

REVENANT STAND

(c) Copyright 2011

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

HENRY, 12 year old good looking city boy, runs behind the underbrush chased by HAILEY, 12 year old pixie country girl, both in 1950s clothing.

Their small shoes, his new, hers worn, stand on boulders before they lift into the branches of a tree where they climb to a high perch.

They giggle and laugh as they spy on their large families at a picnic gathering in the clearing.

AT THE WOODEN PICNIC TABLES

Amid the family chatter a tall man stands and looks about, eyes narrow on a windblown twirl of leaves that passes through the clearing.

Conversations at the tables stop until the leaf devil passes.

FATHER

Hon, where's your son?

MOTHER

Probably run off with that Hailey girl down the road. You better go fetch 'em before they get any notions.

The man puts down his napkin and heads to a big black car.

SPYING TREE

Hailey stifles a giggle. Henry turns a moment to look at her. She grins ear to ear, intent on capturing their families in some candid moment.

He looks at her hair, the curve of her ear, her eyelashes. He is lost in a constellation of her freckles when she turns to him.

Sheer excitement trickles from her aura.

Between first lust and too much electricity they kiss.

The old car backfires.

Too much adrenaline. Henry and Hailey both jump.

A fast grip, he catches his own fall from the rocks below.

Hailey tumbles cartwheels til the stone boulders stop her skull from falling anymore. Ever.

Blood gouts from behind Hailey's head, down the stone, to the roots of the tree he remains paralyzed in far above.

Upon Henry's terrified screams all run to them.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

The trees are older. The underbrush mature.

A modern work truck rolls down the forest lane into the clearing, circles to the remnants of the picnic tables then stops.

SUPER: Today

STEVE, 22 year old scarecrow yet to fill out his clothes, pulls a long rod and a roll of pink surveyor's ribbon.

A pair of leaf devils curl from the forest across the clearing and into the trees.

He looks around at the tall trees, unsettled.

STEVE

You know what they say about this place.

MIKE, 30 year old mountain of a man, steps out, unloads a big gray box and surveyor's yellow tripod, says nothing.

STEVE

They say this stand is--

MIKE

Haunted. Yeah. Everyone knows. Shut up about it.

Mike looks about, then at a hand held GPS unit then up at the tree canopy. Irritated.

STEVE

My grandma says a baby girl was murdered out here.

MIKE

Crappy piece of shit. Goin' old school.

He tosses the GPS into the truck, rifles through the glove box, pulls out a worn map and unfolds it on the truck hood.

STEVE

Her family sacrificed her to the devil.

Mike looks up and around through the trees to get a bearing on distant mountains, then back at the map.

STEVE

And now--

MIKE

And now I want you to shut your old woman pussin' and bitchin'. My great great grandpappy told my grandpapa it was a little girl, not a baby, and that this stand was haunted by evil spirits long before that girl was killed out here.

STEVE

And you believe in--

MIKE

No.

STEVE

But--

MIKE

But nothin'. Look, Steve. I don't know about none of that little girly ghosts and whatever. I do know that highway is coming through here. It's coming through here with or without me getting paid to mark it. I gotta eat, so let's get this tape up so the loggers can cut 'em down, and then let's get the hell out of here before dinner.

STEVE

What about the Walpole's? You don't feel bad for 'em at all?

MIKE

Nope.

STEVE

Maybe I'll be hard hearted as you someday, but--

MIKE

Look. Life is tough. Their family owned this thousand acre stand of oak since before the civil war. They ain't done nothin' with it. Ain't never lumbered it, they don't let no one hunt on it, and that's their business. I respect that, but I don't care.

STEVE

Yeah, but--

MIKE

Look. When they can't pay their property taxes then I care. I got kids in school. Too bad. So sad they lost their land. Now get your skinny ass on over thataways and let me shoot an elevation.

Overcast sky rolls in and the sunlight dies.

STEVE

You ain't 'fraid of the ghosts or evil sprits?

MIKE

No. The only evil spirits out here you need be 'fraid of are the ones I'm gonna be lettin' outta my shorts. Now, GO!

OLD LADY

BAAAAH!!!

The men jump out of their skin. Steve falls down.

