

SKIN

by

Heath Houseman

## SETTING

Southern Arizona desert. Close to Tucson.

A general purpose canvas U.S. Army tent covers most of the stage. The tent surface is stained and damaged. Duct tape covers holes and tears. Tent poles have been MacGyvered together using wood, metal, PVC, held together with duct tape and wire.

The tent's Downstage sidewall is rolled up and tied, revealing the interior.

The tent's Upstage sidewall is rolled down, concealing the cab of a beat-up American pick-up truck. The cargo bed and rear wheels stick out into the tent area. The truck has no license plate.

The cargo bed is stacked with wooden crates marked "Skin Club 2000, fragile, handle with care." Similar crates lie scattered around the tent floor, some used to hold a battery operated lamp, a coil of rope, food, including apples, and jugs of water.

A camp stove and a lightweight aluminum alloy pot are set on a beat-up folding table with folding chairs, Upstage.

Two M16 rifles lean against the truck and crates.

Desert sand covers the tent floor. Everything is covered in a thick layer of dust.

The surrounding desert can be seen beyond the tent proper, a bleak, lifeless, sandy landscape.

## TIME

A possible tomorrow.

CAST:

JOHNSON: 50s, black, a school teacher who speaks with a polished "General American" accent. She is always searching for misplaced chalk.

LARRY: 35, black, a terrorist/freedom fighter, born and raised in Liverpool, England, with a scouser working class accent.

TERESA: 30, Hispanic, a terrorist/freedom fighter, from Southern Texas. She has a tattoo on her shoulder that reads Semper Fidelis (Always Faithful).

GORDON: late 30s, white, a Canadian. He is keenly aware of everything around him, like a great hunter.

DANNY: early 20s, Asian. Her ankles, wrists, neck and face are caked with unwashed sweat and grime. She speaks flat-out fast, connecting all sentences so that her speech pattern is unpredictable, difficult to interpret, choked with physical and emotional pain.

ACT 1

Setting:

Lights up on the tent, Johnson, and Larry. Sunset.

At rise:

(Johnson sits on a crate, mumbling to herself, stress level high.)

Larry peers through binoculars, calm, confident, unflappable.)

LARRY

Someone's comin'.

JOHNSON

...dust. Oh my god. Is that a trail of dust?

LARRY

There's Danny. 'Tiesa. And...

JOHNSON

And what?

LARRY

...three more.

JOHNSON

Three? Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god.

LARRY

Two girls. Young. Teenagers. Eeee, and there's our feller. Makes three.

JOHNSON

Is that.... the... the man?

LARRY

Male, Caucasian, tall, close-cropped, between the age of 35 and 50, I'm guessin', amassed a considerable amount of wealth and power obtained primarily through exploitation and privilege. One and only Man I know.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Our guide. To Seattle. Knows all the safe houses, map of the Railroad, that sort of -

JOHNSON

...what? What is it?

LARRY

Danny's actin' strange.

JOHNSON

Danny's always acting strange.

(Larry runs Upstage, jumps onto the cargo bed.)

LARRY

Strange-er.

(He peers through the binoculars.)

JOHNSON

So? So what... what are you saying? Are you implying something? About me? You are, aren't you? I know you are.

LARRY

Kekka your kite, woman. I'm thinkin' out loud.

JOHNSON

What?

LARRY

Shut up. Understand that?

(scans the horizon)

For fuck's sake, Danny? What's...? Don't look right. Don't feel right. Nah, nothin' right about this at all... That's it, then, Teach: Tuck meself behind those crates if I was you.

JOHNSON

Danny. Is. Not. A. Barometer.

LARRY

I trust him. All that matters. I don't trust you and you don't matter.

JOHNSON

His behavior is not a reliable tool to base anything on, especially our lives. He's sick, in the head, and getting worse. That's all it means.

(Larry jumps off the cargo bed.)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

You're going to get us all killed.

LARRY

You're goin' to get us all killed.

