

CORSICAN VENDETTA KNIFE WITH FLORAL DETAIL

Written by

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**BLACK SCREEN:**

"May all my wounds be mortal."

- Unknown

**FADE IN:**

**INT. HOTEL AVEYRON - BAR - NIGHT**

SUPER: AJACCIO, CORSICA, 4,995 MILES FROM HOLLYWOOD

The Hotel Aveyron, an opulent seaside resort. It's the off-season, and the place is semi-deserted.

MARION MORRISON, an elegant middle-aged woman, nurses a glass of wine alone at the bar. She's reading Strangers on a Train.

GIACOMO PERENNI (19, a scrappy, sharp-featured kid wearing a pair of snakeskin cowboy boots and an open shirt) bellies up to the bar two chairs to her right.

The BARTENDER (sixties, walrus mustache) eyes him warily.

BARTENDER

*Que veux-tu?*

GIACOMO

*Deux shots de Wild Turkey s'il te plait.*

The Bartender pours the drink and leaves them alone.

Giacomo looks at Marion, sizing her up with a cocksure grin.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)

You are American?

Marion glances up from her book.

MARION

That's right. Try not to hold it against me.

GIACOMO

No, no. I love Americans. It's just... you look familiar to me.

MARION

Do I?

GIACOMO

It's not a line, I swear.

He scoots closer.

MARION  
(Rolling her eyes)  
Well, that's a relief.

GIACOMO  
May I buy you a drink?

MARION  
No thanks. I'm... well-fortified.

GIACOMO  
Shit, it's going to bug me. You  
were an actress though, right?

MARION  
I *am* an actress,

GIACOMO  
Right, right. Jamie something?

MARION  
Almost. Marion Morrison.

GIACOMO  
Holy shit! From, uh, fuckin'  
*Midnight Caller*, right?

MARION  
That's the one most people know.

GIACOMO  
For real? Oh man, I grew up with  
that shit! My sister showed it to  
me when I was six. I didn't sleep  
for like a week... Crazy, huh?

MARION  
Pretty crazy.

GIACOMO  
Sorry, it's just... I love movies.  
And I've never met a real movie  
star before, you know?

MARION  
Well then, let's make it official.  
Marion.

They shake hands.

GIACOMO  
Giacomo.

MARION

Giacomo? That hardly sounds French.

GIACOMO

It's not. My family's from Sardinia across the water. Corsica is France in name only anyway. We get all our culture and beauty from Italy.

MARION

But I just heard you speak --

GIACOMO

Doesn't mean I make a habit of it. I mean, Bogart never spoke French.

MARION

Well, yes and no. What about Belmondo in *Breathless*?

GIACOMO

Fuck Godard. I'd take the Sergios any day over that grumpy old fuck.

MARION

The Sergios? You mean Leone and --

GIACOMO

Corbucci. They make the westerns. They are my favorites.

MARION

With those boots, I'm not surprised. Are they real?

GIACOMO

Yep, genuine diamondback rattlesnake! Wanna feel?

He lifts his boots onto the bar, scuffing the counter-top.

MARION

I'll take your word for it.

GIACOMO

You know about your name, right? There was another famous person named Marion Morrison, but they changed it before they got famous.

MARION

Yep. John Wayne. Trust me, I've heard all the jokes.

GIACOMO

No joke, just interesting is all. Honestly, I think it's kinda cool that the Duke had a girl's name. James Bond carries a Walther PPK, and that's a girl's gun, but who cares? He's James fuckin' Bond!

MARION

Well Giacomo, I wish more people shared your enlightened attitude.

GIACOMO

So... what brings you to Corsica? You're a long way from Hollywood.

MARION

I'm here for work, actually.

GIACOMO

You're making a movie here? On the island?

MARION

That's right.

GIACOMO

What kind of movie? I mean, it's got to be horror, right?

MARION

Well, sort of.

GIACOMO

Of course, the Scream Queen returns!

Marion flinches at the moniker.

MARION

It's really more of a psychological thriller. Elevated horror, I guess you'd call it. Apparently it's all the rage these days.

GIACOMO

Huh. So what's it about?

MARION

I play a hypnotherapist who brainwashes her rich patients into carrying out targeted political assassinations. But something goes wrong and they just keep killing...

