

KISS OF THE JADED PRINCESS
(JACK SO & THE DRAGON'S HANDMAIDEN)

Written by

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Based on the novel
Bitch On Heat, by Richard Tong

FADE IN:

SUPER: *"We lie down in darkness
 and have our light in ashes."*
 - Thomas Browne

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HAPPY VALLEY - AFTERNOON

It's raining heavily on pre-Handover Hong Kong. Torrential, tropical rain. Heavy, and hot. Lightening casts sinister shadows between the skinny apartment towers and old low-rise building.

TITLE: *HONG KONG, 1987*

People cower beneath umbrellas or shelter under awnings. They blindly bustle along the street. Dragons peer down from neon signs. Their eyes glow in the rain.

Shapely legs, wrapped in a short skirt and sliding into high heels. They make their way, with purpose, down the saturated sidewalk. They side-step a pile of trash. They skip over a puddle. They march on.

A red taxi. It rounds a corner and approaches an intersection, headlights refracting in the downpour. Suddenly, it brakes.

The shapely legs cut across the front of the taxi, silhouetted in the headlights. The horn blasts. The headlights flick rapidly from low to high beam and back.

The shapely legs march on. The horn honks. The headlights flare.

INT. OFFICE

The creative department of a small, struggling advertising agency. Four desks and a work table. No frills. Dimly lit. The rain beats mercilessly against old windows.

JACK SO sits high on a stool, at a large draftsman's table. He wears old Levis, a white T-shirt, black boots and an intense scowl. Behind him, a wall of books. Before him, a sketch pad, pencils and a brand new '87 Apple Macintosh.

Jack pushes a button on the Macintosh. It hums into life with a familiar electronic chord.

Ommm!

The sound reverberates around the walls. He gives a self-satisfied grin.

A three year-old girl, MEI, stands in the doorway to reception, opposite Jack's desk. Smiling.

MEI

Do it again, Ba-ba!

JACK

Have you finished your homework?

MEI

Almost.

Jack looks at her intently. Raises an eyebrow. She begrudgingly sits in her little chair at her little desk against the wall.

MEI (CONT'D)

My turn next. You promised.

JACK

You promised you'd have that finished by the time Angel got back.

Jack returns his attention to the Apple Macintosh. He reaches across and reboots it, again.

Ommm!

Mei turns her head and scowls at Jack.

MEI

Heeeyyy!

Jack looks at her, grins. Teases.

JACK

Heeeyyy!

ANGEL (O.C.)

Hey what?

ANGEL FUK stands in the doorway. Medium height, curvy frame. White blouse. Black mini-skirt. Heels. Hair in pony tail. Diamond stud earrings. She stamps the water from her legs.

ANGEL (CONT'D)

Talking about me again?

JACK
How'd you know?

ANGEL
My ears were burning.

JACK
Lucky it's raining. You might've
burst into flames.

Angel pulls at the front of her blouse. Shakes off the rain.

ANGEL
This weather is really starting to
get on my tits.

Jack acknowledges the double-entendre and admires her curves
with a wry grin.

JACK
Every cloud has a silver lining.

Mei looks up from her desk.

MEI
This homework is getting on my
tits.

JACK & ANGEL
Mei-mei!

Mei returns to her homework. Angel walks to her desk in
reception. Jack returns to his work, on the computer. He
reaches across and reboots it. Again.

Ommm!

Mei turns and scowls at Jack. He scowls back, playfully.

MICKI (O.C.)
Boys and their toys...

Jack looks up, surprised by the voice. It's one he hasn't
heard in a long time.

MICKI TSE stands in the doorway. Tall. Slim. Elegant.
Refined. Tight, black turtleneck top. Sleeveless. Black
skirt. Long legs, high heels. Severe bob of jet-black hair.
Expensive jewelry. Black Channel clutch bag in one hand.
Chunky portable phone in the other.

Jack and Micki eyeball each other.

Angel appears behind Micki.

ANGEL

Sorry, Jack. She wouldn't wait.

