

## JACK HANLEY GALLERY

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### *A Man's Treasure / Is a rusted petticoat enough to bring it down to earth?*

Gong Li's husband got himself kicked where it counts and she is pissed. The doctor, who may actually be a vet, tells her man to "keep it straight". Being the concerned wife, she wheelbarrows his ass home. As Qiu Ju in *The Story of Qiu Ju*, Gong Li waddles from farm to village to district to city, appealing to every municipal court and official, at the slow and even pace of a placid, stubborn animal. She waddles because the roads are unpaved, it is icy, she is country folk and she is pregnant. Is it a boy or a girl in there? A valid question in rural China. "If we can't fix your plumbing, we're stuck with the single-child policy for good". If Faye Dunaway "glides and drifts like a vertical sashay" into one end of *Bonnie and Clyde* and out the other, then Gong Li is the trudging pear-shape that pushes the plot, and her cause, to the very end. She does not make the angles of a lightning bolt with her body as when dancing salsa in Havana with Colin Farrell, where she is a sharp, whipping greyhound to his baby walrus in *Miami Vice*. Rather she is a peasant swaddled in layers of synthetic sweaters and coats, gingham pink on green on grey, like a walking mattress or an unmade bed plodding into the horizon of a pastoral painting or Communist cityscape. Her face goes from feline to bovine in the frosted air and noodle steam that is this constant mist around her. She knows exactly when to sniffle or slurp or wipe her mouth with the back of her padded sleeve and we enjoy her enjoying her frumpy disguise. Gong Li is woven into a National Geographic spread that trains our gaze on minor rituals like how chili is ground and sold at market, or how a passerby bundles cargo atop a bus. With hidden cameras placed at several public points, she slips into these quotidian scenes like a spy. The appeal of the film is knowing that this endearing, bullheaded bumpkin is Gong Li – a baller – a woman who can slice through anything. Can you kick a man in his privates? And get away without saying sorry? Her husband pleads to her to put it behind them, people are starting to talk, he is getting teased – "Keep your legs locked tight. If the family jewels get kicked again Qiu Ju will head straight for Beijing!" When she speaks, Gong Li casts her eyes off to the side somewhere, as if the words are coming out of her extraordinarily high cheekbones. When she hollers to Meizi, her young sister-in-law and chaperone in her legal travails – "Meizi! Load the chilies into the cart!" – you know she's at it again. The folk music kicks in at exactly the repetition where the women ride off – the backs of their jackets like a curtain falling to mark the next chapter, which will start and end like the one before. The village chief also has a few words for relentless Gong Li: "Bitch! Beast! Bloodsucker!" With an indifference to everything, including her gentle husband, whose groin she has every intention of protecting at price of his pride, she lumbers off, "They can say what they like. I want an apology."

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