JOHNSON

Give me a gun for heaven's sake. Something.

(Larry points to the camp stove and aluminum alloy pot.)

LARRY

See that pot? Might come in handy. God knows, you can't cook.

(Beat, then he pulls out a long, thin knife, offers it to Johnson.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Here. Now get back there.

(Johnson crosses Upstage, ducks behind a crate.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

(peering through the  
binoculars)

Times like these, wish I was back in me house. Least I'd know where I bloody was, the bloody countryside, have a bloody cup of bloody tea.

JOHNSON

(whispering)

Larry?

LARRY

All right, then: Plan A. If that doesn't work, Plan B. And if that doesn't work...

JOHNSON

(whispering)

Perhaps this knife of yours is dull.

LARRY

It's not dull.

(Larry throws an apple at Johnson.)

JOHNSON

...oh. You're right. It's sharper than I thought. Larry? Do you have the first aid kit handy?

LARRY

What for?

(Throws another apple at Johnson.)

JOHNSON

I seem to have cut myself while examining the sharpness of the blade.

LARRY

And you want me to give you a gun?

JOHNSON

Larry? I believe I'm in need of a bandage. Uh, Larry?

LARRY

Will you stop whisperin'! We're in the middle of the desert, you remember.

(Johnson stands up.)

JOHNSON

Do you have a BAND-AID?

LARRY

Here!

(He throws a small first aid packet at Johnson.)

LARRY

And careful. They're the kind that stick to your skin. Now get behind that crate. You're a bloody useless nuisance, Johnson, but you're alive. If you trust me, you'll stay that way.

JOHNSON

Trust you?

LARRY

GET BEHIND THAT CRATE!

(She drops down behind the crate.)

JOHNSON

I'm behind the crate.

LARRY

And don't think about playing jack-in-the-box with me. When I was a wee lad, hated that sort of thing. Used to wait for that grinnin' clown, Jack, to come out of his box, and then I'd rip his grinnin' clown head right off. Eeee.

(beat)

Got any red ones...? Mrs. Johnson? I said, have any red Gummy Bears ed yous?

JOHNSON

What? Gummy Bears? Is that what you said? Do I have any Gummy Bears?

LARRY

Red ones. Thought I'd ask, case you're hidin' some of those sticky little bears deep in your trouser pockets. Never know what's down there. Never know what you might find.

JOHNSON

You'll find chalk. Lots and lots of chalk.

LARRY

Chalk? Why?



JOHNSON

It's old fashioned, I know. But I liked using chalk and chalk boards. I'd forget where I put it. I'd come home from school and my pockets would be filled with chalk. How can you talk about Gummy Bears at a time like this?

LARRY

You're talkin' about chalk.

JOHNSON

Madness! This is madness! Red Gummy Gears! Why I let you talk me into coming, everything was, I could have made it, in Denver, we, we, we could have survived, Bill and I, we -

LARRY

If you can't beat them, might as bright join them, isn't that right, Mrs. Johnson? And you do remember what happens when you join them, don't you? I'd say you're rather ungrateful. Glad you never taught me anythin' in school.

JOHNSON

My husband's dead because of you.

LARRY

Don't blame me. Stupid bastard had it comin'.

JOHNSON

Nihilistic pig. I hate you.

LARRY

Hate is the key word, Mrs. Johnson. You saw him run like he was a white flag or something. You think they saw a white flag, Teach?

JOHNSON

He was a good man. Gentle. Kind.

LARRY

He was a kind of crazy feller, if you ask me, cuckoo! What was he thinkin', running beyond the Satan Fe Wall like that? Nah feller in his right mind would'a done that unless he had a sort of suicidal tendency. Cuckoo all right. Cuckoo. Cuckoo.

JOHNSON

Stop it.

LARRY

Cuckoo. How come you let him run?

JOHNSON

I thought that was obvious.

LARRY

'Cause you piss trousers, your can't stop your feller runnin' to the subbs? I understand fear, Mrs. J., 'specially when someone's shootin' at you. Bowels have a tendency to let go sometimes. But can't you run and piss at the same time? Can you do this?

