

Talking to Trees

by

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FADE IN

EXT. CITY STREET, LATE NOVEMBER/EARLY DECEMBER - DAY, SNOW?

A chilly, overcast afternoon in industrial Brooklyn. PHIL walks complacently along the sidewalk, hands in his jacket pockets. He is dressed warmly and plainly in a pair of plain, brown pants with a button-down shirt underneath a black peacoat.

The streets are empty. Phil seems to be in uncomfortable solidarity, not too different from 'I Am Legend.' He glances at several shops, deciding whether or not to enter. Eventually, he settles on a quaint and 'hip' little coffee shop. Phil reaches for the handle and walks in.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

He is the only customer inside the shop. Phil takes a long look at the typical coffee shop decor before strolling quietly to the counter.

PHIL
Hi, can I have a small decaf pour
over please?

The camera cuts to reveal a TREE STUMP sitting behind the counter on top of a stool. Not a metaphor, just a regular old tree stump sitting behind the counter. It is roughly 3 feet around, and maybe 2 feet tall. It has a little visor on, as if it were the barista. Phil sits in silence for a moment and eventually answers (unprompted)

PHIL (CONT'D)
Umm yeah, just a little bit of
room if that's ok.

Again, we see the STUMP just sitting on top of the stool.

PHIL (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Ah I actually have cash (as if to
answer the question 'credit or
debit?')

Phil passes a \$5 bill across the counter and his eyes begin to wander around the room as he waits for the transaction to happen.

Shot/Movement note. The stumps move like the stone angels in Dr. Who. You never actually see them moving, but they can appear in a different spot in every camera angle changes.

We cut to see Phil's coffee and change sitting plainly on the counter. He puts the coins in the tip jar and takes his coffee.

PHIL
Thank you! I'll see you guys next week.

EXT. OUTSIDE COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The door to the coffee shop opens and Phil continues to walk down the street in the same direction and pace that he was before.

FADE OUT:

TITLE - TALKING TO TREES

FADE IN:

INT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Phil is sitting on the couch typing something out on his computer. The room is very quiet. He glances up for a moment, only to look back to the screen, as if he is being ignored.

PHIL
How was work today?

A large tree stump sits on a chair across from him. It gives no response. It is s tree stump.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Well that's good. I'm glad he didn't end up breaking his leg...Did you want some tea? I can put some extra water in the pot if you'd like.

Again, no response.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Cool.

Phil closes his laptop and exits frame to the kitchen. The camera stays on the stump as we hear the sound of the stove igniting and the water begin to heat up.

Phil re-enters frame, sits back down, and continues to write on his laptop. We sit in silence for a beat or two and Phil give another unprompted response.

PHIL (CONT'D)

I mean, it sounds like it makes sense. I haven't really read up on much of Niche's work. I do hear it's a bit dated though.

We sit for another beat and begin to hear the kettle on the stove start to sing. Phil closes his laptop, get up and exits frame to the kitchen. Again, the camera stays on the stump as we hear water being poured from the kettle into two cups.

Phil re-enters frame, a cup in both hands. He sets one down on the table in front of the stump and goes to sit down. He blows on the tea to cool it off, opens his laptop and begins typing again.

CUT TO BLACK:

We hear a phone ringing, and a generic, automated customer service voice speaking.

AUTOMATED MESSAGE

Welcome! If you know your party's extension, please dial it now. Otherwise, please remain on the line and a customer service representative will answer your call in the order that it was received.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Phil is waiting patiently with his phone up to his ear. We hear, from the other line, that a phone is being taken off the receiver, but no answer is given.

PHIL

Hi, so I called about this a few days ago. I'm pretty confident that I've been overcharged on my gas bill the past few months. Yes, I left a message with the billing department and they still haven't gotten back to me.

We cut to an **INT. OFFICE - DAY**, to see a STUMP sitting on the other line. It is sitting in an office cubicle with an old style telephone receiver sitting on the stump's flat top/head. It says nothing. We hear Phil through the other line

PHIL (OVER PHONE)

It's
R-I-D-G-E-W-A-Y...yep...60...No, I
called yesterday too.

PHIL (IN FRAME)

Seriously?...Can you put someone
on the line who knows how to fix
this? Thank you.

Beat

Hi, I'm not sure what you all have
in your notes from previous calls,
but I'm pretty sure I've been
being overbilled for the last few
months...uh huh...ok

Cutting back to the office, we see a second STUMP has
joined the first one. The new one has the phone on its
head, and the second one is sitting patiently behind it
drinking a coffee, smoking a cigarette, reading Vogue
magazine.

PHIL (OVER PHONE)

Yep...sure...so this is a real
thing? Like you've know exactly
what I'm talking about...

PHIL (IN FRAME)

But still can't help me
again...Ok...Sure...Alright, well
I'll call back tomorrow then...

Phil hangs up the phone and sits back on the porch. He
opens up his laptop and begins typing.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. COMEDY OPEN MIC - NIGHT

***SET NOTE- There needs to be a brick wall behind the stump
to imply it is a comedy show. Even if there is a brick
wall as part of the building, there needs to be another
brick wall in front of that brick wall***

Phil is sitting in a chair in the audience, facing the
stage. There is a STUMP on stage, sitting on a stool with a
microphone. The room is silent.

PHIL

laughing to himself
Ohh man, it's funny every time I
hear him tell it.

We hear a door slam closed from behind. The camera reveals a beautiful woman, ALEX, in a spotlight, admiring the scenery around the bar.