RUTH, 60 years of high-handed derision hides behind her Ralph Lauren country attire, steps right up to them from the underbrush.

RUTH

You boys need to get out of here, now!

Mike recovers and gets his angry on.

MIKE

What the devil?! Mrs. Walpole?! What is wrong with you?! There was no need for that!

RUTH

Leave! Now!

MIKE

Look, Ma'am. I'm real sorry for what happened--

RUTH

Are you?! "Too bad! So sad! I got little hillbilly bumpkins in public school sucking off the government teat"!

MIKE

Look, Mrs. Walpole, that's quite enough. We're just here to--

RUTH

Shut up, fat boy! I know what you're here to do! Any cornpone idiot can see what you're doing here! And I'm saying you need to leave!

Mike looks at Steve getting up from the ground who holds his thin surveyor's pole in defense.

MIKE

There's your evil spirit, Steve. Happy?

RUTH

Evil spirit?! You have no idea!

Steve tightens his grip and edges toward the truck.

MIKE

Mrs. Walpole there ain't no evil spirits out here. Just us. Now, you have got to leave and let us boys get our work done. Don't make me call the law out here on you.

Ruth advances, Steve raises the pole, Mike pulls his cell phone. All sanity drains from Ruth's face.

MIKE

You got her, Stevie?

The pole comes up in full spear mode.

STEVE

Yeah. I got--

Ruth grabs the end of the pole and yanks Steve with his tight grip along with her into the underbrush.

As Steve yells general alarm farther into the forest Mike dashes to the truck.

RUTH (O.S.)

You can't be here, now! You have to go!

BEHIND THE UNDERBRUSH

Without the good sense to let go, Steve falls to the ground, which halts Ruth. She spins on him, the devil in her eyes.

RUTH

They'll get you! They protect
Revenant Stand!

CLICK!

Mike puts a revolver muzzle to the side of her head, cell phone to his ear.

MIKE

Please, Mrs. Walpole. I need you to stop this, right now.

Ruth freezes. A leaf devil twirls through the trees. All watch its magical passing. She backs off some steps.

A hoot-hoo-hoot sounds deep in the forest. All turn.

RUTH

Leave NOW! Before it's too late!

MIKE

Sherrif's gonna be here soon. You best be goin'.

Steve gets himself up off the ground, again. He keeps Ruth at the end of the pole.

Mike glances at his phone. Irritated.

RUTH

Even if you could call Sherriff has the good sense not to come out here. Not here. Not ever here.

STEVE
What's... what's Reverent Stand?

MIKE
Revenant. Revenant Stand. It's a forest for ghosts.

Ruth looks at Mike. Grins.

RUTH
This cursed forest is a place where our family spirits wait in limbo for their true love to join them before passing into the afterlife.

Steve about half laughs.

STEVE
What... ?

MIKE
Mrs. Walpole, we don't have time for ghost stories. We got work to do. Now, there ain't no spirits or ghosts or fairies or boogeymen out here. It's just two guys doing their job and a scared old lady--

The truck alarm goes off. Mike's demeanor shifts to meaner.

RUTH
You're too late. They've come.

MIKE
Who? Mr. Walpole out here, too?

Ruth backs away from them.

The truck alarm continues blaring through the forest.

MIKE
Stevie, you got her this time?

STEVE
Yeah, Mike. I got her.

Mike takes off through the underbrush back to the truck.

CLEARING

Mike stops in his tracks then continues.

The doors are both open, truck's contents dumped all around the area.

MIKE
How the... ?

Steve screams in mortal pain behind him.

Mike turns on his heels and runs back into the underbrush, pistol at point.

BEHIND THE UNDERBRUSH

Steve's back on the ground, surveyor's rod through his leg. Ruth is nowhere to be seen.

MIKE
What the hell happened?!

STEVE
Something... ! Behind... ! I... !

While Steve babbles Mike hauls him up by the pits and drags him back through the underbrush to the clearing.

MIKE
I got you! I got you! I'll get you
to the doc's. They'll fix you up
just--

In the clearing Mike again stops dead in his tracks but just stands there.

The truck is gone.

And all the contents.

STEVE
Where's the truck, Mike? Where's
the truck?

Mike looks about dumbfounded. Mean and irritated are replaced by concern and alarm.

