



***THE  
POSSESSION(S)***

## The Possession(s) - Treatment

A weathered cargo van - Morty's Drywall Repair - speeds up Highway 91. A sign emerges. Amherst...90 miles. Inside the van, RYAN REYNOLDS, late-twenties, relates a tale about a haggard UMASS professor and his brief encounter with the bizarre. Enter an antique phonograph. One artifact in a collection that seemingly possesses their owners.

The tale falls on deaf ears. Ryan's travel companion apparently suffers from amnesia. Still, he dedicates himself to helping her remember. Ryan motions to the cargo area, where a wooden chest sits within a circle of salt.

He then relates their story, in an attempt to rekindle her memory. There's a reference to the wooden chest, and the home movies he found within. There's also a reference to the seance at his Aunt's house. It was 1978. He anxiously recounts what he saw within that lone reel...

Inside the dining room. Ryan's Aunt, SUSANNAH (SUZIE) SAWYER, mid-twenties, radiant, clad in clothes reminiscent of the "disco" era, approaches the dining room table, crystal ball in hand. She is joined by a small group of WOMEN at the table. They are holding hands. Three lit candles in polished brass candle holders form a triangle in front of them. One of the women calls out. Nothing. Then...the candles flicker violently. The table shakes. There's a flash. Suddenly, an object flies off of a nearby shelf, nearly hits MADELYN (MADDY) FRANCIS, also mid-twenties. The tripod collapses, creating a sort of Dutch Angle.

The end of the reel...but the beginning of the story. INT. NEW YORK CITY STUDIO. There's a malnourished painting, and an enigmatic cat. Enter Ryan's even hungrier bookmaker, APOLLO SCARVETA, late-forties. A smallish man with a terrible fake tan and badly receding hairline. Someone who would have a hard time striking fear into a squirrel. Yet someone who is aided by two large HENCHMEN.

There's banter about the unpaid debt, then a battering of Ryan's midsection. He crumples like aluminum foil. Apollo modifies the terms of their "gentlemen's" agreement...24 hours...and 100 percent interest. Apollo moves in for the kill, but knows his feeble hands couldn't daze a housefly. That's what brass knuckles are for. Lights out.

Ryan awakes the next morning having lost a little self-respect, but having gained a large shiner under his right eye. There's a call from his father. Ryan's bohemian Aunt Suzie has passed. She was Ryan's artistic mentor. He asks his father if he will be attending the funeral. The best his father can do is to offer Ryan the use of his company's spare van. With that, and a strong breeze, Ryan just might make it to Breakwater Bay, Maine in time for the funeral.

For Ryan, it was a way to pay his last respects, and a way to ensure that he didn't suffer the same fate. 24 hours. That's all he needed....especially considering that Aunt Suzie more than likely had included him in her will. He arrives in Maine, on an island surrounded by the unforgiving Atlantic, which, to Ryan, proves fatalistically ironic. Alas, a struggling New York artist with an addiction to the ponies suddenly finds himself a fish out of water.

But Ryan is in no way unique here. For he is surrounded by others who suffer the same fate. One such resident is ALEXANDER FRANCIS, early-sixties, the defacto attorney within this small island community. He is a professional man with a passion for heavy metal. Joining him and Ryan in his small office is DESTINY COYNE, late-twenties, a woman once known in these parts as "Pigtail Dessie." It has been 16 years since Ryan and Dessie last spent time together. They reminisce about "old times" and Dessie's overzealous father. Dessie was the daughter

of the town preacher, but she is a gifted theologian in her own right. Unlike her father, she seems almost puritanical to the island's heathens.

Dessie and Ryan are there for the reading of the "will." But that seems to be the only reason they are together. They are both fish out of water, but they are also polar opposites. Dessie has been appointed the island's spiritual caretaker, a position assumed out of reluctance when her father retired to Florida. Her main role is for the moral fortitude of the small community. Ryan's role, in contrast, is for the financial fortitude of Ryan Reynolds. Still, if we are to believe that opposites attract, there is a connection between these two characters that is unmistakably poignant.

