

Vineland, Revisited

(Being the True Tale (in Reverse) of Cedric the Man-Eating Plant)

ACT I SCENE 1: The smoldering wreckage of a flower shop. Vines and blossoms, some charred, some merely limp, some surprisingly fresh, are strewn everywhere. In the corner of the mostly-standing brick wall, in a mound of soil lying flat, is a large Venus Flytrap with faintly red 'lips.' You may THINK the plant is called Audrey II, but you're wrong. He's CEDRIC.

In a somewhat bitter voice, it begins to speak.

CEDRIC: The truth is, this all started when this schmuck kid bought me because I landed in the wrong place.

But I digress. Let me tell you why this place is in rubble...

I could hear my offspring singing, ready to break out of my planter, and spread their seed around this world, ready to go out on their own, but all I could think of was that my dinner was repeating on me. The blonde chick had been kinda stringy, with more than a hint of bleach. I shoulda eaten her first. I shoulda...

The lights fade and come up again.

SCENE 2: The same flower shop, a few minutes before. The explosion hasn't happened yet. Cedric is upright.

SEYMOUR: Audrey? Audrey are you here. You gotta... you gotta stay away from the plant. Audrey II is dangerous. He's not the cute, innocent pet you think he is. (spies a stray shoe on the ground, picks it up.) Oh god.

CEDRIC: God ain't here, Seymour.

SEYMOUR: Oh, *Audrey*.

CEDRIC: She ain't here, neither. Well, not precisely. I mean... you are what you eat, hey? (coughs up the shoe that matches the one in SEYMOUR's hand.)

SEYMOUR (repulsed, angry) How... how could you? I rescued you. I took care of you. And what did you do? You *ate* the only thing – person – dammit, Audrey was a person. You ate the only person who ever cared for me, who I ever cared for. Give her back!

CEDRIC (burbs smugly) Never gonna happen. Besides she tasted like shit. Did you know your girl was a bottle blonde?

SEYMOUR: You're an animal!

CEDRIC: Plant actually. Sentient, alien, plant. Scout from another world, looking for a place with food and... (if a plant can leer CEDRIC is doing it) drink.

SEYMOUR: That's disgusting.

CEDRIC: Feed me.

SEYMOUR: No, never. (backs away)

CEDRIC: Feed me, Seymour!

SEYMOUR: Never again! I'm gonna end this here and now. (Finds a container of fertilizer and a lighter. Turns it into a bomb. Smoke and rubble rain down.) Gotta run. Gotta warn... gotta... (SEYMOUR bolts out in a panic.)

(Lights dim again, and rise. Again, the flower shop resets, clean and new.)

SCENE 3: The same flower shop, about half an hour before SEYMOUR blows it up. AUDREY enters through the door. A bell rings.

CEDRIC: The bigger I got, the closer I got to spawning, the hungrier I got... not surprising, I guess. It takes a lot of energy to send younglings out and about. Taking over the world is a job of work.

AUDREY: Hello? Anyone here?

CEDRIC: (to himself, lustily) Suppertime! (to Audrey) Hey, there...

AUDREY: I don't believe it...

CEDRIC: Believe it baby.

AUDREY: Plants can't talk.

CEDRIC: And girls from your part of town can't have hair that color, but I can, and you do, so what's the what, sister? Do a friend a favor, would ya?

AUDREY: I've gotta be dreamin'!

CEDRIC: Nope, and you ain't in Kansas, neither. Now, listen... I'm thirsty... I'm... parched. Give me a drink... please?

AUDREY: I don't know if that's a good idea. Wait does Seymour know you can talk? Do you order him around?

CEDRIC: It ain't ordering if I say please, and I did. You want me to make it an order...?

(one of his tendrils starts to snake toward her, heading around the room to sneak up on her from behind)

AUDREY: N-no. I can... I can get you some... Where does Seymour keep the watering can?

CEDRIC: (dark, dangerous) Oh, Seymour don't use a watering can.

(His vines capture her and drag her into his gaping maw. She screams, but they are eventually muffled as she is consumed.)

CEDRIC: (smug) And mighty tasty, too.

Blackout.

ACT II SCENE 1: The flower shop, night. It's shadowy, but it's obvious that CEDRIC is about half the size he was in ACT I.

CEDRIC: The said thing is, I didn't come to Earth intending to eat humans. Y'all taste like crap with all the processed foods you eat. I mean, would it kill you to eat grass fed *anything* once in a while? Or even just... grass. My kind has a strong prohibition against consuming intelligent creatures. Though it became pretty clear pretty quick that y'all ain't all that bright. Take that Musknik fella... I had to help Seymour with him. Didn't I?

(The lights flicker off and back on.)

SCENE 2: The same place, earlier. SEYMOUR is visibly shaken, probably because his boss and father-figure, a large, old, man named MUSHNIK is pointing a gun at him.

MUSHNIK: I know what you did to get that girl, Seymour. I know what really happened to that dentist. I saw... saw the blood. I heard the screams.

SEYMOUR: It wasn't what you think... it was self-defense.... It was.

CEDRIC: (sotto voce) Dinner.

SEYMOUR: (hissing, to CEDRIC) Not. Helping.