GIACOMO

Is it gonna be super gory like  
*Midnight Caller*?

MARION

Well... that's pretty much a given.  
But this one has a lot on its mind  
too, politically you know? It's not  
just another stupid slasher movie.  
It has something important to say --

GIACOMO

*Midnight Caller* wasn't stupid.

MARION

Hey, I get it. It's a classic; it's  
endured for a reason... I probably  
wouldn't have had much of a career  
without it. But you've gotta admit  
that over the years, the formula  
has grown pretty stale. I mean, how  
many sequels have there been now?

GIACOMO

Eight.

MARION

There, see what I mean? Kent was a  
sweet man and a brilliant director,  
but there's a reason why we both  
walked after Part Three. How many  
times can the same masked psycho  
break into the same radio station  
to kill the same lady DJ? It was  
the right call. Maybe not from a  
money standpoint, but at least we  
got out with a shred of integrity --

GIACOMO

So who's directing your new one?

MARION

That's the best part. René Zampa.

Giacomo's eyes go wide with a sudden, pained recognition.

Marion, now fairly drunk, fails to notice the change.

MARION (CONT'D)

Did you ever see *Her Last Resort*?  
It played Cannes a few years ago.

GIACOMO

No.

MARION

That was René. He's a genius, the French Polanski. And this is his first foray into genre filmmaking.

GIACOMO

Whatever the fuck that means.

MARION

What?

GIACOMO

Sorry. I just heard the guy was kind of a pervert.

MARION

Really? That's not the impression I have.

GIACOMO

Probably because you're too old for him.

MARION

Right. Well, I have an early call time tomorrow. It was nice meeting you, Giacomo.

She leaves, clearly insulted.

GIACOMO

*Buona notte...*

He takes a rueful sip of whiskey, COUGHING as it goes down.

**INT. HOTEL AVEYRON - ELEVATOR - NIGHT**

Marion waits for the elevator doors to finish closing, a familiar boot-tip slides between them. Giacomo joins her.

GIACOMO

Hey, I'm sorry. That was a rotten thing to say.

MARION

Don't worry about it. What floor?

GIACOMO

Which one are you?

MARION

Twelve.

GIACOMO  
Really? Me too.

MARION  
What a coincidence.

They stand in silence. Giacomo turns, showing himself off.

GIACOMO  
I feel like shit for what I said.  
Let me make it up to you, okay? No  
charge.

MARION  
I take it you're not really a guest  
here.

GIACOMO  
You kidding? I come every night.

MARION  
Boy oh boy. You are barkin' up the  
wrong tree, kiddo.

GIACOMO  
*Che cosa?*

MARION  
Well, for starters, I'm gay.

GIACOMO  
What?

MARION  
I prefer the company of women.  
Also, how old are you?

GIACOMO  
Nineteen.

MARION  
Jesus. You're Riley's age.

GIACOMO  
Who's Riley? Your girlfriend?

MARION  
My son.

GIACOMO  
*Merda...*

He covers himself, embarrassed, as the ride continues.



A bell DINGS as they reach the twelfth floor. The doors open. Marion starts to exit but hesitates, looking back at Giacomo.

MARION

How much do you usually make per night?

GIACOMO

I dunno, depends. Usually around five hundred.

MARION

I'd imagine you're pretty popular.

GIACOMO

I do okay. Why?

MARION

I'll make you a deal. I'll give you the five hundred to come to my room and help me run lines for tomorrow.

GIACOMO

I thought you had to get up early.

MARION

I never sleep the night before a big scene. What do you say? You'll make your quota and I won't have to worry about you getting into trouble out here on your own.

GIACOMO

I can take care of myself.

MARION

I don't doubt it. But I could really use a scene partner. Just for tonight. Deal?

Giacomo considers the offer. After a beat, he smiles.

GIACOMO

Deal. Fair warning though, I can't act for shit.

MARION

That's all right. Have you had dinner? We could order room service.

GIACOMO

I could eat...

**INT. HOTEL AVEYRON - MARION'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Giacomo flops onto the king-size bed as Marion locks the door, stowing her purse in a tiny safe beside the closet.

GIACOMO

(Fussing with his boots)  
Mind if I take these off? They  
pinch my feet if I wear 'em too  
long.

MARION

Go for it.