(Larry rubs his belly and slaps the top of his head, laughs.)

JOHNSON

He panicked.

LARRY

Not the panicky type. Like you.

JOHNSON

My husband loved me.

LARRY

Loved you too much, perhaps? Do anythin' you asked?

JOHNSON

How dare -

LARRY

Saw it, I did, half his head gone, brains spillin' out like cherry Jell-O, you remember. If I'd been faster, maybe I could've stopped him, but I had to save you, didn't I, the pisseduckoo.

(laughs)

Aw, come on, you know: Pissed/drunk, piss/piddle, pee/cuckoo. You're nah fun. Lighten up, Teach. Sometimes funny's all that's left... Ooooo. Gimme that look. You can't manipulate me, Mrs. Johnson. We're not in love. Didn't teach that in school, did you?

JOHNSON

Teach what?

LARRY

Economics.

JOHNSON

History. I'm a history teacher. I taught American history.

LARRY

Did you now? Fancy that...

(The sound of distant thunder comes up - continues through scene, getting closer and closer.)

JOHNSON

I can't... why, oh god, I... Why are there three? Why don't we just make a run for the Southern Wall? We're so close.

LARRY

Do what?

JOHNSON

Well... You know. You know it, the way through. I know you do. Why else would you lead us down here into this godforsaken desert? It makes no sense to go north now. You must mean for us to go through the Southern Continental Wall.

LARRY

Trust me. I've done this. A good couple times.

JOHNSON

I swear, I can see it from here.

LARRY

Nah. I'm tellin' you. You can't see it. If you could, we'd be dead already. There's nah way through that wall. It's a monster. Get too close, it eats you alive. 'Specially likes history teachers. Nice and tasty.

JOHNSON

God, there has to be a way, a better way.

LARRY

There is - the way we're goin'.

JOHNSON

Two thousand miles! Two thousand! Do you seriously expect any of us to survive? And when we get there - if we get there? It's just another impenetrable wall.

LARRY

Nah it's not. It's the Northern Continental Wall. One wall to the south. Another wall to the north. Get your facts straight, Teach. And you're right. There's nah difference. The Northern Wall is a monster too. But. I know somethin' you and it don't, a secret.

(Beat.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Weather comin' in, from Tucson, by the looks of it. Ever been in a desert monsoon, Teach? All wind, thunder, sheets of lightnin', but nah rain, you know, all cakehole and kecks. Comes and goes just like that, sudden like. Hate it. Spooky.

JOHNSON

I can't stand this! Where are they?

LARRY

They. Are. Comin'.

(He checks his clip, cocks the gun, readies his weapons.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Best thing to do is keep your mind busy, in the meantime: Calculate the amount of skin we have. Can you do that?

(Johnson peeks above the crate.)

JOHNSON

But what do I do if -

LARRY

Uh-uh-uh. I see your head, I pop it off, Jack.

(Johnson drops back down.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Busy mind, now: Thirty crates, two, two hundred fifty per crate, I think.

JOHNSON

You think? Don't know much about the merchandise, do you?

LARRY

I know too much about the merchandise, Jack. What's the answer?

JOHNSON

Um.... Best guess: 7,500?

LARRY

Serious money.

JOHNSON

Yes.

LARRY

You'd get more overseas, the Neutrals or a clean Tokyo chop shop - can you imagine? Since we're doin' maths, what's the skin ratio?

JOHNSON

I don't know.

LARRY

Guess again, then.

JOHNSON

I don't know and I don't care to know.

LARRY

Generally, one for every two. Goes a long way, it does.

JOHNSON

You work it out.

LARRY

Not me job.

(Johnson stands up.)

JOHNSON

About 3,700 and something or other. But then, you know this. You have to.

LARRY

But you didn't, did you?