CEDRIC: Breakfast then? It's almost late enough. Send him this way.

SEYMOUR: Audrey!

MUSHNIK: What about Audrey? You think she wants to be with a killer? You think you're better than the guy who beat her up. You tell me... you tell me how to care of your award-winning plant, and maybe I won't call the cops. Maybe I won't shoot you. Maybe I'll let you take your week's pay and go free. You water, how often?

SEYMOUR: Uh... (he circles slightly toward the work desk on the left, easing himself and MUSHNIK in a 180-degree circle so he's facing CEDRIC). Three times a day, and mist in between with a blend of water and nitrogen. And mulch with uh... pot ash and uh – (he keeps edging sideways) you have to keep the leaves clean, but be careful because the spikes are sharp and...

MUSHNIK: And grow lights?

SEYMOUR: Uh, yeah, trop – tropical temperatures are better and

CEDRIC: (reaching out with his vines to pull MUSHNIK closer) Feed me...

SEYMOUR: He gets very hungry for mineral supplements. Like... downright bloodthirsty.
(CEDRIC tug MUSHNIK into his maw, but it takes several swallows to get him all the way down, during which the old man screams and struggles to no avail)

CEDRIC: Delicious. Little salty.

Fade to black.

SCENE 3: SEYMOUR enters the shop dragging what is obviously a not-quite-dead body.

SEYMOUR: (muttering to himself) What have I done. I killed him. I had to. He was brutalizing Audrey, but... God, I'm just as bad as he is, and now, what am I supposed to do with the body and...

CEDRIC: Seeeeeeymooooour. I can heeeelp you.

SEYMOUR: Who said that.

CEDRIC: I did.

SEYMOUR: Who did.

CEDRIC: (waving a frond) Over here schmetzy-pants. I did. Me. The one you named after a girl. By the way, my name is not Audrey with or without a number.

SEYMOUR: Great, first I'm a killer, now I'm delusional. Plants don't talk. Wait. You're not Audrey II?

CEDRIC: Nope.

SEYMOUR: Then, who – what – which?

CEDRIC: Where, when, why? Get'em all in, putz. You couldn't pronounce it. In your language, the closest is... Cedric.

SEYMOUR: I think I prefer Audrey II.

CEDRIC: (resigned) Of course you do. (If a plant could roll his eyes, he would.) Listen, Seymour. I'm hungry.

SEYMOUR: I gave you blood.

CEDRIC: And sweet it was. What are you? O-neg? But it's not enough. I'm a growing pod. I need flesh. You have flesh to get rid of. *Simpatico?*

SEYMOUR: You want me to feed the dentist to you?

CEDRIC: You gotta chop him up first.

SEYMOUR: I don't think I can do that. I don't think he's exactly dead.

CEDRIC: (snaking a vine around the body's neck and tightening) Is now.

SEYMOUR: I have to... chop.

CEDRIC: Unless you want the evidence to lie there on the floor. (beat) Or unless you want me to eat you.

SEYMOUR: I'll get the axe.

CEDRIC: Attaboy.

(Seymour fetches an axe from across the room and then returns chops up the body, pitching bloody chunks into CEDRIC's mouth.)

CEDRIC: (Makes appreciative eating noises.)

Lights go red, then blackout.

ACT III SCENE 1: The flower shop. CEDRIC is the size of a Christmas Poinsettia and his pot is to scale. He's on a bench by the window, but still animated.

CEDRIC: Blood – human blood – became my favorite form of sustenance by accident, really. I didn't mean for it to happen, but my caretaker – Seymour – was kind of a - well, the humans use the word 'klutz' which pretty much says it all.

SEYMOUR: (entering) Hey, little plant... you look kinda peaked. You doin'; okay?

CEDRIC: (mopes)

SEYMOUR: Let me get the mister. I'll add a little more nitrogen this time. (goes and gets the green glass mister, returns at starts to spray.) Is that helping at all.

CEDRIC: (gives a slight shake of his pod. Super subtle.)

SEYMOUR: (reaches out to pet the plant) Aww, poor guy. I don't know what else to try. I mean, you're a flytrap, so maybe I need to get you some bugs for protein? But –

(CEDRIC moves slightly, catching a spike on SEYMOUR's finger)

SEYMOUR: Ow! Oh, sorry. Oh... hey... !

(CEDRIC envelops the tip of SEYMOUR's finger)

Hey! That tickles!

(beat)

(beat)

Hey! That kinda... hurts.

Audrey II – STOP!

Blackout.

SCENE 2: A sidewalk in NYC – the flower market – tables full of flowers. CEDRIC is prominent among them. SEYMOUR walks by.

CEDRIC: Scout's Log: Have arrived on Sol 3 and appear to have blended with local fauna. My vessel is in its dormant stage, and matches the general form factor of others in the area. Have not yet opened communications, but will do so as soon as possible.

SEYMOUR: Hey, what an interesting and unusual plant. Mr. Chang, is this plant for sale?

CHANG: You want? I sell. One dollar, ninety-five cent.

SEYMOUR: I'll take it.

(SEYMOUR pays for the plant and walks off with it tucked under his arm as the curtain falls.)

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