

PACKAGE DEAL

A very important restaurant in Los Angeles.

STARLA SIMMONS, an accomplished actress in her early thirties, sits at a table, dressed in various layers and shades of black. SHE eats a piece of chocolate cake with a studied pose of nonchalance, watching the room and allowing herself to be watched.

Presently her agent, CODY JACOBSEN, enters in a burst of energy. Smartly dressed in a suit Jacket with razor-sharp lapels and the inevitable sunglasses. SHE carries a leather portfolio. Upon spotting Starla, SHE reacts physically in a manner which appears to denote delight.

CODY
Starla!

STARLA
(Rising.)
Cody!

(THEY exchange kisses on their respective cheeks. STARLA resumes her seat as CODY divests herself of purse and portfolio.)

CODY
(Noting the cake.)
Started without me? I know, I'm late, I'm late. Frigging traffic on Sunset, what can I say?
(CODY checks out the room, waving to acquaintances right and left.)
Jerry! ... Beverly! ... Brandon! ... Tanya! ...
(SHE sits down.)
Jesus, there's nobody here. Frigging ghost town.
(Smiling as SHE turns to Starla.)
Isn't this nice? So great to see you again, Starla. It's been so long. Too long.

STARLA
I saw you yesterday at Pavilions.

CODY
Was that yesterday? Well, I mean professionally. We haven't really talked since...
(CODY suddenly spots the waiter, and flags him down [Note: the waiter can be just an invisible presence, like the other diners in the restaurant]. To waiter.)
Oh, Anwar! No menu, precious. I want some kind of salad. A regular salad. Bean sprouts, cucumbers, - what's that other shit? Arugula! But no radishes.
(To Starla.)
Radishes can give you thyroid problems. Did you read that?
(To the waiter.)
And pignoli nuts. I brought my own dressing.
(To Starla.)
Want something else? My treat.
(To the waiter.)

What kind of water do you have here? Tell you what, just bring me a glass of ice and a lime.

(An afterthought.)

Oh, and Anwar, I'm expecting a phone call in like thirty seconds, so be aware.

(SHE dismisses the waiter, and takes a bottle of dressing from her bag.)

They say that's the best time to drink water, when the molecules are in transition. The Aqua Flux, or something.

(Turning on her smile again.)

So! Let me look at you. Let me see my star.

(STARLA, after an initial flash of modesty, rises and poses for Cody.)

CODY

Hmm.

STARLA

(Unsettled.)

Hmm?

CODY

No, you look great. A tad fleshy. But that's a good look for you.

STARLA

Fleshy?

CODY

I don't mean fleshy.

(Thinking fast.)

Matronly. What do I mean? ... *Healthy*. You look healthy. Like a frigging milkmaid or something. You're working out, right?

STARLA

Well, not every day, but...

CODY

We just signed this Hungarian model, what's her name, Sonja Smetacek, she does the Volkswagen ads, you know?

(Affecting an accent.)

"Fahrvergnugen, baby..." Tightest bod you've ever seen. Not a cell of fat. Eats like a horse, never exercises... just lucky. Well, I guess if she were really lucky, she wouldn't be Hungarian...

STARLA

You signed her for film work?

CODY

The camera creams over her. Cheekbones like sculpted marble. Thick Slavic lips, pre-collagen. Slavic eyes. Slavic tits. Young Mother Earth.

STARLA

Can she act?

CODY

She has that accent, so who knows? But she's being considered for the next Tom Selleck movie, if there is one. What about you? What have you been doing?

STARLA

I haven't been doing anything, you know that. You're my agent.

CODY

It's quiet right now. Nobody's doing anything. When the pilot season starts...

(SHE waves to a passerby.)

Menachem! You darling man, you!

(Confidentially to Starla.)

He is so hot for moi. I sat next to him at a screening at the DGA - the new Costner movie; it's...

(SHE makes a so-so gesture.)

Anyway, no sooner the lights go out, Menachem's hand is flying up my crotch like a heat-seeking missile, you know? He's playing my cooter like a Steinway. I don't mind so much except he's got these humongous rings on his fingers, he's ripping my stockings to shit. Besides, he's got his gorgeous new bride next to him, who is, by the way, no more than fifteen years old, I do not lie, a junior miss, Polanski-bait. Beautiful skin.