(beat)

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

I like to know the exact cost, Johnson. Keeps things in perspective. 'Sides, I've never been good with numbers. Ta. Class dismissed. Ass back down.

JOHNSON

You're selling them on the black market, aren't you? Peddling human flesh for profit. That's why you're risking your life. Well, that's not why I'm risking mine.

LARRY

Jack, I think you better get back inside your bloody little box.

(Johnson does not drop back down.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

I didn't like you when we first met in Denver. I like you even less now. 'Cause of you this has been me worst salvage operation to date - you're right, we lost a lot of skin in New Mexico. Costly.

(beat)

Now. Our guests'll be arrivin' soon. Gettin' dark and by the looks of it rather shady. Back in the box, Jack. Lock yourself in.

(Johnson remains standing.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Johnson. Hate me all you like, but listen to me now. Just stay behind the crates. Nah guarantees, but you might be safer there, just in case.

(Johnson drops behind a crate.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

Got any Gummy Bears ed yous, Mrs. Johnson?

(Larry winks at Johnson.)

Lightning flashes, thunder rolls, close and loud now.)

LARRY (CONT'D)

All right, then. Guess I'll go and meet them: Plan A. If things get, erm... unpredictable, don't Jack, stay down. Wouldn't want to have your head popped off, now would we?

(Exits, revolver out, prepared for anything.)

Johnson remains behind the crate.)

JOHNSON

Gives me a knife. Son of a bitch.

(Thunder and flashes of lightning blanket the stage - intense.)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

A knife.

(She pockets the knife, crosses to an M16, picks it up, handling it with some know-how.)

A sudden burst of rapid gunfire, shouts, screams, offstage.

Lightning flashes, thunder rolls.

Johnson crouches low, afraid, confused.

Moments later, Teresa enters, catlike, revolver drawn.

She glides silently behind Johnson, wraps a hand around her mouth.

Startled, Johnson drops the M16.

Teresa calmly assesses the situation.)

TERESA

(finger to lips)

Sh...

(She crosses to a cache of ammunition, drops a clip, reloads, flips open a palm-sized computer, examines the screen, pockets it.)

Johnson picks up the M16, crosses to Teresa.

Teresa turns to Johnson, notices the M16 barrel aimed at her torso, calmly pushes it away.)

TERESA (CONT'D)

Safety...

(Johnson glances at the M16, fumbles for the safety switch.

Teresa continues stocking up on ammunition.

Extreme gunfire, offstage.

Teresa and Johnson throw themselves to the ground.

The barrage ends. Deadly silence.)

JOHNSON

Teresa?

(Extreme gunfire, offstage.)

TERESA

Down! Stay down.

JOHNSON

I'm, I'm sorry, I -

(The gunfire ends. Beat.

A single gunshot.)

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

This is insane.

(Rapid gunfire, shouts and screams - death screams.)

TERESA

You hear that? That's crazy. Now, I'll give you insane.

(Teresa jumps up, shoots Downstage into the darkness, laughing as she empties the cartridge.



Lightning blankets Teresa and the stage, thunder rolls, the storm reaching its violent apex.)

TERESA (CONT'D)

I love my life! You hear me, chingadas! I LOVE MY LIFE!

(Drops to the ground.)

TERESA (CONT'D)

They took it from my mamma, Johnson, but there's no way in hell they're taking it from me.

JOHNSON

What are we doing, Teresa...?

(The storm passes - it's sudden, leaving the stage bathed in a deceptively calm and eerie blue moonlight.

A dying girl screams, offstage.)

TERESA

The only thing we can.

(A single gunshot.)

TERESA (CONT'D)

The sane thing.

(Extreme gunfire.)

TERESA (CONT'D)

Holeee shit! Sounds like General Santa Anna and the entire Mexican army out there! Well, color me un-Texan, but I'm not Davy Crockett and this ain't the Alamo, you trigger happy turkey! You're a turkey, you know that?

(mimics the sound of a turkey gobble, laughs crazily)

A big, dumb, Tex-ass turkey!