"Hangman"

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1 INT. CUNNINGHAM LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A sad-looking PAUL CUNNINGHAM, 38, is seated in a big recliner. His suit jacket is draped over the back of the chair. He is wearing suit pants and a dress shirt, having only recently returned home from work. There is a pen in his shirt pocket. His tie is askew, the top collar button unbuttoned.

Before him is an oversized, slightly tattered photo album bearing the title "Wedding Day." Cunningham is on the telephone. On a split screen, we see that he is talking with his gray-haired MOM, who is very concerned.

MOM

You're not going to look at the album again, are you, dear?

CUNNINGHAM

Of course I am.

MOM

But, sweetheart -

CUNNINGHAM

(flippantly)

When would you suggest I look through my wedding album - on my birthday?

MOM

Paul -

CUNNINGHAM

It's my wedding anniversary, and
I'm -

MOM

(tenderly)

Was, dear. It was.

(beat)

She's been gone for -

CUNNINGHAM

You don't have to tell me. No one knows that more than I do.

MOM

Claire wouldn't -

CUNNINGHAM

Don't tell me what she wouldn't have wanted. No one can know that. (MORE)

1 CONTINUED:

CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm going to do what I feel like doing. . . and this feels right.

MOM

(beat)

Son, I know what you're going through.

CUNNINGHAM

(annoyed)

Do you? Isn't Dad still alive? You can't know what it's like to be widowed until you are.

(longish beat; embarrassed)

I'm. . . I'm sorry, Mom. I know you only. . . only want what's best for me.

MOM

Always.

CUNNINGHAM

Tomorrow, I'll get up and go to work. Tonight, I'm going to take a trip down memory lane, cry some - maybe a lot - and then go to bed. It's what I do every December 3. It gets me through the day.

MOM

You'll call if you need help. . . someone to talk to?

CUNNINGHAM

You're first on my list.

FADE TO:

2 INT. CUNNINGHAM LIVING ROOM - LATER

Still sitting, Cunningham turns a page of the wedding album. A tear rolls down his cheek as he looks at a picture of his late wife and him on their big day. He runs the fingers of his right hand along the picture, as though feeling the past.

CUNNINGHAM

(sniffs)

So young.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2

2 CONTINUED:

CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

We were. . . so young.

He wipes the tear away with his sleeve and turns the page.

CUNNINGHAM

(sighs)

MR. SCRATCH, a tall, salt-and-pepper-haired man wearing a pinstripe suit, is suddenly behind him, leaning over the back of the recliner to look at the picture.

MR. SCRATCH

She was a lovely lady.

CUNNINGHAM

That she was.

Cunningham is so lost in his own thoughts of yesteryear, he doesn't notice that he has an unexpected and uninvited quest.

It suddenly strikes him. He turns his neck to look at Mr. Scratch, who grins.

CUNNINGHAM

Hey!

He puts the album down on an end table, stands, and faces ${\tt Mr. Scratch.}$

CUNNINGHAM

Who are you? How'd you get in here?

MR. SCRATCH

My name isn't important.

CUNNINGHAM

The place is locked up tight.

(beat)

What are you - some kind of a magician?

MR. SCRATCH

Some people have referred to me as one, but that was eons ago.

CUNNINGHAM

You've got a minute to get out of here before I call the police.

MR. SCRATCH

Oh, Mr. Cunningham, I have more time than that.

CUNNINGHAM

You're a mind reader too?

MR. SCRATCH

I am many things.

CUNNINGHAM

Well, Mr. Many Things, I'm going to take care of you myself.

Cunningham starts rolling up his shirt sleeves.

MR. SCRATCH

But my minute isn't up yet!

CUNNINGHAM

Too bad.

Cunningham takes a couple of steps forward. Mr. Scratch attempts to use the back of the recliner as a shield as Cunningham continues approaching him.

MR. SCRATCH

I was hoping we could look at your wedding album.

CUNNINGHAM

You are a weird one.

MR. SCRATCH

You don't get it?

CUNNINGHAM

"It" what?

MR. SCRATCH

Who I am.

Cunningham stops his approach.

