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EPISODE 2 - "REN"

EPISODE 2 - SCENE 1

INT./EXT. REN'S CAR - DAY

[Road sounds. Driving. Something bumps, wheel runs off into gravel a moment, then back on the road.]

REN

Shit.

[GPS beeps. A moment of driving. Ren sighs.]

REN

(VO)

This road crosses the border  
between North Carolina and  
Tennessee three times. Maybe you  
can call it a road. It's twisted  
like old twine, the ancient  
asphalt is all cracked. Look. Even  
the GPS doesn't know where the  
hell I am.

[More GPS beeping.]

REN

(VO)

But... god, it feels familiar.  
Yeah, I know, one tree-covered  
mountain is pretty much like  
another up here. It's not so much  
different than Saltville. But this  
is old growth forest. And even  
though I barely remember it, I was  
born here. (pause) Do you think  
that leaves an impression?  
Something in the light, or the  
soil, that sticks with you?  
(pause) Haunts you?

[GPS chimes.]

REN

(VO)

Here's the turn. It's gravel roads  
from here.

[Car turns onto a gravel path, drives on.]

REN

(VO)

So dark under the spreading  
branches. Lots of beech forests up  
here. Sugar maples and ash. Pines  
and black oak. Autumn is about to  
hit and even when the leaves fall  
Kilruane lives in the shadow of  
the mountain. I do remember how it  
always felt dark. (pause) I don't  
think that mountain has a name. I  
think it just ... is.

[REN's phone beeps: getting a text.]

REN

... jesus fucking Christ.

REN

(VO)

Fucking Tyler. I didn't text you  
back the last 18 times you texted  
me, I'm not going to text you back  
while I'm driving up the side of a  
mountain.

[Her phone rings.]

REN

Oh for...

[She takes the call. They talk, hands-free.]

REN

What is your problem?

TYLER

Ren! Where are you?

REN

No, I asked you a question first.  
What is your problem?

TYLER

What do you mean? I was w--

REN

19 times. You texted me 19 times  
in the last two days, Tyler.  
You've called. You've left voice  
mails. I didn't answer. What does  
that tell you?

TYLER

Ren, please. I...

REN

I can't believe I have to say this  
again, but I want to be  
unambiguously clear. We're broken  
up. We're not dating anymore. You  
can't keep stalking me like this.  
I am this close to blocking you  
with all my other exes.

TYLER

(pause)

Why haven't you blocked me, then?

REN

(pause)

Because you were my friend.  
Because we've known each other for  
so long and... I mean, now that's  
all messed up. I don't want it to  
be. But you're out of control, and  
I thought you were different.

TYLER

I'm sorry. I just... I love you.

REN

(pause)

I know. Love screws everything up.  
But please. Stop calling, stop  
texting, or I will have to block  
you.

TYLER

Can you just tell me where you  
are? I'm worried. No one's seen  
you around, Abigail said you just  
took off yesterday.

REN

Ty...

TYLER

I can't stop thinking about you,  
Ren. You took off and ... and I  
don't even know where you are, and  
I ... I feel like that if... If I  
don't get the chance to talk to  
you again I'll...

REN

You'll do what Frankie did?

[Horrified silence.]

TYLER

Ren... that's... that's such an  
awful thing to say.

REN

Is it? Because you're starting to  
act a lot like he did. Jesus,  
every time. I'm not going through  
that again, do you understand? So,  
I'll ask again, are you going to  
do what Frankie did?

TYLER

... no.

REN

Good. Because... I liked you  
better than Frankie.

[Long pause.]

TYLER

Will you please just tell me where  
you're going? I'll feel better if  
you just tell me.

REN

(pause)

I'm going to Kilruane.

TYLER

Why?

REN

(pause)

To look for Janet.

TYLER

Ren...

REN

Don't. Don't treat me like a  
mental patient. Don't pity me.  
Everyone's given up on her, the  
cops, her family, and I just... I  
can't. You and she were my only  
real friends and now... now you're  
both gone.

TYLER

(pause)

I'm not gone, Ren. We can still be  
friends.