STARLA

So what happened?

CODY

I left for the ladies room, Menachem followed me in and now we're talking about a development deal; I'm very excited. What about your personal life? How's Michael?

STARLA

I'm not seeing Michael anymore.

CODY

I heard. What happened?

STARLA

You know how these things go. It's tough when you're both artists in the same field. He has his Muse to follow, I have mine.

CODY.

His new film, *Devastator 3* - \$26 million for the first weekend. I'm surprised they didn't hold it for Christmas.

STARLA

That's another thing. I didn't want it to look like I was coasting on his success. I want to make things happen for myself.

CODY

Sure, of course. So you broke it off?

STARLA

It was mutual.

CODY

You guys were going out a long time.

STARLA
Three months.

CODY
Gotta be a record for Michael. Usually he has fresh meat every night.
Double features on Sundays.

STARLA
Yes, it's amazing, when you think about it, in all that time he was
never unfaithful to me.

*(CODY says nothing, but her expression clearly indicates knowledge to
the contrary. SHE calls for the waiter.)*

CODY
Anwar! The salad? Today?
(To Starla.)
Anyway, you're better off. You can concentrate on your career.

STARLA
Speaking of my career, Cody...

CODY
(Reacts to another passerby.)
Maggie, darling!
(Pointing with admiration.)
Those shoes are heaven! I'm absolutely green!
(As the unseen Maggie passes on, CODY watches her go.)
Will you look at the spread on her butt? Like a couple of casaba
melons.
(Sighs.)
Some people just don't care. They think just because they're talented
and dedicated the world owes them a living. But you gotta have the
package. Presentation is everything.

STARLA
(Taking this personally.)
You think I'm fat? Is that it?

CODY
Did I say fat? I said healthy.

STARLA
Fleshy. As in meaty.

CODY
Well, you're not a reed, darling. But I understand; you get older, it's
harder to maintain.

STARLA
I haven't gained more than five pounds.

CODY
(Eyebrows raised.)

Five pounds? A camera can do sadistic things with five pounds. Now don't be so sensitive. It's my job to notice these things; I have your best interests at heart.

(Checking her watch.)

What's with the frigging phones here? I can't believe nobody's called me.

STARLA

On the subject of my best interests...

CODY

Did you notice, I've been trying to say "frig" instead of "fuck"? I think it's a better word choice. I hear myself saying "fucking this" and "fucking that," and it strikes me as coarse. Not the image I want to project.

STARLA

Cody, we should talk about the contract.

CODY

Right, the contract. I thought we could wait till after lunch, but I don't know, there's some kind of waiter's strike here.

(SHE opens her portfolio.)

Renewal time again. Incredible, right, another year gone? The time just evaporates. And you know, nothing makes me prouder about my work in this industry than my long-term association with top talents *and* top human beings like your very self. It gives me a glow of satisfaction and fulfillment that even a child from my own womb could not replace. And I mean that from the old corazon.

STARLA

Actually, Cody, I'm thinking of not renewing with you.

CODY

Uh huh, uh huh.

(Getting this clear.)

Not renewing.

STARLA

Seeking other representation.

CODY

I see, I see. Hmm. Is there any particular reason for this sudden act of treachery?

STARLA

It's not treachery, it's a business decision. I don't feel that I've been properly handled. I don't feel that my career is on the fast track. I feel that, at this point, my exceptional talent and star potential has been lying, you know, fallow.

CODY

Fallow, you say?

STARLA

It's a tough decision, but I feel I should go in a new direction.

CODY

Well, frankly, hon, I'm shocked. This hits me like a sandbag.

STARLA

I don't want you to take it personally.

CODY

Personally? Of course not.

(Picking up the butter knife.)

Gee, I wonder how hard it is to open a vein with a butter knife?

STARLA

Let's look at the facts. You haven't sent me out on anything in three weeks. You haven't gotten me a movie audition in two *months*.

CODY

Nothing's happening.

STARLA

Nothing's happening? There were four calls for features last week. The new Oliver Stone film..

