

MORNINGSIDE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

A partly cloudy sky hangs over green fields that surround a winding road. On the road at the horizon...

A point of light...a car.

The car speeds past an open metal gate. Atop the gate a sign reads: MORNINGSIDE ASSISTED LIVING

The car pulls into the only visitors spot left.

Three cars occupy the other spots, fallen leaves lie scattered on their tops and windshields like shallow graves.

The car's driver-side door swings open, stepping out of the car...

MICHAEL BENNET(30's) fit, short cut, wearing a three piece suit, briefcase in hand.

He heads toward the entrance, glancing at the cars as he passes them.

INT. MORNINGSIDE HOME - DAY

Inviting, the foyer is bathed in a yellow light, crown molding on the ceiling compliments a large chandelier.

Michael enters the home, he pulls out a small bottle of sanitizer, cleans his hands.

He passes a pair of lovely ladies...

LOVELY LADIES(80's) One in an impressive floral one piece and sun hat, another with a walker smile at Michael as they pass, he returns the glance.

They swoon as they enter the elevator.

Michael brushes off his suit, ever the one to impress. He approaches the reception desk.

At the reception desk, the RECEPTIONIST(50's) Gives him the once over.

RECEPTIONIST

Make sure you sign in with our ledger against the wall there.

MICHAEL

I'm here to see Mr. Hodges.

RECEPTIONIST

Take a seat.

Michael settles into a modest sofa chair, the small table to his side is littered with cards of well wishes, happy birthday, Happy Anniversary. On the table at its center rests a vase, in the vase, xeranthemums, well tended to.

Receptionist keeps glancing at Michael.

RECEPTIONIST

(hesitant)

Is it busy in town? The tulips...for the festival...are they...

Receptionist blushes, stops talking, pretends to be busy with some forms.

MICHAEL

The tulip festival? That was last week. Surely you've seen it on your way here.

RECEPTIONIST

I haven't really been...you know...I can't really leave.

MICHAEL

Can't leave? Is this place on some kind of lockdown?

Receptionist glances nervously around.

RECEPTIONIST

(nervous laugh)

I, uh, stay. Because of the...the clients who are...in recovery. They really need us.

The Receptionist smiles, Michael gives her a long look, decides she's just an idiot.

Briefcase in hand, Michael spins around in his seat to get a scope of the place.

Across from reception is a large dining area, in a fancy leather booth sits an old gentleman...

OLD GENTLEMAN(80's)thin, sickly. An oxygen tanked rests at his side, a tube runs from the top of the tank to a mask fixed on his face, a manic/panicked look.

A LARGE ORDERLY approaches his table. He places a hot steaming cup in front of him. The Orderly slowly turns his head towards Michael, the same look of panic.

Michael's face fills with unease.

VOICE (O.S.)

Waylon Hodges. What can I do for you?

Standing in front of Michael...

WAYLON HODGES(55) portly, receding hairline, in a striped dress shirt, suit vest and pants, thick black framed glasses.

Hodges extends his hand, a big toothy smile. Michael rises to his feet, takes his hand, a hardy shake.

MICHAEL

Michael Bennet, I'm with the Health Department.

Waylon looks to the receptionist with reprimand.

WAYLON

You caught me by surprise I must say...

Michael takes a small bottle of hand sanitizer out of his coat pocket, cleans his hands. He is officious, doesn't want to hear excuses.

MICHAEL

Can we go to your office please?

WAYLON

Yes, well, right this way.

Michael follows in tow.

INT. HODGE'S OFFICE - DAY

Enveloped by darkness, floor to ceiling transom windows enclose the cramped space. Michael looks to the darkness behind the windows and takes a seat.

MICHAEL

There has been a steady stream of complaints Mr. Hodges.

(MORE)

I had a family member of one of your clients, a misses Jane Stewart denied entry several times the past month. We had a spirited conversation...

(looks to his notes)

Quote " The staff has forcibly removed me twice saying that I don't appreciate what they are trying to do here." End quote. Care to fill me on this?

WAYLON

That one, Jane Stewart,... we've taken issue with, she's abusive to the care staff and thinks her mother deserves special treatment--

MICHAEL

-- Another one from a mister Kevin Johnson "Dad was here with us for a few days. His last day here he disappeared. We had a search party look for him, found him four hours later. He refuses to go back and won't leave his room, he won't talk to us, keeps going on about the dark, He won't go back to the dark." end quote.--

A beat.

WAYLON

It's like the other one. He can't blame the home for his fathers problems,...they can't see what we are doing here, what we are trying to do. Let me assure you we're working very hard to put our plans into progress.

Michael jots down a few notes, looks dubious.

MICHAEL

Mhmm. Has anyone visited the home recently? Like the last day or two?

WAYLON

Not since the tenth.

MICHAEL

I couldn't help but notice a couple of cars in the visitors parking.

WAYLON

The extra care staff have been using what parking we have. We don't really leave.

Waylon lets out a faint nervous CHUCKLE.