REN

That's not how it works.

TYLER

(signal breaking up,  
this is fading out and  
choppy)

Maybe it can be. Just give me a  
chance to make things right.  
Please.

REN

Ty? You're breaking up. It's these mountains. Ty?

TYLER  
(heavy interference,  
almost nothing  
intelligible.)  
Please. I love you. I can show  
you--

[Call drops.]

REN  
Ty? (pause, sighs in frustration)

REN  
(VO)  
Why are relationships so easy to  
fall into, but so hard to crawl  
out of? Every single t--

REN  
Shit!

[Car brakes hard, skidding tires on gravel. REN pants a little.]

REN  
(VO)  
There's a tree down in the road.  
Almost hit it. Lucky I didn't slip  
over the shoulder and fall off the  
goddamn mountain.

REN  
Jesus.

[Pause. Car idling.]

REN  
(VO)  
Check the map app, but...

REN  
C'mon...

REN

(VO)  
No bars. I doubt there's another  
way to Kilruane anyway.

[She sighs heavily. Pause. Car turns off. Car door opens,  
closes. Forest sounds.]

EXT. CAR - DAY

REN  
(VO)  
Let's see if I can move this.

[Footfalls. More forest sounds.]

REN  
(VO)  
It's not too big. A twisted beech  
tree. I don't have to clear it  
from the road, just drag enough of  
it out of the way so that I can  
drive around it.

[Footsteps halt.]

REN  
(VO)  
Huh. There are axe wounds on the  
bottom of the trunk. This tree  
didn't fall over. Someone chopped  
it down. The leaves are wilting.  
It's been down a while.

[More forest sounds. Faint buzzing of flies.]

REN  
(VO)  
That's... odd.

[Faint snapping sound in the distance. More faint buzzing.]

REN  
(calling)  
Hello?

REN

(VO)

Can't see a damn thing in these woods. The undergrowth is thick, the trees are set close together. ... ugh, why does this all feel familiar? And there's a smell... of...

REN

(curious)

Huh.

[Slow footsteps. Over time, flies buzzing gets louder. None of the things REN describes next strike her as scary or gross. If anything, she's curious.]

REN

(VO)

Will you look at that? Sometimes up in the mountains, you'll see symbols carved into the trees and rocks. They call them witch marks. They're meant to hold spirits at bay. Make an area sacred. Banish evil. That sort of thing. Now, look at that big oak growing by the side of the road. Its roots are clawing deep into the shoulder and its massive, crooked branches spread overhead. Biggest tree for a mile. You can't miss it. It's covered in witch marks. Circles. Crude, rough-hewn arrows and wing-shapes. The lines and patterns slash through the bark of the tree from right at the soil level up to as high as an outstretched hand can reach. Kind of a wonder the tree survived such frantic decoration. But it doesn't stop there.

[Footsteps stop. Ren breathes out. Flies buzz.]

REN



(VO)

They've smeared blood into the marks. The trunk is dark crimson, almost black. The flies swirl around, lapping at the surface. The largest of the witch marks is unusual. It's a heart, with fishhook-like horns rising from its top. There are woven garlands hanging as well, dried sage, rosemary, and cedar. They sway, only a little, in the faint breeze, and do nothing to cover up the scent of decay.

[Flies intensify. Strange music creeps in, as if something in REN's memory.]

REN

(VO)

Which is coming from a woven lattice box that rests at the foot of the tree, beneath the carvings. Finger-thick sticks of beech, left rough, leave plenty of space between them for the contents inside to drain. The scent coming from it is rich with rot. Metallic. Organic. Life and death at the same time.

[Flies get loud for a moment.]

REN

(VO)

Hearts. It's a box full of animal hearts. Different sizes. Guessing deer or elk. Goat. Maybe a cow. It's hard to see, the blood is congealed and the hacked flesh sort of runs together. But I know a heart when I see one. You grow up on a farm it's part of your day. Back in high school, during biology when we did dissections, some kids got grossed out, sick. I

don't get it. When I was twelve, I found the carcass of a sheep that wolves had gotten. Papa Albert says when he found me, I was up to my elbows in it, and had blood all over my dress. Mama Hannah was angry and a little scared. But I wasn't doing anything to it. I was just looking. I was curious. I mean, aren't you?