CUNNINGHAM

I don't give a damn who you are. I just want you to get the hell out of here.

MR. SCRATCH

Now you're catching on!

CUNNINGHAM

What?

MR. SCRATCH

Hell. The hell out of here.

(beat)

Think, man!

CUNNINGHAM

(longish beat;

amused)

You're the devil?

MR. SCRATCH

Yes. Though, lately, for a change, I've been going by "Mr. Scratch."

CUNNINGHAM

It's time to go.

MR. SCRATCH

Aren't you curious why I'm here?

CUNNINGHAM

Not particularly.

MR. SCRATCH

I felt the longing in your heart for your Claire. It was so overwhelming, it seeped all the way down to Hades.

CUNNINGHAM

(angrily)

How do you know her name?

MR. SCRATCH

Very little escapes my notice.

(beat)

You miss her, don't you?

CUNNINGHAM

I've had enough of this.

Cunningham starts his approach again.

MR. SCRATCH

(quoting Cunningham

from earlier)

"Tomorrow, I'll get up and go to work. Tonight, I'm going to take a trip down memory lane, cry some - maybe a lot - and then go to bed."

(MORE)

MR. SCRATCH (CONT'D)

(beat)

Isn't that what you told your mother earlier?

CUNNINGHAM

You tapped the phone?

MR. SCRATCH

(insulted)

I don't need to do such everyday things like that.

CUNNINGHAM

(longish beat)

So you're the devil?

MR. SCRATCH

Mr. Scratch.

CUNNINGHAM

I don't care if you're Mr. Rogers. I want you out of here.

MR. SCRATCH

I've come to offer you a deal.
One, I daresay, you will like very much.

CUNNINGHAM

What I'd like very much is for you to leave before I knock out some of your teeth.

MR. SCRATCH

You're not the least bit curious?

CUNNINGHAM

(exasperated)

OK.

(beat)

What can you offer me?

MR. SCRATCH

A reunion with the lovely Claire.

CUNNINGHAM

(disbelievingly)

Sure.

(beat)

And all you want in return. . . is my soul.

MR. SCRATCH

Not today.

CUNNINGHAM

(surprised)

No?

MR. SCRATCH

I have an abundance of souls. Too many, in fact.

CUNNINGHAM

Then. . . what?

MR. SCRATCH

The big toe of your right foot.

CUNNINGHAM

(very confused)

What are you talking about?

MR. SCRATCH

The only way I can keep the peace down below.

CUNNINGHAM

With one of my toes?

MR. SCRATCH

Hell has many residents. Some of them, during their stay with me, have. . . "lost" things.

CUNNINGHAM

Like toes?

MR. SCRATCH

Toes, fingers, lungs, kidneys. These "losers," if you will, are crying out loud and long about why they shouldn't suffer and how, if they were only in charge, they would fix everyone's problems.

(beat)

I've been through a power struggle before. I don't want to face another one.

CUNNINGHAM

So by giving somebody else my toe, you cut down on the complaining?

2 CONTINUED: (6)

MR. SCRATCH

Yes.

(beat)

The would-be recipient is currently my biggest griper.

CUNNINGHAM

What made you pick me?

MR. SCRATCH

As I said, I felt your despair. I thought you might be interested in making a deal.

CUNNINGHAM

For a toe?

MR. SCRATCH

To start with.

(beat)

If, later, you're agreeable to
more. . .

CUNNINGHAM

What would I get in return?

MR. SCRATCH

That is what we need to negotiate.

FADE TO:

3

3 INT. CUNNINGHAM LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cunningham and Mr. Scratch are still facing each other over the recliner.

CUNNINGHAM

Time's up.

MR. SCRATCH

I'm sorry?

CUNNINGHAM

You were amusing for a bit, but -

MR. SCRATCH

You haven't given me a chance to make my point.

CUNNINGHAM

The only point you have is the one on top of your head.
(MORE)

3 CONTINUED:

CUNNINGHAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

Should I call the cops or take you out of here *myself*? You stand a better chance of leaving unharmed with the police.

MR. SCRATCH

(quickly)

Three minutes.

CUNNINGHAM

What?