MICHAEL

If only I could find the humor in this.

WAYLON

It's been a long week Mike.

Michael looks to his paperwork, various charts and important papers, then to the dark through the windows.

MICHAEL

Long Term Oversight were at the home recently without any issue yet the complaints haven't stopped, how did you spin that?

WAYLON

The long term oversight people had their doubts, but once they really looked around and saw with their own eyes what we're doing, how we are changing things, bringing a different outlook to the community, they were as happy as clams.

That nervous CHUCKLE from Waylon.

MICHAEL

Mmhmm...

Michael shuffles his papers in order, places them back in his briefcase. He takes his bottle of sanitizer out of his suit breast pocket, cleans his hands, one last glance into the dark.

MICHAEL

I would like to see the rooms please,...specifically a Mrs. Carol Stewart.

A beat.

WAYLON

Of course, it's probably best you see for yourself then you'll understand...unless you're just here to tick more boxes on forms...

INT. RESIDENCE ROOM - DAY

Unkempt. Bed sheets lie on the floor, newspaper covers the windows. Waylon and Michael stand in the open doorway.

On a bed in the corner of the room under a large blanket lies a form, the blanket rises and falls, shallow breaths.

Michael approaches the bedside...

...Slowly lifts the blanket.

CAROL STEWART(80'S) lies with her hands clasped together as if in prayer, long shallow breaths. Michael is beside himself, the Stewarts are not going to be happy.

Waylon stays close to the door, then an ORDERLY(30's) appears in the doorway from the hall.

Waylon is strangely, nervously fixed on the windows, Michael takes notice.

MICHAEL

When did it start?

WAYLON

A few weeks ago.

MICHAEL

Aside from Mr. Johnson, Have any of the residents been off the grounds?

WAYLON

Most of the residents prefer to stay indoors.

Michael looks to the windows.

MICHAEL

The least you can do is allow them a view.

Michael approaches the large covered window. Waylon looks even more panicked.

WAYLON

I wouldn't do that...

MICHAEL

It contributes to illness Waylon. We need natural light. Studies have shown -

Waylon lets out a faint CHUCKLE.

MICHAEL

For god sake! This isn't a laughing matter! The residents need sunlight!

Michael grabs a corner of paper to pull off the window --

-- Mrs. Stewart lets out a desperate SCREAM.

Startled, Michael covers his ears.

Waylon slowly walks back to the doorway.

Michael rushes to her side. He takes her hand, caresses her head.

WAYLON

I told you not to do that...

MICHAEL

Carol? My name is Michael Bennett, can you hear me?

No response, only labored breathing. He looks to Waylon who shrugs, Michael can't believe it.

Michael takes out his paperwork, makes the proper check points. Looks in disgust at Waylon.

MICHAEL

For god's sake, man! Get a nurse in here now!

Waylon gestures to the Orderly loitering at the entrance, he makes haste. Waylon leans in to the orderly -

WAYLON

(to orderly)

Time to move Mrs. Stewart to the East wing.

ORDERLY nods knowingly.

MICHAEL

I assume you have legal representation? You're going to need it.

WAYLON

The best. They see very well.

Michael gets to his feet. He places his paperwork back into his briefcase, takes out his bottle of hand sanitizer, cleans his hands.

MICHAEL

Is there anything else I should be aware of before I move forward with my report?

WAYLON gets a sly look.

WAYLON

There is one other resident you should probably see...

INT. RESIDENCE SOLITARY WING - DAY

Darker now, Sterile. Empty of people. Modest chandeliers hang from the ceiling every ten feet.

At the end of the hallway, an elevator...

The elevator opens, Michael stands with briefcase in hand, to his side, Waylon Hodges.

Michael exits. Waylon stays in the elevator.

WAYLON

This leads to our private suites. The last door on your left. Give my regards to Mr. Stalinski.

MICHAEL

You're not coming? How will--

WAYLON

-- Mr. Stalinski is our resident client liaison officer. He can manage quite well without me.

(chuckle)

He'll clear it all up, help you see how we're changing things.

The elevator door closes on a grinning Waylon Hodges, a faint CHUCKLE.

Michael turns towards the elevator, tries to grab it before the door closes, no such luck.

He hits the call button, It doesn't light up.

A low unearthly CRY grabs Michael's attention, SOBBING from Stalinski's room at the end of the hall.

Michael cautiously walks toward Stalinski's room. The further he gets down the hall the louder the SOBS, the darker the hallway becomes.

At the foot of the door, an old dusty welcome mat, frayed on one end, as if torn at by an animal. The SOBS stop.

A cold BLUE LIGHT from the gap between the door and floor casts a sickly light at Micheal's feet.

Hesitantly, Michael turns the knob, enters.

INT. STALINSKI'S ROOM - DAY

Bright, inviting. A warm orange sun shines through the large bay of windows. Outside the windows, A beautiful park, SEVERAL CHILDREN at play.

A comfy sofa sits against a wall, on an end table a vase of xeranthemums, well tended to.

MICHAEL

Huh...