[More buzzing. More distant noise in the underbrush.]

REN

(VO)

I get a finger between the sticks, feel the slippery muscle under it. Dense and strong. The blood has turned to jelly. The flies swirl around my head. What is this supposed to be? Hill magic? Bait? An offering? They felled a tree nearby, maybe it's all just to scare people off. Well. Not me.

[Footsteps. Flies recede.]

REN

(VO)

Alright, let's move that fallen tree.

[Sounds of dragging the tree. REN grunts, walks back to the car.]

REN

(VO)

The police said they got nowhere when they came up here to investigate Janet's disappearance.

[Car door opens, slams.]

REN

(VO)

Maybe they just didn't try hard  
enough.

[Engine starts. Car drives on. Time passes.]

EPISODE 2 - SCENE 2

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DUSK

[Evening crickets. REN's car approaching up a gravel road.  
It stops and idles a moment, then turns off. Car door  
opens, REN gets out, door closes.]

REN  
(whispered)  
Oh my god.

REN  
(VO)  
Memory returns, rolling out the  
dark woods.

[Eerie, memory-filled music.]

REN  
(VO)  
Jesus. (pause) I had forgotten ...  
nearly everything. But now, in the  
half-light, with the sun behind  
the mountain and evening about to  
swallow up what remains... it's  
like I never left.

[Forest sounds deepen. In the distance, someone chopping  
wood.]

REN  
(VO)  
I think it's the smell. Trees.  
Mountain herbs. Wood smoke.  
Turned, damp earth. The air is...  
raw.

[Footsteps as she walks.]

REN

(VO)

I was only four. But oh, god I remember this place, now. It hasn't changed. Maybe it hasn't ever changed. Bitter, determined men and women came here. They would have to be bitter and determined to stop here, to choose here, to put down roots in the shadow of the mountain. They arrived in Jamestown, made the long trek overland, climbed into the unmarked and uninhabited mountains, bringing with them all they had: clothes, a few tools, and their souls still heavy with home: Ireland. Wales. England. They built a church, and a village around it and they named it Kilruane in the memory of a home they left behind. Around it, a handful of buildings, crooked and ill-placed, like they were sliding down the hill away from the church. Are these the same walls of mountain stone and hewn logs built by those same bitter, desperate people? The chimneys are caked with centuries of soot. The paths between the buildings are worn and muddy. (a memory) Always muddy. It feels like it's always been here. In fact, it's the gravel road and the street light in front of the general store that seem out of time.

[Distant animal calls. A breeze stirs the branches.]

REN

(VO)

I hate this place. And this place hates me. Every time I think of

Kilruane, I get nauseous. Angry. I remember... feeling lonely. So lonely. No one would talk to me. No one would play with me. No one had time for the red-haired foundling girl, except for ... (determined) ... I don't want to think about them right now.

[She starts walking again.]

REN

(VO)

Okay. Let's see. There's the general store. Someone's ancient pickup is parked out front, near the gas pump. Further along are houses, though I can't remember which families live in them. That one is the hostel--I'll need to see about getting a bed there tonight, and look around for any signs of Janet while I'm there. Uh, that's the log barn. Smokehouse. And just past the well is the Doctor's house. And of course, the Church.

[Pause. She keeps walking in silence a moment.]

REN

(VO)

Guess I'll have to think about them, after all.

[Another moment of silent walking.]

REN

(VO)

Part of me wants to just get back in my car and go home. This town doesn't want me here, and the feeling is mutual. And yet...

[More calls out of the woods, gradually getting stranger, taking on a dreamlike quality. Faint buzzing of insect wings. Subtle sounds of digging through earth.]

REN

(VO)

I dream about these woods all the time. Relentless, insistent dreams. Never good ones. I was born here. Left on the mountainside, here. Something primal impressed on my brain that I'm going to carry around forever. If I close my eyes and breathe slow, just let the scent of the wild into me, I can ... feel... connected, somehow.