He kicks them off, dislodging a small folding knife with a straight, pearly blade and a distinctive wasp-waist handle.

Marion eyes the weapon, unsettled. Giacomo, following her gaze, springs off the bed to retrieve it, almost sheepish.

MARION (CONT'D)

What is that?

GIACOMO

I told you I could take care of  
myself. It's a vendetta knife.  
Revenge is a big deal in Corsica.  
That's what we tell the *turisti* at  
least. Want to hold it?

MARION

All right.

He hands her the knife. Slowly, carefully, she unfolds it.

Something is engraved on the blade.

MARION (CONT'D)

Che la mia --

GIACOMO

*Che la mia ferita sia mortale.* "May  
all my wounds be mortal."

MARION

Charming. Have you ever --

GIACOMO

Used it? No. I've had to flash it a  
few times. But I've never used it.

MARION

Well, thank god for that.

GIACOMO  
You believe in God?

MARION  
It's just an expression. Here you  
go...

She offers him the knife.

GIACOMO  
Keep it. I want you to feel safe  
around me.

MARION  
What makes you think --

GIACOMO  
I saw you put your purse away.

An awkward silence descends.

Marion picks up the phone and dials room service.

MARION  
Hello, yes, room service? I'd like  
to order...

She looks at Giacomo who mouths, "Cheeseburger."

The actress shakes her head, cupping her hand over the phone.

MARION (CONT'D)  
Come on, you can do better than  
that.

Giacomo thinks for a moment, licking his lips.

GIACOMO  
Filet mignon.

MARION  
One medium-rare filet mignon and  
potatoes au gratin for Room 1257.  
All right, thank you. *Bonne nuit.*

Giacomo rubs his feet as Marion sinks into an overstuffed  
armchair, still inspecting the knife.

MARION (CONT'D)  
You know, this actually reminds me  
of the question I get asked the  
most at horror cons. In fact, I've  
pretty much stopped answering it  
because it's gotten so obnoxious.

GIACOMO

What question?

MARION

Miss Morrison, why'd you let go of the knife?

GIACOMO

What knife?

MARION

In the original *Midnight Caller*. Me, Sally Perkins, I've just saved my little brother from the Caller. I set a trap for him in the green room, knifed the bastard right in the heart. He's dead. He's got to be dead. So I drop the knife to grab the phone and call the cops. But as I do, the audience sees him get back up. He looks over at me --

GIACOMO

And he starts crawling towards you. You don't see him, but we do! It's the best scene in the whole movie!

MARION

But they always asked, "Why did Sally let go of the knife?" And I always said, "Well, Sally doesn't know she's in a horror movie. She doesn't know what a double clutch is." She's smarter in the sequels.

GIACOMO

Double clutch? *Non capisco*.

MARION

You know that one part of the movie where you think the bad guy's dead but then he comes back for one last big scare? That's a double clutch.

GIACOMO

Like in *Fatal Attraction*. Glenn Close jumps out of the tub and Anne Archer plugs her.

MARION

Right. You know, Glenn hated that idea. She thought it cheapened the character. I think she was right.

GIACOMO

Maybe. Still a good scene, though.  
So... do you like going to cons and  
stuff? Meeting your fans?

MARION

Sometimes. Most of them are really  
sweet, but there's only so many  
times I can laugh and smile while  
some weirdo's telling me I kick-  
started his puberty or something.

GIACOMO

Does that happen a lot?

MARION

All the time. Jesus, look at me,  
complaining to a sex worker about  
having to deal with creeps. I can't  
imagine what you put up with.

GIACOMO

Nothing I can't handle.

MARION

Hey, can I ask you something  
without being too indelicate?

GIACOMO

Okay.

MARION

When's the last time you bathed?

GIACOMO

I uh... I use cologne.

MARION

Why don't you go and take a hot  
shower? The food will be here soon.  
Then we can start the rehearsal.

GIACOMO

Oh, okay. I'll be right back.

He slinks to the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

Once she hears the shower SPUTTER to life, Marion calls her  
agent EDDIE DOLAN (early thirties, a peppy little puppy dog).

EDDIE (V.O.)

Marion? What time is it over there?

MARION

You know me. Up past my bedtime.

EDDIE (V.O.)

Insomnia's part of your process.  
So, how's my favorite client? Is  
Monsieur Zampa behaving himself?