VOICE (O.S.)

Is that you Nancy? I don't need house keeping...

MICHAEL

I heard crying. Are you alright?

MR. STALINSKI strides in from the kitchen...

MR. STALINSKI (70's) thin, in a pin striped pair of slacks, a red cardigan with a collared white shirt underneath. A full black and grey van dyke compliments a charming smile.

Stalinski grabs a bar towel tucked under his arm, wipes his hands.

STALINSKI

You're early!

MICHAEL

I didn't know I was expected.

Stalinski puts his arms up in a playful manner. He walks toward Michael, inviting.

STALINSKI

Tea's on. Why don't you join us Mike?

Puzzled, Michael looks for the "us" and cautiously walks with Stalinski into the...

KITCHEN

Old country style. A set table for two. Stalinski gestures to an empty chair, he rushes to the stove, grabs a full teapot. Stalinski places the teapot on the table, takes a seat.

MICHAEL

Have we met?

STALINSKI

I'd of remembered you.

MICHAEL

You called me mike.

Stalinski grabs the teapot.

STALINSKI

I have my ways, say when.

A nice full cup.

MICHAEL

That's quite enough.

Stalinski takes a sip of tea, places the cup down.

STALINSKI

I may have steeped it a little too long.

Michael brings the cup close to his lip, holds his glance on Stalinski.

MICHAEL

Why does Waylon want me to meet with you? You seem to be in good health.

Michael takes a long sip.

STALINSKI

We're all in good health here. Eventually. It's a process, you see.

A SCRATCHING, faint at first, then LOUDER. Michael looks around the room, to the side of the stove a door opens a small crack, on the other side of the door, darkness.

MICHAEL

Can you hear that?

STALINSKI

Sugar? Cream?

Michael takes another sip of tea, dismisses the sound. He pulls out his paperwork from his briefcase, pen in hand.

MICHAEL

This...process. A healing process you mean? Is this how you've been helping the clients as the resident liaison? Are the staff helpful here?

STALINSKI

Among other things. I haven't been here long but the hospitality is top-shelf.

MICHAEL

Hospitality aside, there are many problems in the home Mr. Stalinski.

STALINSKI

No problems Mike. We are all quite well. Some just take a little longer than others to...adjust.

Michael looks through his important papers. He is struggling to find what use Stalinski has for his investigation.

MICHAEL

How many homes have you been through Mr. Stalinski? You seem very familiar with long term care.

STALINSKI

I've stayed with friends mostly.

MICHAEL

I'd like to interview them, get more outside input. Can you contact any of them?

STALINSKI

They are never far away.

Michael looks to the darkness beyond the door, the small crack in the door is much wider now.

STALINSKI

You're not uncomfortable Mike? You know, considering...

MICHAEL
Considering?

STALINSKI
Sometimes when you look into the
dark, it looks back.

Shocked, Michael composes himself. He must have just heard wrong.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry I'm not following you.

STALINSKI
Are you familiar with the ant lion
larva?

Michael notices something different in Stalinski's demeanor, even posture. He's forward leaning, almost in anticipation. It makes Michael nervous.

MICHAEL
Can't say I am, Let's get back to --

STALINSKI
-- It creates a pit, when its prey
reaches the bottom of the trap, it
closes its mandibles.

Clearly having heard enough, Michael gathers up his important papers, tries to control his voice.

MICHAEL
I think I've seen everything, Thank
you Mr. Stalinski.

The SCRATCHING becomes louder now.

STALINSKI
You've seen nothing yet.

Shaken, Michael pushes the tea towards Stalinski, clearly done.

MICHAEL
Alright, good day sir.

Michael puts his paperwork back in his briefcase, takes out his bottle of sanitizer, cleans his hands.

STALINSKI
That can't help you.

The comment catches Michael by surprise.

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

STALINSKI

All we want is to be left alone. We manage quite well on our own.

The SCRATCHING, louder now.

STALINSKI

But you aren't very good at leaving anything alone, are you, Michael? Now I have to show you what we've been doing here, the progress that's been made.

Michael covers his ears, looks around the room and then to Stalinski who is seemingly unaffected.

MICHAEL

You,...don't hear that?

STALINSKI

...just a hungry friend from the dark. See? It's quiet now. It knows dinner is soon to be served.

The SCRATCHING stops, Michael pulls his hands away from his ears. Stalinski stands to his feet, slowly backs away from the table. A devilish grin paints his face, he looks up.

Michael slowly looks up...

STALINSKI (O.S.)

Runts are always the last to feed. This one is a messy eater...

...on the ceiling...

A ROTTEN CORPSE in a hospital gown, limbs broken, legs spread, its arms twist around the other way, bulging white eyes sit in dark sockets.

STALINSKI (O.S.)

(cackling)

Are you a messy bleeder Michael? Let's find out! Hahahahaha!

A big rotten GRIN. It lets go.

It falls towards Michael, its mouth open.

Michael's face fills with terror, a SCREAM.

FADE OUT.