CODY

I'm not speaking to Oliver Stone at the moment. And he knows why.

STARLA

But it was a great role. I can pass for Cambodian easily.

CODY

I'm not sending you out for just anything, Starla. I'm grooming you.

STARLA

I'm thirty-two years old; I can groom myself. I need *work*. What about the *Father McMurphy P.I.* show? I know for a fact they've been looking for a new nun since July.

CODY

You don't want to do a series; it's artistically confining. Besides, you don't look like a nun.

STARLA

What's there to look like? You put the fucking wimple on your head, you're a nun!

CODY

Don't be coarse. This is someone's religion we're talking about. Nuns are either very thin or very fat. Audrey Hepburn. Pat Carroll. These are legitimate nuns.

(As Starla expresses scorn.)

Hey, I don't make the rules. I just try to find the properties that will put you in the best possible light.

STARLA

Like this piece of shit?

(STARLA takes a script from her bag and tosses it contemptuously on the table.)

CODY

You didn't like the script?

STARLA

Like it? It was stupid, incoherent, ultra violent, and totally insulting to women. You liked it?

CODY

I thought it was a good read.

STARLA

And this is the kind of part you're grooming me for?

CODY

I'd say it lies comfortably within your range.

STARLA

Haven't I told you a hundred times that I won't do nudity?

CODY

Is there nudity? I don't think so.

STARLA

What about the locker-room scene, where I perform oral sex on the basketball player?

CODY

You don't have to take your clothes off for that. You can wear a bathrobe; that'll be a contract point.

STARLA

I don't care if I'm wearing an oxygen tent. It's an onscreen blow-job; I won't do it!

CODY

I read that scene. It's tastefully done.

STARLA

Is it, really?

(STARLA opens the script to the scene in question and reads.)

"Her head nestles hungrily in his groin. Her cheek swells with the ripe fullness of his member..."

CODY

(Shrugging.)

It's a frank, honest exploration of the male-female thing, in my opinion.

(STARLA shakes her head.)

All right, so don't do it. I was only fielding an offer. What do you want? You tell me...

STARLA

I want to do significant work. Of lasting cultural value. Movies with a committed political and social agenda. And a sort of moral catharsis. you know, a Frank Capra type of thing.

CODY

(Nodding.)

No problem. See, that's what these meetings are all about, we can brainstorm and get on each other's frequency.

(Writing on a pad.)

What was that name? Frank Capra?

STARLA

Cody, my mind is made up. I appreciate everything you've done for me, but, let's face it, you haven't done *anything* for me. The time has come to move on.

CODY

So that's it? I'm wasting ink here?

(SHE caps her pen.)

Okay, I won't stand in your way, that's not how I do business. Good luck, God bless. I only hope you can find someone else to represent you, the market being what it is.

STARLA

I have found someone. Randy Damon.

CODY

Randy Damon? That wuss?

STARLA

He's not a wuss. He's a respected agent, and he has some very creative ideas about my management.

CODY

I don't like to disagree with you, Starla, but I think I speak for the general industry when I say that Randy Damon is a major dickhead. That's why he got bounced from ICM.

STARLA

He didn't get bounced. He left to form his own boutique agency. And he brought some very strong names with him.

CODY

Boutique agencies are for boutique actors, okay? The ones you see on public television. New York eggheads who like to do "theater."

STARLA

I would be interested in doing some theater.

CODY

Jesus Christ! First you break up with Michael Dexter, and now you want to do theater. Why don't you just stamp "Oblivion" on your forehead and mail yourself to the Bermuda Triangle?

STARLA

This is just the attitude I'm talking about. You have no respect for my abilities as an actress. You said when I signed on that you were going to steer me towards prestige productions...

CODY

A career is made of building blocks...

STARLA

In four years, what have I done? A hooker on *L.A. Law*. A hooker on *MacGyver*. A vampire hooker on *Tales From the Crypt*. A low-budget quickie in Mexico that went straight to video. The *Dirty Harry* sequel where I was disemboweled under the credits. Oh, and an extra in a bikini for *The Love Boat Cruise to Devil's Island*.

CODY

Did you have a good time or not? You got to keep the bathing suit.

STARLA

You said I would have a starring feature within two years.

