

HAGRIDDEN

By Henry Christner

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FADE IN:

INT. COMMANCHE HOTEL - ROOM 213 - DAY

Morning light through curtains. West Indies decor.

Three rapid knocks.

HOTEL MAID (O.S.)
Housekeeping!

The door opens a few inches, stops at the chain lock.

HOTEL MAID (O.S.)
Sorry. I come back later.

A gray-haired man in white underpants, RONALD (62), lies on his back in a double bed. He opens his eyes.

An OLD HAG (80s) kneels on his chest. She releases her grip on his wrists and pulls back.

RONALD
You're letting me up?

OLD HAG
I hurt everywhere. My fingers. My
right meniscus. My corns.

Ronald moves his body slowly, as if testing it.

She untwists her nightie, wipes fluid from her eyes.

OLD HAG
It will be such a relief to rest.

Ronald sits up, massages his wrists. He has two red knee prints on his chest.

OLD HAG
You don't remember. I can tell.

RONALD
I'm awake, and you're...

He tilts his head, sniffs the air.

RONALD
Of course I remember.

OLD HAG
Shall I go talk to Edith?

RONALD
No, I'll do it.

OLD HAG
I'm not sure you really want this.

RONALD
I'll tell her today.

OLD HAG
And have you forgotten we must have
a place of our own?

RONALD
No, I remember.

OLD HAG
I can't have that miserable
knocking every morning.

She belches deeply, forcefully.

INT. COMMANCHE HOTEL - BALCONY CAFE - DAY

Ronald eats breakfast on a veranda above Strand Street.

The hotel owner, HEKTOR (61), joins him. Dark tan, thick
arms, green linen shirt.

HEKTOR
Senior has agreed to officiate.
I'll remind him not to be so loud.

He lights a Punch robusto cigar.

HEKTOR
At least he's not Episcopal. Short
and sweet, the way you said.

Ronald nods but seems preoccupied.

HEKTOR
What's wrong? The bed lady?

RONALD
No, Edith...The wedding.

Hektor waves dismissively.

HEKTOR
You're getting close to the day,
that's all.

A WAITER (early 20s) brings Hektor a plate of scrambled
eggs and brains.

HEKTOR
A man of your leisure, it's natural
to worry about --

RONALD
I'm in love with someone else.

Hektor regards Ronald, puffs the cigar.

HEKTOR
Just like that. Someone else.

RONALD
I don't actually understand it.

HEKTOR
Ah.

RONALD
She's older. Not a beauty.

HEKTOR
Attraction is a strange thing.
Remember that girl back in
school...Cloaka?

RONALD
This is different.

HEKTOR
Hmm. Pheromones, perhaps.

RONALD

Gnomes?

HEKTOR

A smell. A scent you can't smell.

He flutters his fingers in the air.

HEKTOR

It brings the ardor.

The waiter approaches, whispers to Hektor.

HEKTOR

I have to go. Very unusual -- a complaint.

EXT. ISLAND COAST - ROAD - DAY

A taxi moves eastward along the bright blue Caribbean Sea.

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - DAY

Ronald pauses inside French doors.

RONALD

Edith?

He looks in the kitchen and living area that adjoin a screened porch above the water.

Voices murmur on a radio elsewhere.

RONALD

Edith?

He listens, waits. The radio goes off.

EDITH (54), blonde-gray hair in a bun, appears. She wears a floppy parrot-print house dress.

He kisses her cheek.

RONALD

Did you forget I was coming?

EDITH

No, no. I was listening to the hearings and dozed off.

She covers her face in mock embarrassment.

EDITH

I haven't even done my makeup.

RONALD

Some news from the hearing?

EDITH

Not really. But I love listening to that Sam Ervin talk.

Ronald offers a reserved smile.

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - PORCH - LATER

Tropical-print chairs and couch. A ceiling fan.

Ronald and Edith play cards at a table.

EDITH

That big Cruzan man.