The next morning...the two benefactors travel to Aunt Suzie's homestead to fix their eyes on their prizes. Destiny seems honored to be in Susannah's will. Ryan seems annoyed that the terms of said agreement prohibit him from selling his inheritance, which would greatly facilitate his return to the city. The inheritance being, of course, Aunt Suzie's homestead. But, this is the least of Ryan's concerns. The house that he can't sell has two occupants - the first being Ryan's drunken cousin Will, or "Swilly" as he calls him. The second being the reason Ryan can't sell.

It's the moment of truth. With Will running an errand, Dessie and Ryan decide to check out his new digs. Ryan comments on how the house has changed little since his last visit to the island. And yet, he seems to view it from a different perspective. He comments about how it didn't seem as foreboding before. Perhaps, it's because it is now an unwanted "possession" that he can't unload.

The house is empty...but the duo are not alone. There's a swaying curtain in a window, footsteps on the second floor, and a collection of dusty furnishings in the attic. This fact, by itself, would seem standard for a house of this size and age. But there is one notable exception...the furnishings are restrained within a rather large circle of salt. Even more frightening is the showcase of said furnishings - Aunt Susie's original paintings. Her landscapes are a testament to her artistic skills...oil-based masterpieces that drill into the core of the soul. These are works that capture the serenity of the small island community, save for one painting that has captured its tragic past. That portrait is a haunting rendering of one Ursula York, the beautiful young woman who was executed by a group of witch hunters, some three hundred years hence. All of Aunt Suzie's work seems alive. But, only Ursula can prove that her portraits truly are.

Alas, all of the paintings have been bequeathed to Dessie, to do with as she sees fit. This fact is soon made apparent, as Ryan and "Swilly" make a secret deal to try and sell the remaining furnishings, even though the will prohibits such transactions. Next up...the Sawyer Estate sale.

The following afternoon. Will and Ryan assess the inventory, plan on what their profits might be. Will carts the painting and easel out of the attic. Ryan takes the wooden chest, while Dessie carries the phonograph. As they descend the staircase, Dessie nearly trips on a step. Ryan catches her. In so doing, the crystal ball flies out of the wooden chest. Not one scratch. He realizes that he has assessed the crystal ball at too low a price.

Cue really cool time transition. The following evening. The quiet before the swarm. Ryan relates to his travel companion a dream that he had that evening...an alchemy of foreshadowing and foreboding...

The living room. But we don't see it in all its three-dimensional glory. We see it as it would appear on Super 8 film. Focus on the wooden chest. It vibrates, shakes, as if coming to life. Ryan appears in the background, at the base of the

staircase. Suddenly, the chest springs open. The crystal ball leaps forward, collides with the wooden floor.

Ryan watches, in shock, as the ball slowly moves towards him. It bumps against his shoe, stops. The faint image of a woman with long, black hair appears briefly as a reflection. He picks up the ball, examines it. There is unintelligible chatter, followed by haunting laughter. Ryan pivots his head around the room, returns his gaze to his hands. The ball is gone! Ryan's attention is quickly averted, as he notices wet footprints materializing on the wooden floor, starting at the front door and moving towards the staircase. He rubs his eyes, looks around. The footprints are gone, as are the boxes. All that remains is a broken ring of salt. The laughter intensifies. Ryan grabs his head. He looks up, sees the easel. It is now only a few feet from him. He lowers his hands. A look of fear spreads across his face. He retreats, bumps into the staircase. On the easel, the portrait of Ursula has changed. It is a mere backdrop. Her image is gone!

Ryan covers his ears, screams. In an instant, the room goes silent. Deadly silent. The only sound is the pounding of Ryan's heart. He lowers his hands, looks up. The easel is gone. The boxes are where they were before. A relief. Ryan steps forward. Suddenly, a pair of woman's hands reach through the staircase, grab his neck. He face goes ashen, as he springs forward on the couch, awake.

This was the darkness before the dawn. And what a beautiful dawn it is. The seagulls ascend and descend across the baby blue sky. Their songs are accompanied by the rhythm of the pounding waves. This is a day of getting rid of the old and welcoming the new. This is the day of the Sawyer Estate sale.

Ryan, Dessie and Will set up their wares on a long table. The wares - phonograph, chest, et al. - are familiar, even if some of the townspeople are not. The most important of which is Maddy Francis, now early-sixties and Alexander's wife...not to mention town medium. She and Ryan exchange pleasantries and chat briefly about Aunt Suzie. The tone becomes somber, almost ethereal, but is soon balanced by the arrival of Holly Pearson, the town realtor...and skeptic.

Maddy, not to be outdone, suffers a supernatural exchange with the wooden chest. It is at this time that Maddy mouths the type of words that one would find in the middle of a marketing trailer, or in the middle of a lobby poster - "She's here. She's still with us." Holly quickly moves in for damage control. Her concern is not for the town prophet, but rather for town profit.

As the Breakwater Bay Garden Club departs, Ryan decides to assess the condition of the items within the wooden chest. He extracts them, one-by-one, with the surgical precision of a seasoned jeweler. There's, of course, the crystal ball, three candle holders, a 1970's instamatic camera, a Super 8 film camera, a silk tablecloth, a designer pen, and the gold "cross" necklace. Ryan carefully places the objects on the table, save for the pen, which has found a new home...in Ryan's front pocket.

A customer approaches, asks about the tablecloth. However, Ryan and Dessie have affixed their gaze on Maddy, as she speaks with some approaching customers. They turn away, almost as fast as they arrived. Ryan and Dessie ponder the odd sight.

That evening. The unsold items are scattered across the living room. Dessie inventories the remaining wares, while Ryan slaps a handful of cash into Will's eager palm. Will anxiously awaits a night of frolic and froth at the local watering hole. Ryan, a little less eager, anxiously awaits a date with Apollo and his two goons. For now, Ryan is stuck in Breakwater Bay. But, Dessie reminds him that he won't be homeless or lonely...because he now has a roommate.

This forces Ryan to ponder the lesser of two evils - physical abuse at the hands of his bookie, or living with his drunken cousin. Decisions.

The conversation shifts to something even darker - the Sawyer Estate. The questions are raised - what did Maddy say to the potential customers to drive them away? What did she mean when she stated that she is still in the house? Who? Aunt Susie? Is the house haunted? Do ghosts even exist?

They return their attention to the unsold items. Dessie reaches into the chest, pulls out the "cross" necklace. In a tender moment, Ryan affixes the necklace around her neck. She admires its luster in the full-length mirror, but soon realizes that she has an audience. Ursula's steely gaze within the portrait shakes Dessie, who decides to sell the portrait. Victory Ursula.

As Dessie deposits the necklace back into the chest, she confirms with Ryan how much money they made at the Estate sale. This number does not sit well with Ryan, who decides to re-inventory the unsold items. They are four items short. In a rage, Ryan races upstairs. Dessie tries to slow him down. She pleads, "Where's the proof?" Ryan knocks on Will's door, who is in a drunken stupor. Ryan responds, "I say there's 80 proof!" Will answers the door. Ryan charges into the bedroom, grabs him by the neck, requests the money. Dessie tries to stop Will, afraid that Ryan will choke him to death. But, this night allows for only one death per customer. Ryan flings Dessie off of him. She slams her head into the wall, slithers to a sitting position. Dazed, disgusted, and disappointed, she storms out of Will's room. Ryan continues to shake down his cousin. But the tension is soon broken, albeit diverted, by a series of loud thuds O.S. The two men race into the second floor hallway, approach the stairs. Death has once again visited the Sawyer Estate, and once again an innocent young woman was its target.

The shadows that engulf Ryan's soul extend throughout the house. Night has fallen. Will huddles in a corner of the living room. The earthly form of Destiny Coyne lays peacefully on the couch, covered in a white sheet. The conversation that ensues in the foyer falls on dead ears. Ryan explains to Alexander and Holly the events that transpired, and that he has notified Dessie's father. They regret the absence of the island doctor, who is vacationing in Palm Springs.

Dessie's dad instructs Ryan to call Port City Hospital, on the mainland, until he can arrive. But the next available pick-up time won't be until the following morning. The conversation shifts to, of all things, Maddy. In a small community like Breakwater Bay, a few hours is more than enough time for rumors to circulate. The fires of controversy have been rekindled. Is the Sawyer Estate haunted? Is it cursed?

Ryan would soon have his own questions. Maybe it was the power of suggestion. Maybe it was the power of possession. But he would soon come face-to-face with a nightmare that far transcends the death of a loved one.