MR. SCRATCH

Give me three minutes to prove myself. If, by that time, I haven't, I'll leave.

CUNNINGHAM

(anxiously)

You will?

MR. SCRATCH

You'll never see me again.

CUNNINGHAM

(longish beat)

You're on the clock.

MR. SCRATCH

May I use your kitchen?

CUNNINGHAM

You gonna boil an egg?

MR. SCRATCH

(chuckles)

It's hard to explain. I need to show you.

CUNNINGHAM

OK.

Mr. Scratch walks to the kitchen threshold.

MR. SCRATCH

Please stay clear.

He holds his hands up to his temples and closes his eyes.

CUNNINGHAM

Getting a headache?

3 CONTINUED: (2)

MR. SCRATCH

Concentrating.

CUNNINGHAM

I'm getting a headache.

MR. SCRATCH

Shhh!

We hear a low hum. It builds to a higher level and then stays constant. The view of the kitchen flickers momentarily, like an old newsreel, and then changes to one that looks much older.

Cunningham stares at the image in amazement.

CUNNINGHAM

I haven't had that linoleum, those countertops since. . . Oh, my God!

In the image of the old kitchen, Claire, radiant in a flowered sun dress, is turning on the oven.

CUNNINGHAM

Claire! Don't move, honey!

Cunningham rushes to the image. Mr. Scratch tries to grab him, but misses.

MR. SCRATCH

Wait!

Cunningham doesn't make it. He hits a barrier between the past and the present at the kitchen threshold. There is a crackle of electricity, and Cunningham is thrown to the living room floor at his guest's feet.

CUNNINGHAM

Oof!

He shakes his head quickly, attempting to pull himself together.

CUNNINGHAM

Damn it! What's -

MR. SCRATCH

For now, it is merely an image
. . a moving image.

Cunningham slowly stands and faces Mr. Scratch.

3 CONTINUED: (3)

CUNNINGHAM

(eagerly)

For now?

MR. SCRATCH

It can be more.

CUNNINGHAM

(angrily)
Get to the point.

MR. SCRATCH

With an understanding between us, I could drop the field and allow you to enter that idyllic scene.

Cunningham looks longingly at the image of Claire.

CUNNINGHAM

That's impossible.

MR. SCRATCH

Is it?

Mr. Scratch notices the pen in Cunningham's shirt pocket. He gestures at it.

MR. SCRATCH

May I?

He plucks the pen away.

Again, he holds his hands to his temples. The hum lessens a bit, and a small hole appears in the threshold field.

With a slight grunt, Mr. Scratch underhand tosses Cunningham's pen through the hole, which collapses. The pen lends on the old kitchen floor.

In the past, Claire notices the pen, picks it up, and puts it on the kitchen table.

Cunningham is amazed.

MR. SCRATCH

As easily as that pen made the leap from now to the past, so could you.

(longish beat)

Shall we discuss terms?

3 CONTINUED: (4)

The hum stops. The image of the past flickers out, revealing the present-day kitchen once again.

FADE TO:

4 INT. CUNNINGHAM KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

4

3

Mr. Scratch and Cunningham are seated at the kitchen table. The former does not look happy.

MR. SCRATCH

(aghast)

A year for a toe? That's... That's highway robbery!

CUNNINGHAM

Don't forget who's in the catbird seat here.

(beat)

You need me.

MR. SCRATCH

Not as much as you think.

(beat)

You are. . . convenient. I'm here now. I could find someone else to deal with and leave you out of it.

CUNNINGHAM

But then you'd lose the time you need to keep things quiet back home.

MR. SCRATCH

I won't be treated this way! I can just leave. . . and, oh, what an opportunity you will miss.

(beat)

I'll give you. . . a week.

CUNNINGHAM

Six months.

MR. SCRATCH

Two weeks.

CUNNINGHAM

Three months.

MR. SCRATCH

Three weeks.

CUNNINGHAM

Two months.

MR. SCRATCH

One and done!

(beat)

A month. No more!

CUNNINGHAM

(longish beat)

I'll take it.

MR. SCRATCH

I'll have a contract drawn up.

(beat)

Once it is signed, you may start your month in the past.