Phil stands up slowly and begins to walk toward Alex.

PHIL (CONT'D)

Hi, I don't think I've met you before. My name is Phil.

ALEX

I'm Alex. It's nice to meet you.
(pointing to the stage)
Is this guy any good?

PHIL

He's doing pretty well tonight, but I've seen him really kill here.

Beat

I hope this doesn't come off too strong, we did just meet, but do you maybe want to go for a walk?

ALEX

That's sweet of you. Isn't it the middle of his set though?

PHIL

I mean, I know his whole routine at this point. Could probably do it better, AND I'll save you the cover charge!

ALEX

Haha if you insist.

PHIL

C'mon, let's make like a tree and leaf.

Phil and Alex turn to walk towards the door.

CUT TO BLACK:

END ACT I

ACT II

INT. PHIL GILLETTE'S KITCHEN - MANY MONTHS LATER, AFTERNOON

PHIL
Ok dear, I'll see you later
tonight. I wish you could be
there.

ALEX
I can't wait. Do something great
tonight.

She kisses him on the cheek and waves him out the door.

EXT. PHIL GILLETTE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A single, long, and wide shot of the house lets us see Phil exit the house, close the door, and walk over to his car.

INT. PHIL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

He gets inside, turns it on, and begins to back out of the driveway.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. CONCERT HALL - EVENING

Phil walks up to the conductor's podium and places a piece of music on his stand.

The camera reveals an entire orchestra of tree stumps. They all have a different instrument resting on top of them.
They

He takes out his baton. And begins to count off the band.

PHIL
1,2,3 *breath*...

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. OUTSIDE PHIL GILLETTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A familiar, single, long, and wide shot of the house lets us see Phil pulling his car up the driveway and into the garage. He exits his car and walks toward the front of the house.

Phil stops and looks down, examining the ground. Leaning in, he pushing the earth around with the bottom of his shoe.

He takes a few more steps toward the front door and notices that it has been left slightly ajar. With urgent suspicion, he pushes open the front door and walks inside

INT. FRONT ENTRANCE NEXT TO STAIRS - NIGHT.

Phil closes the front door, takes off his shoes and jacket, and looks up at the stairs in front of him.

PHIL
Honey? ...Alex? Are you
home?...I'm sorry it's late.

Phil notices a trail of dirt that goes from the front door, all the way up the stairs.

Unbuttoning the cuffs on his shirt, he begins following the trail up the stairs.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Honey, did you bring some mud into
the house?

Phil reaches the top of the stairs and turns the corner to face the bedroom. He finds Alex's body lying dead spread across their bed. She has been stabbed in the chest with a comically oversized knife.

PHIL
ALEX!!!!!! NO..no, no, no, NO!!
NO!! NO!!!!

Phil falls to his knees and begins knee-walking his way over to Alex's side. He cries long cries of sadness for her.

DISSOLVE/FOCUS OUT:

END ACT II

ACT III**EXT. THE NORTH WOODS, OR SOMEWHERE REMOTE WITH A LOG CABIN
FEEL - DAY**

Roughly a year has passed. A few establishing shots of the rustic and slightly underkept house set the tone.

Phil has moves out to the country. He is in a red flannel jacket and warm Russia hat thing. He is chopping wood. Yes, that's a very violent thing to be doing.

He rests his axe against a tree for a moment; stretching his arms up and about. He takes a deep breath. He picks up his axe and turns aaround.

There is a stump on top of the stump that Phil was using as a chopping block. Phil and the stump make eye contact.

Their eye contact says something. It says there was something between them in their younger years. It is a look that says things are never as bad as we remember; that the hardest part about coming back home is taking your first few steps.

Phil rests the axe on top of his hands, palm up. He grasps it, inhales sharply, and exhales. He lets the axe fall out of his hand and down to the ground.

Phil walks out out into the distance.

FADE OUT:

INT. MUSIC STUDIO, INSIDE LESSON ROOM - DAY

Phil is finishing up a lesson. He is sitting in a chair with a saxophone on his lap. There is a stump next to him. The stump has a saxophone on top of it.

The stump should be wearing something that lets us know it is a boy

PHIL

Ok, cool. Can you play from
measure 17 one more time for me?

Beat

Great, it sounds much better than
last week.

Glancing at the clock, 4:27, the lesson should be coming to a close.

PHIL (CONT'D)

I think that's our time for today!
Thank you for a great lesson.

The stump is all packed up and ready to go. Phil opens the door and picks up his schedule sheet for the day. He stands up and stretches his legs and back out.

Reaching to open for the door the rest of the way, we see the next student waiting very patiently outside the room.

The stump should be wearing something that lets us know it is a girl.

PHIL

(*playfully, to
entertain young kids*)

Alriiiiight! How's it going? How
was your week?

(no response)

Too cool! I didn't know they were
making those again.

(no response)

Oh my gosh of course! They were
probably waaaaay cooler back when
I was a kid than they are now.

Int. Music studio, outside lesson room - continuous

After 5-10 seconds on this shot, it will begin to fade out.

PHIL (CONT'D)

Ok, ok, ok, I hear ya loud and
clear. I'll check 'em out and
seeeee first hand what the kids
are into.

So how did the practicing go this
week?

(no response, getting
softer)

Ohhhh, you don't say. Yeah, I
know it's real hard the time some
times. Did you have anything you
wanted to work on today?

(no response, softer
still)

That looks great! Lets take a look
at this thing. You didn't have
this last time did you?

Both the image and the audio have completely faded to
black.

THE END