MIKE
Where's my truck?

Steve starts losing his shit.

MIKE
Where's my goddam truck?

Leaves rustle to the left.

They turn left.

Leaves rustle to the right.

They turn right. A hoot sounds out far away.

Mike lets Steve hang ragdoll lopsided as he points the pistol towards the sounds in the forest.

A distant hoot sounds out to their side. The pistol tracks.

Two hoots sounds out behind them, this time closer. The pistol comes around.

Mike sweats wide-eyed and panicked.

MIKE

Missus Walpole?! Mister Walpole?!
This shit ain't a goddam bit funny!
I got a man hurt! I need to get him
to the hospital! You can keep your
goddam trees, but I need my truck
back to get the hell outta-- !

HENRY

Here?

Mike wheels about and fires a shot at the old man standing behind him. Missed.

HENRY, 70 year old stick of well dressed hickory himself, doesn't even flinch.

HENRY

You'll have to wait a bit.

Henry coughs a deadful sick wet cough. Holds a fine handkerchief to his mouth.

HENRY

Maybe not too long.

Mike keeps a pistol bead square on Henry.

A windswept twirl of leaves comes through the forest and envelops Henry.

He stands there. Peaceful. Calm. Relaxed. It's magic.

MIKE

Where's my truck, Mr. Walpole?

Henry looks about inside the twirl.

HENRY

The others will return it after I
die, which should be shortly.

RUTH (O.S.)

Henry Walpole! You are not going to die out here, you old fool!

The leaf devil disappates. Henry's peace deflates as his eyes close in defeat.

Mike relaxes his posture, lowers the pistol a hair, Steve still hangs as he braces the pole in his leg.

Ruth runs as fast as she can through the underbrush.

RUTH

I can't stand the thought of you haunting this forest until I die, and I'm not ready to die anytime soon! C'mon. Let's leave.

HENRY

Ruth, you have to let me go.

RUTH

No. You have to come home and take your medicine.

HENRY

No. It's time for me to leave.

RUTH

You confused old fool. That's what I just said. We have to leave here.

Mike and Steve are trapped in this senior drama.

HENRY

No, Ruth. I have to leave you. She's waited long enough.

RUTH

What? What are you... ? You're not talking about that... ? We've been married for forty years. I gave you five healthy children. We built a lifetime together! Don't tell me-- !

The windswept leaf devil cuts through the forest, across the clearing and again around Henry.

Mike backs away with Steve near Ruth, pistol goes back up.

HENRY

I'm sorry, Ruthy. I really am. I really tried.

Henry coughs another wicked wet cough. His color turns pale.

RUTH

No. This isn't right. You're wrong.
You're wrong! This can't be true!
No! You love me!

HENRY

I really tried to be a good
husband.

As the color drains from Henry anger wells within Ruth.

RUTH

Me! You! Love! Me!

She snatches the pistol from Mike and aims it at Henry.

RUTH

That rotten little trashy hillbilly
filth?! But you were just children!
No! We had a lifetime, Henry! A
lifetime! You love me! You love me!
Me! Not some dirty little trailer
trash! Me!

Ruth's resolve in anger crumbles to tears and sobs.

RUTH

If you leave me for her who will
set me free of this cursed forest?!

HENRY

I don't--

Her anger rages back on.

RUTH

Who?!

HENRY

I don't--

A ghostly image comes from the leaves.

HAILEY

No one.

Mike and Steve scream.

Ruth shrieks and fires a shot into Hailey's ghost.

The leaves twirl away in a delightful laugh as Henry drops to his knees. A small round patch of shirt cloth punched from his chest flows red outward.

He drops facedown at Ruth's fashionable country boots.

RUTH

No, no, no, no...

Ruth stands there, hollowed out at heart.

RUTH

I don't want to die here. I don't want to die alone. I don't want to die alone.

The old girl puts the pistol to her head.

Then puts it down.

Then puts it to her head again.

Her crying dies down to sobs and the pistol lowers.

Mike reaches out and takes the pistol, then takes her hand.

A half-dozen leaf devils whirl through the forest past them and past the truck in the clearing.

The laughs of lost souls hoot and echo through the stand.

FADE OUT: