

Topanga Canyon Devil

Rob Dunphy

FADE IN:

EXT. CENTRAL COAST, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Jagged rocks line canyon walls. Switchbacks, fingers, ravines. Shadows from the late day sun.

A Prius zips along the curvy highway.

The car slows at an intersection. A freshly paved road divides the valley. To the north, a distant master planned community under construction. To the south...

INSERT - ROAD SIGN - TOPANGA CANYON STATE PARK

Google Maps beckons "Rerouting, rerouting, rerouting."

BOB (V.O.)

Shut that stupid thing off! Dang road right here.

CAROL (V.O.)

Bob, it isn't on the map.

BOB (V.O.)

It's brand new shortcut, Carol, see? They just done paved it. Torn up half the valley building those mansions. I got sense of direction, coast is that-away. Ain't gonna rest til all the fish dead. That Newsome fucker selling parks to give checks for those derelicts.

CAROL (V.O.)

You get those checks.

BOB (V.O.)

Best drop it. Hear me? It different... I worked when I could find it!

CAROL (V.O.)

There's a bathroom!

BOB (V.O.)

No more stops. Got to get my line in before it too dark.

CAROL (V.O.)

Bob...

BOB (V.O.)

Alright... Rufus needs to go.

CAROL (V.O.)

We stop when your dog needs to go.
Can we look at the new houses?

TIM (V.O.)

Are we there?

BOB (V.O.)

Nope. Your mom need another pee
break. And ain't no more stops.

TIM (V.O.)

Can we play catch? Can we, please?

BOB (V.O.)

Uh... no.

CAROL (V.O.)

Bob...

BOB (V.O.)

Kay. But be quick about it. Got
get my fishing in. Why we doing
this. Season open tomorrow. Be all
kinds of rangers and stuff there
then. Don't know why y'all need
come too.

CAROL (V.O.)

Bob! It's good to get a way.

BOB (V.O.)

You whole life be a break.

CAROL (V.O.)

What? Besides, it gives you a
chance to teach him to fish.

BOB (V.O.)

I don't know any boys who can't
fish. Or why he taken that ball.

The Prius pulls along a rest stop overlooking a vista. A gravel plateau dotted with golden fescue patches and skeletal Juniper. A basin of cracked mud.

BOB, 30's, a reformed redneck, cracks open the door and Rufus bolts and races.

CAROL, 40's, a buxom hot mess, tugs the bathroom door.

CAROL

It's closed.

BOB

Blame your fella Gavin. Bet the
bathroom at his vine yard still
open.

CAROL

Vineyard. Sorry... Bob, the door?

BOB

Don't know why you think so much
about him. Granted, fella got nice
hair.

CAROL

Great hair.

BOB

Ain't no more stops. I'm reformed
so a locked door staying that way.
Squat it out.

CAROL

You squat it out, I grew up with
indoor plumbing.

BOB

Fine, hold it then. Rufus, dump.

CAROL

Don't tell my mom I'm doing this.

BOB

Ain't saying words to that bitch...

CAROL

Bob!

BOB

Sorry. I meant, yes dear.

Carol seeks privacy near some distant dense brush.

A soft breeze. An echo of a distant crow cackle. Silence.

Sandals on sand and twigs.

A peculiar stick. Rugged thick and twisted stem, thin exfoliating strips of scorched gray bark, with stumpy paired and pointed branches.

The pee splatters. Barely noticeable, the stick twitches.

Bob wanders to a discreet space. The coast is clear. He slyly hits a meth pipe, twitches and snorts.

TIM, 12, a snot-nosed waif, pegs Bob in the back with the football.

TIM

Bob, catch!

BOB

Dammit! Little shit!

CAROL (O.S.)

Bob!

TIM

You can't catch, Bob?

BOB

You give heads before you throw the ball. Dammit, hun, don't let him hump...

Rufus gives it all as he humps her leg.

CAROL

No! Stupid dog. Down!

BOB

Rufus, no hump! See. He don't respect, he don't listen.

Carol wipes. The tissue falls. She reaches for it. The stick is gone.

Bob fires the ball well over the Tim's head.

BOB

Boy, you can't catch no better.

Tim wiggles into a thicket.

TIM

I like you, *Bob*. Most dads can catch *and* throw. You can't do neither.

Tim disappears in the thicket.

A moment of silence.

A skirmish within the brush.

BOB

You can't do neither... either. Boy!
Tim. Timbo. Timmy? You okay?

Bob creeps near. The brush goes still.

Tim emerges with the ball covered in prickers.

TIM

Prickers everywhere!

An errant pass. The football rolls near brush.

BOB

Who can't throw? Talk shit.

He reaches for the football. Movement catches his eye. He scans the dense brush -

- and sees nothing.