RONALD

Yes. Is he all right with you?

She hesitates, puts a card down.

EDITH

It doesn't really matter.

RONALD

It doesn't?

EDITH

No...He's fine.

RONALD

I want you to be comfortable. He's very loud when he talks.

EDITH
It's your turn.

He contemplates his cards.

RONALD
Is everything all right?

EDITH
Of course.

INT. COMMANCHE HOTEL - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ronald sits at a table with Hektor and SENIOR (55), a tall, beefy islander dressed in a purple shirt.

SENIOR
(to Ronald)
We must discuss it, you understand.

A Chi-Lites recording moderates his voice level.

HEKTOR
Can you tell us about this woman?

RONALD
(uneasy)
I mentioned her before.

HEKTOR
Yes, she is plain, but what --

RONALD
Before this morning.

HEKTOR
You did? Oh.

He takes a drink of gin. Alarm crosses his face.

HEKTOR
The bed hag? You're joking, then.

RONALD
No.

SENIOR
I'm not following.

HEKTOR
Ronald has trouble with his
sleeping. It's gone on for years.
(chuckles)
He believes an old crone visits him
in the night. She sits on his chest
so he can't move.

SENIOR
I know of this story. It's Cruzan.

HEKTOR
And Danish, and Swedish.

RONALD
It's not a story.

HEKTOR
It is, my dear friend. Like the one
we heard as boys -- John
Dillinger's schwanz in the museum.
(beat)
Twenty-two inches? No. A story.

SENIOR
Twenty-two?

Hektor waves his hand.

HEKTOR
So now, this hag seduces his mind.
He insists he loves the creature.

SENIOR
He should delay the wedding, then.

RONALD
I think --

HEKTOR
No, no, no. Edith is the right one
for him. He is just afraid.

SENIOR
This happens.

HEKTOR

You saw Edith today. Tell us.

RONALD

We played cards. She listened to the hearings.

HEKTOR

See? A husband and his wife.

RONALD

She seemed different. I can't put my finger on it.

INT. COMMANCHE HOTEL - BALCONY CAFE - DAY

Voices from the street below. A car horn.

Hektor watches a crowd approach the old Danish courthouse.

He turns to Ronald, who sips coffee.

HEKTOR

Kuntsler and his young woman. Now she, I might believe you.

(grimly)

Pre-trial today for those animals.

Ronald nods, points to the Avis newspaper.

HEKTOR

It will be so much better for Edith with you out there. All this so-called trouble in paradise.

RONALD

We're going to talk.

HEKTOR

Good, good. And how was your sleep?

RONALD

It was all right.

Hector's face turns solemn.

HEKTOR

I regret bringing this up.

RONALD

What?

HEKTOR

The couple in two-fifteen. They complained of smells coming from your room. Gefilte fish, they said.

RONALD

That's ridiculous.

HEKTOR

I know, I'm sorry, I told them.
I'll check the kitchen ducts.

INT. EDITH'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

A breeze off the sea. A deck of cards on the table.

Ronald sits on the couch with Edith, his hand in hers.

EDITH

I thought I was ready.

RONALD

I know. I understand.

She pulls him to her. An awkward hug.

EDITH

You seem to have known.

RONALD

Some things you sense. I had the taxi wait this time.

They walk toward the French doors.

RONALD

We've both lived alone so long.
It's hard to make such a change.

EDITH

Yes....

RONALD

Suddenly having someone else.

EDITH

Actually...I've taken in a boarder.
An older lady.

RONALD

Oh.

EDITH

Things were so up in the air with
us, I didn't mention it.

RONALD

It will be a comfort, with what's
gone on across the island.

EDITH

I do get anxious at night.

Ronald pauses, tilts his head up. His nostrils flare.

EDITH

Something?

RONALD

I don't know. I guess not.

EDITH

The wind brings odors now and then.

RONALD

Yes, that must be it.

FADE OUT.