CODY

"I said, I said"... What, do you have all this on tape?
(*Suddenly worried.*)
Do you?

STARLA

I don't want to rehash all this, Cody. You probably did your best. But that's the point. We're not a good fit. Let's terminate while we're still friends. A clean break. You can keep my head shots, I'm getting new ones made.

CODY

(*Sourly.*)
Fine. Terrific.
(*Yelling.*)
Anwar! What's with the goddamn salad?

STARLA

His name isn't Anwar - it's Nigel.

CODY

So I'm supposed to remember *his* fucking name? What studio is he running?

STARLA

Calm down...

CODY

No, it really pisses me off. I can't have a simple lunch anymore without being sold down the river. Doesn't anyone around here know the meaning of the word "gratitude"? I introduced you to everyone in this town! Including *Michael!* That's right, three months of celebrity sex with the winner of this year's People's Choice Award, and you have *me* to thank for it.

STARLA

(*Correcting her.*)
I introduced Michael to *you*. At your request.

CODY

And there was instant magnetism between us. I could have slept with Michael any number of times, but I refused on professional grounds. This is the kind of friend you have here.

STARLA

Try to be a little objective, Cody...

CODY

It's not my job to be objective! I'm an agent! I live and die with my clients. They bleed, I hemorrhage. You don't know the worry, the obsessing, the symphony of angst... Sure, and now, when there's light at the end of the tunnel, you stick an icepick in the base of my skull and climb over my unsuspecting carcass. Okay, if you can live with yourself, more power to you. But forgive me if I take a moment to weep for the old-fashioned virtues that I try to incorporate into *my* daily behavior: loyalty - personal integrity - and most important, *most important*, the unspoken ties of sisterhood. That's what kills me most: that you, Starla Simmons, no stranger to the humiliations of this male-dominated inferno, can turn your back on a fellow sister - can betray the ancient gender bond - for what? Money? Fame? Hey, I could have placed you in a dozen big A-plus budget films, and picked up a tidy commission for myself, but I wouldn't. Because the parts weren't *you*. And I would never sell you out like that. Maybe I'm naive, I don't know, but if taking a personal interest is a crime, then color me guilty. I mean, pardon me for *caring*.

(CODY lets her words hang in the air a moment, savoring them. There is a pause.)

STARLA

I never really looked at it that way...

CODY

(Looking away.)

Yeah, well...

(A long pause.)

STARLA

(Humbled.)

Maybe I haven't thought this thing through. It's just that you never know who you can trust in this business. You get so used to the sleaziness, you figure everyone's working an angle. I should have given you more credit. I'm sorry.

(CODY shrugs, still upset. A pause.)

STARLA

Look, let me go home and think things over. Maybe...

(Suddenly decisive)

No, I don't have to think it over. You're right, we have to stick together; we have to present a solid front against the weasels and the exploiters. And you deserve a show of faith. Give me that pen; I'll sign right now, goddamit.

CODY

You will?

STARLA

Absolutely.

(A pause.)

CODY

Actually, we're not renewing your contract.

STARLA

(Stunned.)

What?

CODY

Hear me out. You know how this recession is, sweetie. We've had lots of layoffs, my workload is incredible, and it's just a situation where we're forced to weed out some of the deadwood.

STARLA

Like me?

CODY

Don't put words in my mouth. But, let's be honest, you haven't exactly set the screen on fire, have you?

STARLA

Whose fault is that?

CODY

I don't think it's mine. I can't do the acting for you.

STARLA

If I had a decent part...

CODY

Hey, bitch all you want about hooker roles, but you can only eat what's on your plate. Jane Fonda does a hooker, she takes home an Oscie. So does Liz Taylor. Look at Julia - she's *the* hooker for our generation. Gotta seize the opportunity, babe.

STARLA

I worked very hard on my hookers. I did research, I learned the walk, the lingo, how to open condom packets with one hand...

CODY

Not what I'm talking about. When someone - Someone - casts you as a whore, it's because he *sees* you as a whore. *Capisce?*

STARLA

So I'm supposed to...?

CODY

Not saying definitely, but how could it hurt?

STARLA

That's disgusting. I don't want to have anything to do with that part of the business.