[It's getting darker and the calls of the woods are changing still. Dreamlike impression fades.]

REN

(VO)

Over the village is the cliff they call Heartsore Drop. The mountain's ridge is above that, through thick forest. There's a trail out of town that leads up there. That's probably the trail Janet took to get here--if she got here. I wonder if I should go up there. Look around. See if I can find something.

[Doors banging. A couple of men murmuring indistinctly.]

REN

(VO)

The sun is low. The sky is fading from ruddy orange to dark blue. People are coming out of the store. A woman is on her porch, lighting a pink candle. Oh my god, the candles. The smell of thyme oil everywhere. I had almost

forgotten. The men out in front of the general store are staring at me. They look familiar, though no names come to me. Maybe what I remember is their expression. Mistrust. Malice. A blank, hard stare devoid of any curiosity or good will. (pause) Yeah. I remember Kilruane. I was little and powerless, then. But not anymore.

[Footsteps as she approaches.]

REN

Evening.

[They do not answer.]

REN

(pause) ... uh-huh. I don't suppose you remember me.

[They still don't answer.]

REN

(VO)

They just stare at me, statues of spite. They are made of lean, twisted muscle, formed by years of subsistence and labor. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. Most mountain people are annoyingly friendly. The world is getting smaller, places that were once remote are now practically across the street. But this is Kilruane. You can't stumble across a place like this. It takes effort to leave the world behind, ascend the mountain and walk in its shadow. And maybe living like that changes you. (pause) Or maybe this place is just full of assholes.

REN

I'm going to assume that's a yes.  
I need a few things. I don't  
suppose you take credit cards...

CHARLES  
We're closing.

REN  
(VO)  
Hm. That voice. A flash of a name.  
Charles Pugh. Important man. Runs  
the store. Hatred in his eyes  
every time he looked at me. I know  
you, Charles Pugh.

REN  
I won't take up much of your  
valuable time, then. Excuse me.

[Footsteps. Door creaks open.]

## EPISODE 2 - SCENE 3

INT. GENERAL STORE - DUSK

[The forest is muted inside the store. There is electricity here, but all the machines are old. Faint hum of lights and an ancient soda machine. Occasional soft squeaks of metal on metal.]

REN  
(VO)  
To me, the store is all  
impressions, not memories. Farm  
tools all over the walls: scythes  
and adzes and pitchforks. There's  
also the smell of tobacco and  
cigarette smoke. A dope  
machine--soda, that is, that  
dispenses glass bottles. Bags of  
nails and screws. Cribs of  
cornmeal. Shriveled strips of  
dried meat in jars. No telling  
what animal those are made of. And



shelves of pink candles the size  
of fists that reek of thyme oil.

[Pause. Door creaks. Footsteps. REN walks, CHARLES slowly  
comes inside.]

REN

(VO)

I should have stopped on the way,  
picked up some groceries. But I  
wasn't really thinking. I just had  
to get away. From Tyler and the  
farm and... (pause) ... the  
loneliness. We spent twelve years  
together in school, we graduated  
and it's like nothing changed,  
except now we didn't have a reason  
to see each other every day, so  
... we didn't. And after  
everything that happened, there  
was only Janet and Tyler. And  
then she left to hike the  
Appalachian Trail. She invited me  
to come with her. "Let's go find  
out who we are, together," she  
said. I told her no. I couldn't. I  
wake up covered in sweat with  
dreams of these woods simmering in  
my brain and she wanted me to go  
there? I know Janet had her demons  
but mine are here. She left me.  
She left me, and now she's gone.

CHARLES

Fixin' to dusky dark. We're  
closing. Be on your way, girl.

REN

(undeterred)

Almost done.

CHARLES

Red-hair, get you gone!

[Door creaks. More footsteps.]

REN

(VO)

A couple more men come in. They're wearing denim and thrift store shirts. Stringy long hair. Jaws of stone. Dead black eyes. (pause) Alright. How to play this?