CUNNINGHAM

Excellent.

MR. SCRATCH

I can't give you a day here and a day there, however. It must be thirty days straight.

CUNNINGHAM

Thirty-one.

MR. SCRATCH

(sighs)

Very well. Thirty-one days.

CUNNINGHAM

(nervously)

When will I. . . lose my. . . my toe?

MR. SCRATCH

At the end of your time, you will be brought back here and. . . pay your check.

CUNNINGHAM

Will it. . . hurt?

MR. SCRATCH

Not at all.

(beat)

Oh, one thing you should know.

CUNNINGHAM

Here we go: The catch.

CONTINUED: (2)

MR. SCRATCH

(insulted)

Hardly.

(beat)

I merely wanted to point out that, after you pay up, only you and I will ever recall that you once had that toe. Everyone else, including your mother, will think that you were born without it, lost it in an accident, whatever.

CUNNINGHAM

Why's that?

MR. SCRATCH

I can't have more than one reality existing at a time. It's much too cumbersome. People would wonder why you're. . . changing, and how would you answer them?

FADE TO:

5

5 INT. CUNNINGHAM KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

Mr. Scratch and Cunningham are again seated at the kitchen table. The latter holds a contract. Finished reading, he takes his companion's offered pen and signs his name on the dotted line. We see that it is in red ink.

Cunningham points at his signature.

CUNNINGHAM

Nice touch.

He places the signed contract between them on the table.

MR. SCRATCH

Blood can be so messy. I gave it up years ago.

(beat)

You saw no mention in the contract of your soul?

CUNNINGHAM

No, and I read every word twice.

MR. SCRATCH

(chuckles)

That's because there is no such mention.

Mr. Scratch takes the contract from the table, folds it up, and puts it in his coat pocket.

CUNNINGHAM

(anxiously)

Now what?

MR. SCRATCH

We're ready.

(beat)

You will have your 31 days. After that, you'll find yourself back here - at this very table.

(beat)

Then it will be time to. . . pay the piper.

Cunningham disappears with a loud pop. Mr. Scratch chuckles a small, evil chuckle and pats the contract in his coat pocket.

FADE TO:

6 INT. CUNNINGHAM KITCHEN - 31 DAYS LATER

6

Across the screen: "31 days later. . . "

With a loud pop, Cunningham appears seated behind the table. Mr. Scratch is waiting for him.

CUNNINGHAM

(surprised)

Is my. . . my time up already?

MR. SCRATCH

To the second.

(beat)

Did you enjoy yourself?

CUNNINGHAM

Very much.

(beat)

How do I. . .

Mr. Scratch snaps his fingers.

MR. SCRATCH

Done! Paid in full.

CUNNINGHAM

(surprised)

That's it?

MR. SCRATCH

What did you expect?

Cunningham starts removing his right shoe.

MR. SCRATCH

Can't you trust me?

CUNNINGHAM

No.

MR. SCRATCH

(sighs)

Very well. Check if you must.

Cunningham also removes his sock.

His right big toe is gone. He pokes a little at the area. The skin has grown over where the toe was. It looks like an old, healed injury. He starts pulling his sock back on.

CUNNINGHAM

It didn't hurt at all.

MR. SCRATCH

Does that mean you're interested in further trades?

CUNNINGHAM

If the. . . "time" is right.

FADE TO:

7 INT. CUNNINGHAM KITCHEN - MONTAGE SCENE

7

Mr. Scratch and Cunningham appear throughout, always seated at the kitchen table.

Mr. Scratch points at Cunningham's left hand.

MR. SCRATCH

Another 31 days with Claire for that thumb.

JUMP CUT TO:

MR. SCRATCH

Six months for a kidney.

CUNNINGHAM

(nervously)

A kidney? I don't -

MR. SCRATCH

You can get by with one. Lots of people do.

JUMP CUT TO:

MR. SCRATCH

Three months.

JUMP CUT TO:

MR. SCRATCH

Five months. What a deal!

(beat)

Do you accept?