CODY

But that *is* the business, Doris Day. Using whatever you've got. Even if it ain't what it used to be.

STARLA

What does that mean?

CODY

I'm not trying to be cruel; that's not my intention. But you're past thirty, and nature is reclaiming you. It's not just my impression, honey. I was talking to the make-up head at Fox, he caught your last audition, and he was *appalled*. He said you looked bovine.

STARLA

Bovine?

CODY

An objective opinion. Now that's not to say you don't look fine for general purposes. If I were a lesbian - and I'm not saying I'm not - I would find you very attractive. But the camera is a pitiless lover. It roots out every mushroom of fat and holds it up for public inspection.

STARLA

It's only a few pounds...

CODY

So far. What were you buying at Pavilions yesterday? Twinkies. Pork sausages. I saw. You're going to eat yourself right out of this business.

STARLA

There's a reason for that...

CODY

I know. Michael. He dumped you, you're in mourning. You're going to swallow anything that vaguely resembles his prick.

STARLA

He didn't dump me!

CODY

And what did you get out of that relationship? A ring? A production company? Zero. Three months wasted. You want to make things happen for yourself, you'll never get a better chance. The least you could have done was get him to join the agency. When he left Morris, we thought you might use a little influence on our behalf.

STARLA

I asked him. He said no.

CODY

You asked him. Wow, you really went to the mat for us. It would have been nice to have the two of you together, a real acting team, you know, like Jessica Tandy and the guy who was in *Cocoon*. The *deals* we could have made...

(CODY sighs for what might have been.)

STARLA

I see. Michael's gone, so I've outlived my usefulness.

CODY

We're not closing the door forever. In a year or so, should we perceive an increase in your salability...

(Yelling to a passerby.)

Milos! Call me! Call!

STARLA

But that's it. You're just letting me go.

CODY

A clean break. It's for the best.

STARLA

I don't suppose mentioning the ancient gender bond will have any effect at this point.

CODY

What are you worrying about? You have the Amazing Randy to light up the sky for you. Has he seen you recently?

STARLA

He knows my work...

CODY

(A shrug.)

Maybe he can sell bovine. It remains to be seen.

STARLA

(Slowly rises from the table.)

Excuse me, I have to go to the ladies room.

CODY

That's right, have a good cry, dear.

STARLA

Actually, I'm going to throw up.

CODY

An overreaction, but I understand totally.

STARLA

I don't think you do.

(CODY stares at her a moment, uncomprehending. Then, as STARLA rubs her belly, it dawns on her.)

CODY

You mean...?

(STARLA nods.)

CODY

Oh, Starla. My, my. A love-child?

STARLA

(Significantly.)

His.

CODY

(Startled.)

His love-child? *His?*

STARLA

You better believe it. Almost two months gone, and only five pounds. I've been working out.

CODY

Does he know?

STARLA

(Nodding.)

He wants to take me back. We're negotiating.

CODY

This is immense. This is earth-shaking. A lovechild for the Devastator. How did you manage it?

STARLA

Let's just say I made it happen.

CODY

Sit down, I want to hear all about it, from the moment of conception.

STARLA

I can't. I have to vomit. And then I have another lunch meeting at two.

CODY

But we have to talk. This changes everything, of course. I feel like I've died and gone to agent heaven. Think of the publicity value! I see a million possibilities opening up already...

STARLA

(Calmly.)

So does Randy.

(CODY sits back, deflated. STARLA smiles, and takes up her bag.)

STARLA

Your treat, right?

(STARLA starts out.)

CODY

(Trying to stop her.)

Starla, wait. We can work this out. Sisterhood, remember?

STARLA

Tell it to Sonja, baby.

CODY

No, listen, I can promise instant gratification. Commercials. Talk shows. Magazine covers. The kingdoms of the world at your feet. All I need is a minute of your time. Just a minute. Thirty seconds. I'll do anything for you. *Anything*. Tell me, what can I do?

STARLA

(Coolly.)

You can talk to my agent.

(STARLA makes a triumphant exit.)

CODY

(Muttering.)

Fucking actors.

(The WAITER, if visible, brings the salad.)

THE END