He reaches for the ball.

TIM

Dad! Help!

He readies to react. Rufus humps Tim.

BOB

You need help, now I'm *dad*. Rufus, no hump. Damn homosexual canine. That's better.

Rufus tugs at Tim's sleeve.

CAROL

Stop him. He's going to rip it.

BOB

He playing.

TIM

Let go!

The shirt rips. She's pissed.

BOB

The command.

TIM

No bite!

Rufus lets go and sits.

BOB

See, he a well-trained canine. He listens to who in charge.

TIM

I thought dogs only have one master?

CAROL

Train that mutt or he's gone.

BOB

We'll see who gone.

CAROL

What?

BOB

Nothing.

TIM

Bob... throw the ball.

BOB

I got...

The ball has moved.

Further into the brush. The stick has moved too. The football is beneath the stick's paired branches.

He's fazed... but makes his way into the brush.

Twigs snap. Thorns snag his clothing and scratch his arm.

He squats and reaches. The ball is just beyond his fingertips. He stretches. Exposes his jugular.

He almost has it.

Two fingers paw the ball to roll closer.

BARK!

He shirks.

On the offense, Rufus zooms and howls.

BOB

No bark!

Rufus continues to howl. Bob doesn't notice the stick is gone as he retrieves the ball.

TIM

C'mon, toss it.

BOB

I've had enough. Back in the car.

CAROL

Don't get blood in my car.

BOB

Yeah, yeah. Let's get out of here.

Rufus, car.

The family climbs in the car.

TIM

Rufus, car!

A blood droplet on a thorn. Movement nearby. Fast. Twittering. Zipping. Encircling. A search for the source of the scent. In front of the thorn. Silence.

SNAP! The branch is torn off.

Bob puts the car into drive. Rufus whines.

BOB

Anyone see Rufus take a dump? No?

Dammit. Rufus, out!

Rufus looks around.

TIM
Rufus, out. Dump.

Rufus dashes and trots a circle as he sniffs for a good spot. The family exits the car.

CAROL
Will he go already?

BOB
C'mon boy. Do it. Dump!

Tim tosses the ball to himself. He drops it and it rolls down a steep slope and beyond view.

CAROL
Be careful. Bob help him.

BOB
The boy fine... I gotta get Rufus to... Never mind, I got him.

Bob stomps off as Rufus circles.

CAROL
Thank you.

BOB
Bob... help him... Toilets leaking, Bob. Fix the dishwasher, Bob. Get a better job, Bob. Shave my ass-hairs, Bob.

Tim sees the ball. Nearby are a few sticks. Some larger than the others. Tim senses something amiss. He creeps close and hears a twittering.

TIM
Hello? Is anyone there?

Tim squats over the ball. He's nervous and looks around. He grabs the ball. Movement catches his eye. He turns...

A stick at his face.

Bob stumbles to the bottom of the slope and sees the ball. The sticks are gone.

BOB

Tim! Balls here... stupid kid. Tim?
Carol, Rufus shit? Carol?

He looks toward the top of the slope, Carol is gone.

He's alone. Suddenly, he's concerned. He scans the thickets. A realization sets in.

BOB

Dum fucking jungle monkeys.
Listen, I got no money. Take the
fucking car. I hated it anyways.
Give me back my damn dog. You
won't want him. Less you gonna eat
him. Just let me walk out of here.

Hands raised, Bob backtracks. He spots a shortcut to safety and cuts through a patch of tall grass toward the highway.

BOB

Not going to say nothing to no
one. I hold no grudge. Keys in the
ignition.

A twittering among the grass.

Bob is confused. Too small for a person to hide.

BOB

Ouch! What the fuck?

A thin stick clings to his leg. Blood siphoned in a straw-like branch.

Bob kicks. A stick latches to his thigh. He fights it off and stumbles. He rises. A stick latched upon his shoulder. He pirouettes and falls. Frenzied sticks cover his torso.

He screams.

Rufus whimpers near the tall grass.

Silence. Some grass moves. Rufus edges near.

Bob lunges. He protrudes from the tall grass. Colorless skin. Sunken eyes. Punctures ooze blood.

A small stick releases its grip on Bob's forearm. Exposed to direct sunlight, separated from vegetation and detached from the others, it writhes and spins upside-down.

Working in unison sticks tether and extend from the grass.
They reach, make contact and rescue the small stick.

BOB

Get... help, boy.

Rufus sits.

What little life remains, continues to be sucked from Bob.

A moment of silence.

Bob's eyes go wide. An agonizing primal screams as he's
yanked into the grass.

The twittering crests.

Dissolve to the sound of industrial machinery.

INSERT - SIGN - NATURE PRESERVE - Overlaid with the
governor's photo "Only together can we ensure a world for
our children."