REN

(calm)

Look, I just want to grab a few things to eat. Is the hostel open?

CHARLES

You should not be here.

REN

Why not?

CHARLES

Hair of red, mark of blood, child of grave, I tell you get you gone!

REN

(VO)

And there it is. Red hair is bad luck. Like I had a choice.

REN

Why are you in a hurry to get rid of me? Did you block the road into town?

CHARLES

You should have heeded the warning.

REN

I'm looking for my friend. Janet. She was a hiker that came through here a little over a month ago.

REN

(VO)

Did you catch that? One of them shoots a glance behind the

counter. Just for a second.  
They're moving around the store to  
come up behind me. So what's back  
there? Gonna try to get a look but  
gotta keep an eye on all of them,  
too.

REN  
You'd remember. The sheriff came  
by. She was...

[Pause. Low musical swell.]

REN  
(murmured)  
... oh.

REN  
(VO)  
There's a mishmash of second-hand  
camping gear behind the counter.  
Most of it is junk, old tarps,  
rope, and third-hand sleeping  
bags. But tucked under a surplus  
army blanket is Janet's backpack.  
I'm sure of it. I remember when  
she showed it to me, olive green  
nylon with little purple threads.  
She was smiling, rattling off all  
of its features, its secret  
pockets and lightweight frame, and  
I was just thinking about how she  
was going to be gone for six  
months. Oh god.

REN  
Where is she? What did you do to  
her?

[They do not answer. REN breathing heavier. Menacing  
footsteps.]

REN  
Where is she?

REN

(VO)

The men are behind me now.  
Surrounding me. Those metal tools  
on the wall, maybe I can get to  
them quick, anything I can use to  
defend myself.

CHARLES

Get you gone. Get in your car and  
go home, girl.

REN

Getting real tired of you calling  
me 'girl'.

[A shriek is heard outside somewhere in the forest.]

REN

(VO)

Did you hear that?

REN

(pause)

What was that?

CHARLES

Out!

[The men grab her. Sounds of struggle, something getting  
knocked over. REN fights without fear.]

REN

(VO)

They're on me. Four to one.  
Bigger. Heavier. But people don't  
understand. I'm not squeamish.

[Metal clanging, scraping. Clatter of tools falling to the  
ground.]

REN

(VO)

I get my hands around a  
screwdriver.

[Stabbing impact. A man howls in pain.]

REN

(VO)

Right into one of their legs.

CHARLES

Watch it! Watch her hand!

[More struggles. Screwdriver clatters to the floor.]

REN

(VO)

Charles Pugh gets my wrist.  
Wrenches the tool away. They drag  
me to the door.

[The door bangs open. Night sounds swirl in, heavy and raw.  
CHARLES grunts.]

EPISODE 2 - SCENE 4

EXT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

[REN is thrown to the ground.]

REN

Oof!

REN

(VO)

They throw me out onto the gravel  
road. Rocks dig into my hip and  
hands. The smell of their chewing  
tobacco and sweat still hangs  
around me. The last traces of  
light are draining out of the  
heavens. The one I stabbed wants  
me dead. He limps toward me.

WOUNDED MAN

Tear you up, feed you back to the  
mountain!

CHARLES

Get inside, Noah Barnes. I'll tend to your leg.

REN

(VO)

I show him who he's dealing with.  
I look him in the eye, hold up my  
hand, streaked with his blood.

REN

This yours?

REN

(VO)

They're scared. Of me. But also...  
something else. Hhn.

CHARLES

The Devil take you, girl.

[The door slams. We hear bolts locking in place.]

REN

(VO)

Locked out. (pause) Every house is  
that way. They've got candles  
burning by their locked doors  
while their shutters are barred  
tight.

[Snap of a streetlight coming on.]

REN

(VO)

And now it's night and the single  
street lamp comes on, sluggish as  
it warms up, as if trying to find  
enough strength to fight the  
darkness.

REN

(shouting at the general  
store)

Fuckers!

[Her voice echoes across the mountainside. Then as if  
answering, the shriek sounds again.]

REN  
(VO)  
What /is/ that?