JACK

She never does, Angel. A lot of men would be disappointed if she did.
(beat) Micki Tse. You blow in with this storm, or bring it with you?

Micki doesn't answer. Angel isn't sure what to do. Jack reassures her.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's okay.

Angel backs away, and returns to her desk

JACK (CONT'D)

It is okay, isn't it, Mrs Tse.
How long has it been? Three?

JUMP CUT TO:

Flashback. Micki Tse, standing in a doorway, years ago. Surprised, shocked, hurt. Anger in her eyes. And then... a tear wells and falls on her cheek.

BACK TO:

MICKI

Four. Four years, since you dashed our hopes and shattered our dreams.

JACK

Four years. And still so angry.

Micki walks into the room. Sits on the stool opposite Jack. She puts the portable phone and clutch-bag on the desktop. Takes a packet of Malboro and a DuPont light from within. Jack waits until she has the cigarette between her lips before he raises a hand to stop her lighting it.

JACK (CONT'D)

Sorry, Mick. Not in front of the young and impressionable.

Jack's directs Micki to Mei, who has been observing the exchange with quiet awe.

Micki swivels on the chair. Studies Mei. Smiles politely. Then turns back to face Jack. She places the cigarette and lighter on the table.

MICKI

I heard. Congratulations.

JACK

Been keeping an eye on me, have you? I'm flattered.

MICKI

Don't flatter yourself. She's sweet. I guess we can thank her mother for that. Are you going to introduce us?

JACK

To her mother? That would be difficult.

MICKI

Left you, has she?

JACK

She left us all. Died last year.

MICKI

I'm sorry. I hadn't heard that.

JACK

I guess your sources are a little out of date.

MICKI

Yours too. You can drop the *Mrs Tse*. The ink has dried on the divorce.

JACK

I hadn't heard that.

MICKI

I guess your sources are a little out of date.

JACK

They didn't mention it when they splashed you all over the 10th Anniversary Issue of *Tatler*.

MICKI

I didn't know you subscribed.

JACK

You didn't think I could read.

MICKI

I just assumed you looked at the pictures.

JACK

The *haute monde* takes my mind off the stylist's snokes while she's doing my hair. Tell me, Miss Wong, why are all the beautiful people so ugly?

Jack stands. And walks around the desk toward Mei.

MICKI

If reason were to judge what is beautiful, Jack, sickness would be the only ugliness.

Jack picks Mei up and carries her on his hip, to Micki.

JACK

I don't think Lichtenberg had Tatler, or the stylist's snokes, in hand when he said that.

Micki looks at Mei. And playfully pokes her in the stomach.

MICKI

Who's this cutie? What's your name?

MEI

Mei-mei! I'm two! Two and a half!

MICKI

You're too cute is what you are!

Jack carries Mei to the door. Puts her down.

JACK

Why don't you give Angel a hand answering the phone, sweet-pea?

MEI

I haven't finished my homework.

JACK

You were never going to.

Mei leaves. Jack returns to his seat.

MICKI

She's adorable.

JACK

I guess we can thank her father for that.

MICKI

You were a lot of things, Jack. Adorable was not one of them.

JACK

Romantic?

MICKI

You could be romantic. Up to a point.

JACK

There you go.

MICKI

The point of ejaculation.

JACK

Oh, that hurts.

Micki reaches for the cigarettes. Jack takes an ash-tray from a draw and places it before her.

MICKI

You would've fucked mud if I'd left you alone with it. We're lucky we didn't have venetian blinds. You would've screwed them too.

Micki lights a cigarette and exhales a cloud of smoke.

JUMP CUT TO:

Silhouette of a woman. Micki. Another woman steps out of her shadow. Two women in silhouette.

BACK TO:

JACK

I really did love that apartment. But, come on, I wasn't completely without virtue.

MICKI

You were a saint, Jack. Esther and I were just talking about that last night. Whatever happened to Saint Jack?

JACK

At least you two are talking again.

MICKI

Blood is thicker than Esther. And any man she beds. Including you. And Mr Tse.

JACK

I love it when a family comes together.

MICKI

She's in trouble, Jack.

JACK

Using sex as a fly swatter again? Climbing the corporate ladder in her stockings?

MICKI

He's dangerous.

JACK

So is she. They're probably perfect for each other.

MICKI

He's connected. Construction. Casinos in Vegas and Atlantic City. Macao. Deals in diamonds. With the Russians. And that's just the things I know about.

JACK

Or can talk about.

MICKI

I'm not the only one wishing he'd disappear. I'm worried Esher will get caught in the middle.

JACK

She'd love it. That would be right up her *strasse*, so to speak.

MICKI

She's my sister, Jack. Family. Like that little girl of yours. No matter what she did you wouldn't want anything to happen to her. No matter how much she breaks your heart. And she will, one day. All girls do. That's our thing.

JACK

Esther's a big girl. She can handle herself. You should warn *him*.

MICKI

I did. And here I am. He's mean, Jack. He scares me.

Jack is distracted by something in reception. BENNY YU appears in the doorway. Tall, slim, and a childlike face. Big lips. Long hair. Joy Division T-shirt. Baggy jeans.

BENNY

Sorry I'm late. We get that bunting to the printer?

JACK

I don't know. Did the artwork magically completed itself?

Benny studies Micki. She has chosen this break in proceedings to re-apply her lipstick. Benny is immediately transfixed.

BENNY

If I'd known we were having guests I would've come earlier.

MICKI

I've heard that's quite common, with men your age.

Micki extends her hand to Benny.

MICKI (CONT'D)

Micki Wong.

Benny takes her hand. Shakes it. And forgets to let go.

BENNY

Micki. Micki Wong. Micki Wong?

Benny looks at Jack.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Micki Wong? Your old flatmate?

Benny looks back to Micki. She looks at Benny's hand, still in hers. Benny lets it go.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Sorry. I don't mean *OLD* flatmate. I mean, you know, from the past.

JACK
Give us a minute, will you, Benny?

BENNY
Oh. Sure. Micki Wong. Wow. So glad to finally meet you. We should have dinner. Or go for a drink. Maybe we could grab your sister and-

JACK
Benny...

BENNY
Right. Okay. We'll catch up later. Micki Wong. How about that.

Benny walks to his desk at the other end of the room.

BENNY (CONT'D)
All those curves and me with no brakes.

Jack returns to his conversation with Micki.

JACK
I don't know what I can do, Mick. It doesn't sound like Esther or this, what's his name?

MICKI
Eddie Player.

JACK
Was Chip Winner already taken?

MICKI
It's his name, Jack. Okay?

JACK
Well it doesn't sound like either of them are big on common sense. She'll get bored, leap out of bed and onto the first tram to the CBD.

MICKI
I was hoping you'd have a fireside chat with him. You can be pretty persuasive.

JUMP CUT TO:

Flashback. Jack pinning a man to the wall, threatening.

BACK TO:

JACK

That's not really my business,
anymore, Mick.

MICKI

If the past has taught us nothing
else, and it hasn't, there's very
little you would consider *infra*
dignitatem, Jack. Who else is
there? Tell me. I'll call them.
Esther is trouble. She either
doesn't know it, won't admit it or
is getting off on it. The guy is a
sociopathic, psychotic miskeit.

Micki stands, angry. She pulls at the collar of her blouse,
revealing abrasions around her neck. She then lifts the hem
above her mid-drift, exposing purple bruises on her waist.

MICKI (CONT'D)

He gave me a matching set for my
thighs.

Micki puts her hands on the desk, leans in to challenge Jack.

MICKI (CONT'D)

You think I want to be here, Jack?
It's embarrassing. You're not my
first choice. You're my last hope.

JACK

Ah, hope. The bastard child of
desire and expectation...

MICKI

Please. They're at The Mandarin.
Esther is with me tonight. Drop by.
Give him the benefit of your
experience.

JACK

Micki, I've got a daughter and a
mother-in-law to support.

MICKI

I'll pay you.

Benny appears beside the desk.

JACK

Not now, Benny.

BENNY

Jack's priorities have changed,
Miss Wong.

JACK

Change yours, Benny. Right now.

BENNY

I'll talk to Player for you. Or
maybe I can work your sister out of
his life. I'm married. She probably
half-fancies me already.

JACK

Cool your jets, Benny.

Jack addresses Micki.

JACK (CONT'D)

It took balls for you to swallow
your pride and come to me, Mick.
But half-truths make for a whole
lot of trouble. We learned that the
hard way.

MICKI

Esther is in a whole lot of
trouble, Jack.

JACK

You can bullshit Benny all you
want. He won't mind. If he wants to
help you, that's *his business*. Not
mine. Not ours.

BENNY

Great minds think alike.

JACK

Idiots seldom differ.

Jack walks around the desk. Moves behind Micki. Bends to
speak into her ear.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's great to see you, Mick. I mean
it. You know me. I'll help if I
can, I can't help myself. That
hasn't changed. Call me tomorrow.
Tell me what's really going on.

INT. RECEPTION

Angel sits behind her desk, with Mei. Mei is explaining her drawing to Angel.

MEI

And this is the princess...

Jack approaches.

JACK

Come on Stinky, bath time. Today is done.

MEI

Today is done. Today was fun.
Tomorrow is another one!

Mei jumps into Jack's arms. He turns to leave. Angel stands.

ANGEL

You're going to leave her, in there, with Benny?

JACK

Benny's the one who should be worried. Trust me. She'll kill him.

INT. HOSPITAL ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY - MORNING

Automatic doors slide back. Jack and Mei enter the brightly lit ward.

At the far end is DETECTIVE OLDHAM. Tall. Solid. Grumpy. Bad suit. He's carrying a large mobile phone. He recognizes Jack and strides toward him. They meet in the middle of the room.

JACK

Look, Mei-mei. The Great White Ghost. The last of his breed. A species on the verge of extinction.

MEI

What's 'stinktion, Ba-ba?

JACK

A thing of the past, cream-puff. A curiosity. Come '97, majestic officers like this will no longer be roaming the wastelands of the colony.

OLDHAM

We'll have you stuffed and mounted on our mantle before then, Jack.

JACK

You'll be lucky to make it to The Handover yourself, lugging things like that around.

Jack looks down at Oldham's portable phone.

JACK (CONT'D)

Don't doctors warn against heavy lifting at your age?

OLDHAM

Hasn't caused me as much pain as you.

JACK

At least you're in the right place if it gives you a hernia.

MEI

What's a hernia, Ba-ba?

JACK

When what's inside you tries to get outside, bingle-bug. Through your guts! Boom!

Jack points to Mei's belly and makes a playful "explosion" with his hands.

MEI

Ewww.

OLDHAM

Sorry to interrupt your biology lesson, Doctor Zhivago. You want to see your boy?

JACK

Sure. What'll we do after?

Oldham leads Jack and Mei across the ward, to an observation window in the wall.

OLDHAM

Might be an idea to Princess Pei with a nurse, Jack. It's not exactly the Garden Of Union And Peace in there.

JACK

We're kind of an item. Buy one get one free.

Oldham, Jack and Mei arrive at the observation window. Mei stands on tiptoes to see in. On the other side of the glass, Benny lies in a coma. A mess of bandages and tubes. The heart monitor pulses.

MEI

Who's that?

JACK

Uncle Benny, sugar-pop.

MEI

Who broken-ed him up?

Jack says nothing, contemplating the fate of his business partner. At the events that transpired to this moment.

OLDHAM

Any ideas, Jack?

MEI

Maybe he got a hernia.

OLDHAM

What was he doing in North Point, between two and three this morning?

JACK

Getting a lube?

OLDHAM

That usually ends with a shot of penicillin. Not a "double hernia".

JACK

So, not a crime of passion, then.

OLDHAM

That all you got?

JACK

An old friend turned up yesterday. She had some family problems. Benny took an interest in them.

OLDHAM

Who was the broad?

JACK

That's neither here nor there.