FADE TO:

8

8 INT. HOSPITAL NURSES' DESK - MONTHS LATER

On the screen: "Months later. . . "

Two older nurses, NURSE 1 and NURSE 2, both dressed entirely in white, sit at the nurses' desk. It is late at night, and they are tired.

NURSE 1

(sighs)

Did you see the *poor* man in Room 6?

NURSE 2

(sadly)

Yes. There's so little of him left. No hands, only one leg. . .

NURSE 1

The doctors say there's just enough left of him to keep him alive.

NURSE 2

I don't know what they'll be able to do for him.

NURSE 1

(sighs)

Me either. I hate to be pessimistic about *any* patient but . . . where do you start?

FADE TO:

9

9 INT. MR. SCRATCH'S HOME IN HELL - LATER

The door to the opulent house is opened. We see an abundance of crackling fire outside and hear the mournful cries of the damned. The door is closed, and MORPHEUS enters. He is a scaly, tall, mostly human-looking, bare-chested red devil - complete with horns and a thrashing tail. He is holding some papers.

He walks to Mr. Scratch, who is seated on his golden throne. As Morpheus speaks, a lizard-like forked tongue darts in and out of his mouth.

MORPHEUS

Here are the case notes you asked for, Master.

MR. SCRATCH

Thank you, Morpheus.

He takes the papers and leafs through them.

MR. SCRATCH

(amazed)

And still he holds on!

MORPHEUS

He does.

MR. SCRATCH

It's been many months since I spoke with Mr. Cunningham.

9

MORPHEUS

Do you have any further use for him, Your Majesty?

MR. SCRATCH

I've gotten what I needed.

MORPHEUS

So he was useful?

MR. SCRATCH

Oh, very useful. His "donations" helped end what could have been a very bloody time down here.

MORPHEUS

So there will be no more trades?

MR. SCRATCH

(beat; smugly)

Maybe one.

MORPHEUS

But you said -

MR. SCRATCH

I've waited a long time, been very patient with his demands. 31 days. Ha!

(beat)

He's in almost constant pain now. He should have no problem trading that last valuable bit of himself for a brief time where he could be whole and pain free again.

MORPHEUS

I thought you said he didn't want to trade you for his soul?

MR. SCRATCH

He did, and - back then - I didn't want it. He was more valuable to me as someone to harvest.

(beat)

But now, with him so close to death, why let a good soul go to waste?

MORPHEUS

(surprised)

You planned this all along, didn't you?

9 CONTINUED: (2)

MR. SCRATCH

(chuckles)

Of course.

MORPHEUS

What makes you think he'll accept now?

MR. SCRATCH

To end to his pain. Noble ideas are all well and good until one is faced with reality. Left alone, Mr. Cunningham could hold on for some time, his pain increasing to agony. He wants it to stop, and only I can ensure that in a timely fashion.

(beat)

His soul will be mine soon. Mark my words!

FADE TO:

10

INT. CUNNINGHAM'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER 10

Several pieces of medical equipment, including a beeping heart monitor, are gathered around Cunningham. Some are tracking his vital signs, others are keeping him alive.

On the bed, we see that very little remains of him - as the nurse said earlier. On his face, he is missing one eye and the opposite ear. His breathing and speaking are labored.

There is a loud pop as Mr. Scratch appears and walks to Cunningham's bed.

MR. SCRATCH

(pleasantly)

Long time no see.

With effort and pain, Cunningham turns his head to face his visitor.

CUNNINGHAM

You did this to me.

MR. SCRATCH

You agreed to all of it. You knew what you were getting into every step of the way.

10

CUNNINGHAM

Look at me! (beat)

Why?

MR. SCRATCH

Greed.

(beat)

No one forced you to accept my offers. You showed enviable greed. You must have loved that woman very much.

He removes Cunningham's chart from the hook at the foot of his bed. He leafs through the pages.

MR. SCRATCH

(beat)

Tsk, tsk.

He returns the chart to the hook.

MR. SCRATCH

You are in rough shape.

CUNNINGHAM

(winces in pain)

MR. SCRATCH

Does it hurt?

CUNNINGHAM

Like hell.

MR. SCRATCH

(chuckles; beat)

Interested in one more trade?

CUNNINGHAM

What?