[Pause. The cry fades. The forest sounds seem cowed.]

REN  
(VO)  
I knew it. I knew they'd be hiding something. Did she die on the trail nearby? Was she abducted? Raped? Murdered? Jesus. Fucking Kilruane.

[She starts walking.]

REN  
(VO)  
Think they'll let me sleep at the hostel? I wouldn't bet on it. I'll sleep in my car if I have to. Still. The hostel is dark. I doubt anyone is even there.

[Noises in the woods.]

REN  
(VO)  
... did you hear that? (pause) I'm jumping at shadows, now, though part of me expects one of the men to be waiting just around the corner with pitchforks.

[REN's footsteps on the Hostel porch. Rattle of the door lock.]

REN  
The hostel is locked up, yeah. I guess I'll sleep in my car. Probably safer anyway. There is one other place in town I might stay in but... I will never go back there again.

[Strange night sounds.]

REN

(VO)

The church. It looks down on the whole town, stone and mortar so old it's only holding together out of spite. (pause, remembering) Inside is... The sanctuary. The store rooms and root cellar. The dingy kitchen. The tiny bathroom, with the water that never got warm. The smell of incense and disinfectant. The nursery. And... her room. But really, the whole church was hers.

[Rustling trees. Insect wings.]

REN

(VO)

There's a light on in the church. I can see it through the glazed windows. Small and flickering. Someone moving inside. (pause) No. (pause) Sixteen years later and she's...

[Twig snaps nearby.]

REN

... hello?

[Tense music slowly fading in. Indistinct sounds. Hums and purrs.]

REN

(VO)

Okay, someone is following me. Somewhere near the general store. Or my car. The street light is bright now. Hurts my eyes, makes it hard to see anything in the shadows.

REN

(to the unseen person)



Red hair is just a recessive genetic trait, asshole. You'd know that if you went to school. Or could spell recessive.

[Insect wings pan. Leaves rustle.]

REN

(VO - assessing)

Okay. Can't run back to my car. They're in the dark, near there. The road is the safest place for the moment, open enough that I can see someone coming before they're on me.

[REN's footsteps on the gravel road.]

I guess I'm heading toward ... toward the church. (pause) Fuck. (pause) I don't have a knife or gun or anything. (pause) Not that I needed one before.

[REN's footsteps on gravel, getting faster. More strange purrs out of the night.]

REN

(to the unseen person, a real threat. No fear.)

I'm warning you motherfuckers. I am not some hill bride you can mess around with. I'll rip your goddamn balls off.

REN

(VO)

The grass is thick in the church yard, within the outstretched arms of the stone fence that surrounds it. The church's black door is lit by several pink candles, and the scent of thyme remains in the dark even after the light has been swallowed up. I know I saw someone

inside. I know I saw the light  
through the windows. (pause) Fuck  
it.

[Hurried footsteps up the steps of the church. REN knocks  
on the door.]

REN

(VO)

The church doors still seem huge.

[Cracking branch. Something lands in the shadow nearby with  
the flutter of insect wings.]

REN

I swear to fucking Christ I will  
rip open your bellies and strangle  
you with your own guts!

[The church door swings open. Ren gasps. We hear a slap.]

SISTER GENEVERIE

(Calm)

You shall not blaspheme here, on  
holy ground. Or have you lost your  
lessons, Catherine?

REN

(VO)

And just like that, I feel four  
years old again. She slaps me  
across the face, there in the  
flickering candlelight, like so  
many slaps before. (pause) At  
least she didn't use a stick, this  
time. (pause) For a moment, I've  
forgotten about the men stalking  
me. All I can do is stare into her  
face. She looks the same. Just  
older. Harder. Worn down. Her  
wrinkles are like scars, and her  
cloudy gray eyes are too small and  
angry to ever be beautiful. Sister  
Geneverie. My first mother.

REN  
(restraining herself)  
... I go by Ren, now.

SISTER GENEVERIE  
Oh, not to me. But you should come  
inside. The night is unfit for  
homecomings.

[They go in. The door thuds closed and locks.]

[CREDITS]