MARION

What's that mean, behaving himself?

EDDIE (V.O.)

It's a joke. You sound on edge,  
Lady M. What's up?

MARION

Does René have some reputation I  
don't know about?

EDDIE (V.O.)

Why? Has he been weird with you?

MARION

No, he's been a perfect gentleman.  
But earlier today someone implied  
he has a thing for little girls.

EDDIE (V.O.)

Don't we all?

MARION

This isn't funny, Eddie. I want to  
know if I'm working with a  
predator.

EDDIE (V.O.)

Of course you're not.

MARION

Tell me the truth. Have there  
been allegations against René?

EDDIE (V.O.)

Look Marion, I know *The Hypnotist*  
is your big comeback and you're  
looking for things to be worried  
about, but I promise you, Zampa's  
not one of them. In fact, he's the  
main reason this picture's getting  
made. So please don't piss him off.

MARION

You're right; I'm sorry. I'm just  
being paranoid.

EDDIE (V.O.)  
Who told you he was a creep?

MARION  
A teenage sex worker.

EDDIE (V.O.)  
Really?

MARION  
Yep. He's in my bathroom right now.  
I just ordered him a steak dinner.

EDDIE (V.O.)  
Very funny. You stay safe, okay?  
And call me if you need to talk,  
day or night or day for night.

MARION  
Is that a Truffaut joke?

EDDIE (V.O.)  
I finally saw it. Pretty good. I  
liked the stuff with the cat --

MARION  
You've had that fucking poster in  
your office for five years and you  
just now watched *Day for Night*?

EDDIE (V.O.)  
Yep.

MARION  
This industry is fucked.

EDDIE (V.O.)  
Don't remind me. *Au revoir*.

MARION  
*Ciao*.

Giacomo emerges from the bathroom, now rocking a fluffy  
Hotel Aveyron bathrobe and a matching towel on his head.

MARION (CONT'D)  
Let's make a scene, shall we?

GIACOMO  
Hell yes!

He bounds across the room, settling on the couch across from  
her. She tosses him a copy of the script.

He squints at the title page.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)  
*The Hypnotist?* That's the title?

MARION  
 (Defensive)  
 Why? What's wrong with it?

GIACOMO  
 Too much like *The Exorcist*, no?

MARION  
 It doesn't matter. The title's a homage.

GIACOMO  
 Great, more French. Homage to what?

MARION  
 To Tod Browning. He wrote a story called "The Hypnotist" that was the basis for a legendary lost film of his called *London After Midnight*.

GIACOMO  
 That's the one he made with Lon Chaney?

MARION  
 One of them. It only got middling reviews, but it was notorious for allegedly driving a man to murder his wife. The last known copy was destroyed in a vault fire in 1965.

GIACOMO  
 You know, Orson Welles once said there's no more detestable habit in all of cinema than the homage.

MARION  
 Well, dear old Orson wasn't right about everything.

GIACOMO  
 You sure about that?

A sharp KNOCK at the door startles them both.

Marion gets up, checks the peephole and opens the door.

SILVIO (forties, lithe and officious, salt and pepper hair) wheels in their room service order.



SILVIO  
*Bonsoir, Miss Morrison!*

MARION  
*Bonsoir.*

SILVIO  
 Filet mignon, medium-rare, potatoes  
 au gratin and a bottle of Bordeaux,  
 compliments of the house, because  
 it is our pleasure to shelter you  
 from the storm and strife of life --

He bristles when he spies Giacomo lounging on the couch.

MARION  
 Thank you.

She slips him a tip and shows him the door. As he goes,  
 Silvio stares daggers at Giacomo. They know each other.

MARION (CONT'D)  
 (Closing the door)  
 Friend of yours?

GIACOMO  
 He used to be in my racket, but he  
 aged out. Now he's jealous of the  
 younger guys. We make more in a  
 month than he'll see all year.

MARION  
 Think he'll report us?

Giacomo SNARFS down the steak, juice dribbling down his chin.

GIACOMO  
 I doubt it. It's the off-season.  
 You could run the Palio in here  
 and the concierge wouldn't care.

MARION  
 All right then, let's get started.

GIACOMO  
 Right now?

MARION  
 Go ahead and eat while I explain  
 your character.

GIACOMO  
 (Suppressing a BURP)  
 I am one of your patients?

MARION

No. You are Jacques Rubicon, an intrepid young police inspector.

GIACOMO

Your love interest, then?

MARION

Yes. But you send me up the river at the end, *Maltese Falcon*-style.

GIACOMO

Jeez, spoilers!

MARION

You call yourself a Bogey fan and you've never seen *Maltese Falcon*?

GIACOMO

Not for the *Falcon*, for this movie.

MARION

Really? I thought you weren't a fan of René.

GIACOMO

I didn't say that. In fact I looked him up in the bathroom and it turns out he made one film I really like.

MARION

Really? Which one?

GIACOMO

(Studying her reaction intently)

*Lupara Bianca*.

MARION

Huh. Must've been one of his earlier ones. What's it about? A period piece? A romance?

GIACOMO

It was a, uh, gangster flick.

MARION

René Zampa made a mafia movie?

GIACOMO

Yeah, sort of.

MARION

When did he do it? What year?

Giacomo shrugs as he shovels more potatoes into his mouth.

GIACOMO

Don't remember.

MARION

Careful, you'll make yourself sick.

GIACOMO

(Slapping his belly)

Are you kidding? My stomach's like a supermassive black hole. I was trying to bulk up for a while, but my *magro* ass couldn't gain a pound.

MARION

Most of the people I work with would kill for your metabolism.

GIACOMO

Metabo-what?

MARION

Don't worry about it. So anyway... Rubicon is interviewing Evelyn, my character, at her office. He knows what she's been up to, but he can't let on that he knows, not yet. He's trying to catch her in a lie. What he doesn't realize, however, is how easy it is for Evelyn to hypnotize someone, even if that someone is an intrepid young police inspector...

Giacomo nods, thumbing through the script.

GIACOMO

What page?

MARION

Forty-seven. It's ear-marked.

GIACOMO

Do I get any badass one-liners? "Don't cross the Rubicon," that kinda shit?

MARION

No. This isn't schlock. My partner Nadia wrote this especially for me.

GIACOMO

Wait, so your girlfriend wrote the movie? Why isn't she here?

Marion grimaces. Clearly a difficult subject.

MARION

Quit stalling and take it from the top.

GIACOMO

What about your copy?

MARION

I've got it memorized.

GIACOMO

The whole thing?

MARION

Chapter and verse before we rehearse. And... action!

Giacomo hesitates, unaccustomed to this kind of performance.

GIACOMO

"H-hello again, Dr. White."

MARION

"Inspector Rubicon. I might have known. What can I do for you now?"

GIACOMO

"Do you know a young woman by the name of Erica Rohmer?"

MARION

"Miss Rohmer was a patient of mine. She suffered from sleep paralysis."

GIACOMO

"I've heard of that. Zero mobility, total awareness, and it can go on for hours. I've heard people claim they've seen demons, shadow people, nightmares made flesh."

MARION

"It's a terrible affliction, Inspector. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy."

GIACOMO

"Did Miss Rohmer ever take part in a sleep study at your clinic?"

MARION

"Yes. Late last year, I think."

GIACOMO

"And do you think this was before or after she made up her mind to assassinate Senator Willoughby?"

MARION

"I fail to see what --"

Her phone starts RINGING. She checks. It's Eddie.

MARION (CONT'D)

Shit, gimme a sec...

Giacomo nods, YAWNING, as she heads for the balcony.

**EXT. HOTEL AVEYRON - MARION'S BALCONY - CONTINUOUS**

Marion takes her phone call on the balcony, finger in one ear, as the Mediterranean CRASHES against the shore below.

EDDIE (V.O.)

So I did some more digging on Monsieur Zampa...

MARION

Yeah?

EDDIE (V.O.)

I spoke with three actresses who have been on his sets over the years, including one who was sixteen at the time shooting started, and they all said he was a class act. Intense at times, maybe a little moody, but a complete and utter professional.

MARION

Glad to hear it. Thanks for double-checking, though. Not many agents would.

EDDIE (V.O.)

Well, not many clients woulda stuck with me after Tiff retired and left her baby face assistant in charge. We gotta watch out for each other, Lady M. If we don't, who will?

MARION

Damn right.

She stares at the sea, listening as the waves roll in.