MR. SCRATCH

One more trade for some time in the past - where you can be a whole man again.

CUNNINGHAM

I have nothing you want.

MR. SCRATCH

Yes you do.

CONTINUED: (2) 10

CUNNINGHAM

(suddenly

understanding)

I refuse!

Cunningham painfully turns his head away.

MR. SCRATCH

You'd rather lie here, in pain and a shell of a man, than accept my offer?

CUNNINGHAM

Right.

MR. SCRATCH

I could give you. . . a year in the past.

CUNNINGHAM

No.

MR. SCRATCH

Two years?

CUNNINGHAM

No.

He again painfully faces Mr. Scratch.

CUNNINGHAM

I told you when we started this damned mess, the answer was no. You may not have my soul.

MR. SCRATCH

But why?

CUNNINGHAM

I don't have much time left. When I die, I want to spend eternity with Claire - not you.

MR. SCRATCH

You really believe in that afterlife stuff?

CUNNINGHAM

I do.

(beat)

There's you, so there's got to be a Heaven.

MR. SCRATCH

Don't you want to die. . . to be free of the pain?

CUNNINGHAM

(winces)

When it happens, it happens.

MR. SCRATCH

(longish beat)

You thought you could trick me!

CUNNINGHAM

(confused)

What?

MR. SCRATCH

Did you really think I'd harvest what I needed from you and then let you die naturally? I have too much inves-

(beat; very happily)
Oh, I just got a wonderful idea.

CUNNINGHAM

Go tell somebody else.

MR. SCRATCH

But you will be the benefactor. (beat)

Starting at this moment, I am going to take the energy I use every day ensuring the world's sorrows and start expending it . . . on you.

CUNNINGHAM

(winces)

Don't bother.

MR. SCRATCH

For so long, I've spent my time ensuring bad things happen... but no more.

(beat)

You, Mr. Cunningham, are going to live forever.

Cunningham's heart monitor starts beeping faster.

CUNNINGHAM

What?

MR. SCRATCH

You'll never die. I'll see to

that.

CUNNINGHAM

Don't. Please.

MR. SCRATCH

You'll live forever as you are now - or worse.

The monitor beats even faster.

CUNNINGHAM

(winces)

You can't -

MR. SCRATCH

You'll never die - never see your wife again.

CUNNINGHAM

You can't have my soul!

MR. SCRATCH

Let's see how you feel about it a year from now, ten years from now, a century.

(beat)

I'll be around too, and I'll be expecting your call.

Mr. Scratch vanishes with a loud pop. The heart monitor beeps even faster.

FADE TO:

11

11 INT. CUNNINGHAM'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

The door is opened, and Nurse 1 walks in. She is pushing a squeaky-wheeled medicine cart. The room door closes as she approaches Cunningham's bedside.

NURSE 1

(overly pleasant)

Good morning, Mr. Cunningham.

CUNNINGHAM

(morosely)

Morning.

NURSE 1

It's time for your meds.

(beat)

Open your mouth, please.

Cunningham does this. She takes a little white cup with his pills in it from the medicine cart and drops the pills into his mouth. She then moves a glass of water with a long straw to his lips. He takes a sip to wash the pills down.

Nurse 1 puts the empty cup and the still partly full water glass back on the cart.

NURSE 1

Did you have a nice sleep?

CUNNINGHAM

No.

NURSE 1

You should have asked the night nurse for something.

CUNNINGHAM

I didn't want to.

(beat)

I'm. . . I'm going to live forever, you know?

NURSE 1

Are you?

CUNNINGHAM

I am.

Nurse 1 puts her hand on his right shoulder.

NURSE 1

You keep believing that. A positive attitude is important.

(beat)

I have to be going now. Your breakfast should be here shortly.

She grabs the handle of the cart and, pushing it before her, walks to the door.

NURSE 1

(calling)

You have a good day now, Mr. Cunningham.

11 CONTINUED: (2)

11

She leaves. The door clicks shut behind her.

CUNNINGHAM

(longish beat; tearing up)
Yep, I'm gonna...
(starts crying)
Live...Live forever.
(starts sobbing)

FADE TO BLACK.