'mon, let's get out of here.

LUDMILA
 (to Skip)
 It was nice to meet you. Thanks
 for your help. He needs me. See
 how happy I make him already?

SKIP
 Yeah, you two make a quite a pair.
 (then)
 Con, I changed my mind. I'll take
 that envelope.

CON COLBERT
 Now you're making some sense.

Con hands the envelope over.

SKIP
 It's for Stacie Williams.

LUDMILA
 I was going to do it.

SKIP
 Yeah.

CON COLBERT
 C'mon, baby, let's go. Time's a-
 wasting.

Ludmila and Con board the plane. The Colbert children
 follow. The hatch closes, the plane taxis off. Skip
 watches it get smaller and smaller.

INT. SKIP'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Skip drives, lost in thought. Suddenly, he does a double
 take. The Gypsy van with the yellow hood but minus the
 asphalt gismo is parked in a strip mall.

EXT. STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

Skip pulls in and gets out. He goes to the van, snaps a cell
 phone photo of the license plate. He finds the door open and
 is rifling through the glove compartment looking for i.d.

when he's spotted by Gypsies emerging from a Dollar Store with purchases -- AN OLD GYPSY CRONE, a nicely-dressed GYPSY MATRON, a Young Gypsy Mother with Child in Arms, and a Couple Gypsy Eleven-Year-Olds.

GYPSY MATRON

Hey! What are you doing!

SKIP

My uncle has a van like this. I'm looking for the manual.

GYPSY MATRON

Shoo! Go 'way! Thief!

The Children press around. The Matron goes and gets into the driver's seat to start the van. The Old Crone gets into the passenger seat.

SKIP

I got names and addresses now, so unless an old man on Beethoven Street gets his money back or a new roof, I'm calling my friends on the Gypsy detail.

OLD GYPSY CRONE

You threaten us?

(throwing a curse)

May my own eyes go blind if your eyes don't fail you when you most need them!

The kids pile in and slam the door. The van peels out. Skip heads to his car, but feels odd. Reaches behind him and realizes his wallet's gone. Panicked, he reaches in his sports coat, is relieved to find Con's envelope. Swearing to himself, he runs to his car, throws the envelope on the dash and squeals out after the van.

EXT. MAR VISTA STREETS - DAY

A car chase. The van weaves in and out of traffic. Skip follows. The van speeds up, takes a corner. Skip passes, narrowly missing an oncoming car. A CAR HORN BLARES.

INT. SKIP'S CAR - MOVING - LEAFY STREET - DAY

Skip is narrowing the gap. The van is close ahead. But then the reflection of overhead leaves on his windshield and the reflection of the envelope completely obscure Skip's vision. Suddenly --

SKIP'S POV - OUT THE WINDSHIELD

Seemingly out of nowhere appears A Latino Gardener pushing a green compost bin in the street right in front of Skip.

SKIP

swerves to avoid him, almost smashes into a car on his left. He swerves to avoid that and SLAMS into a telephone pole, his right fender coming to rest against it. The Gypsy van is nowhere to be seen. On Skip, freaked --

INT. FANTASY ISLAND - BAR - NIGHT

Dancers dance on poles. Parker and Skip drink and watch.

PARKER

Five years.

SKIP

It's getting morbid, Parker. You gotta give it up. It's like when you lose your dog. They always say to go out and get another one.

PARKER

She was my wife!

SKIP

I didn't mean it like that.

PARKER

She hated flying with me. She didn't even want to go.

SKIP

But she went.

PARKER

She waited until after system check to start in. "There's no tacos in L.A.? It's gotta be a Santa Barbara Super Rica taco?" Bitch bitch bitch and I yelled at her.

SKIP

And she opened the door and she bolted. She opened the door.

PARKER

She didn't like to get yelled at. I knew that. Oh God.

SKIP

Maybe if you tried hypnosis.

PARKER

I prefer gin. I just can't get the image out of my mind. She walked right into it, I'm screaming to warn her --

SKIP

Stop! Park, I can't listen to it again!

PARKER

See, you can't see the propeller.

SKIP

She probably never knew what hit her.

PARKER

My Maryanne...

Parker whimpers. Skip sighs.

PARKER (CONT'D)

I know, man. You're right. My therapist says I'm stuck. It gets worse around the anniversary. Enough about me.

(grim chuckle)

Now we're both cursed.

SKIP

There's no such thing as a Gypsy curse, right?

PARKER

There was one against Homer Simpson.

SKIP

I'm talking about in reality.

PARKER

It's the only one I have any familiarity with. And actually it's kind of relevant to your situation.

SKIP

I almost killed somebody, Parker. It never happened to me before.

PARKER
(back to square one,
sniffing)
You're very lucky.

SKIP
(resigned)
All right, so how was his relevant?

PARKER
Who?

SKIP
Homer Simpson.

PARKER
Everyone in his path either dies or
mutates.

SKIP
So what happened?

PARKER
Well, the only way to get rid of
it, he had to catch a leprechaun to
break the curse.

SKIP
Jesus, Parker.

PARKER
What do you want me to say? You
had a bad day. You knew that
Polish girl wasn't any good.

SKIP
No I didn't.

PARKER
You should've.

SKIP
You're wrong. I still think
there's someone in there that wants
to do the right thing.

PARKER
Well, maybe it is the right thing,
give the guy a happy ending, so to
speak.

SKIP

It ripped me to pieces, watching
her go up those stairs in his
clutches, watching that plane taxi
down that runway...

PARKER

It's Mar Vista, Jake.

SKIP

What?

PARKER

Jake? Chinatown? I'm just saying.

Skip stares into the mid-distance at the gyrating dancers.
Parker downs his fifth martini.

FADE OUT;

THE END