As he retreats into the living room, he notices something odd with Dessie's corpse. He notices that the section of sheet near her mouth is moving. Moisture starts to seep through, around her hairline. Black patches develop from the crown, and continue past the shoulders. Suddenly, a GIGGLE, soft, haunting. With trembling hands, Ryan pulls off the sheet, opens his eyes. It is Dessie, as peaceful as she was when Ryan placed her on the couch.

Still, Ryan is not going to take any chances. He extracts the necklace from the chest, affixes it on her neck. An ounce of prevention is worth avoiding a 110-pound nightmare. He replaces the sheet around her. But, as we should already be aware, logic has already left this house..

The darkness of the previous day surrenders to a righteous summer morning. Upon descending the stairs, Ryan discovers the sheet is now neatly folded, and placed at the end of the couch. Dessie is gone. Ryan calls for Will, and asks him when the EMTs arrived. As is par for the course, Will is clueless. But Ryan is actually relieved. He decides to check out of the proverbial frying pan, and take his chances in the fires of Hell's Kitchen...New York City.

Later that afternoon. Ryan packs up only what he brought with him. The rest he willingly bequeaths to the house's sole survivor - Will. Still, there is one thing that Ryan would like to take with him, and he has a good idea on where to find it. He sneaks into Will's bedroom and finds a wad of cash...much more than the two-hundred and fifty dollars that he gave Will originally. He stuffs the cash into the pocket, a justified theft, and proof that a conman can be conned. But, there is something even more valuable than the solitary Grant and twin Benjamins partying in his pocket. Surrounded by Will's ripped and ripe socks is Aunt Suzie's journal... complete, save for a few pages in the middle. He stuffs the journal into his duffel bag.

Ryan exits the house, heads for the docks. As he circles the proposed ponies in the racing section of a newspaper he bought at the local variety, he is joined by Holly. True to her profession, she moves in for a last-minute sale. It's more like damage control. It's apparent that Holly makes a habit of cleaning up after Maddy's messes. But Ryan assures her that the only thing frightful is the island's Internet service. He voices his desire to never set foot on the island again. But the once-crowned Valedictorian of the Suffolk Country Realty School can sense a wound better than a rabid wolf. Holly moves in for the sale. She assures Ryan that he can fight the clause in Suzie's will. Ryan refuses. Could there be a morsel of compassion for Will?

Ryan wonders aloud what would happen if he did sell. Holly assures him that they would not, nor could not, raze the dwelling. It is a historic landmark. Historic, not haunted. Still, she introduces Ryan to Maddy's blog, in which she chronicles the "dark" history of the Sawyer Estate. It is then that Ryan learns about the importance of Aunt Suzie's journal.

Although his time in Breakwater Bay was soured, none of that could compare to what's waiting for him in the Big Apple. All seems like paradise at first. His experience with the day's races are akin to finding fruit on a forbidden tree. Race one. Race two. Race three. He can't lose. Race four. Another score. He texts Apollo to come collect the money. But as a true gambler, Ryan recognizes that the time is always ripe for "just one more." He wagers all his winnings, on a horse named Dirty Dog. One bad horse can most certainly spoil the whole bunch.

The shadows have shifted...from the gray, peeling walls to Ryan's immediate future. Although "Dirty Dog" didn't come in, he could not prevent the entrance of a slimy snake. But serpents have no arms. They have no reach. The same can be said for Apollo, who opts to hire people to get their hands dirty. In this sense, Apollo has four hands. Ryan was soon to be down to one. A GUNSHOT. Ryan is in agony. The henchman's aim was perfect. A single wound to the back of Ryan's right hand, crucifixion style. At least Ryan won't bleed out. Apollo, in all his compassion, has given Ryan twenty-four hours to make good, or next time the henchman's aim "won't be so good."

Later. A dark dwelling. Somber jazz pours through the stereo speakers, in the same way groans and moans pour through Ryan's lips. His hand is in a soft cast, as he struggles to scrub the blood from his kitchen floor. He picks up the stained pen, examines it. An epiphany. He fires up his laptop, spends a few moments trying to type with his untrained hand. More moans and groans. After a few painful seconds, he accesses Maddy's blog. There, at the top, is the obligatory paragraph about Ursula York..."an eighteenth-century seamstress whose cruel death at the hand of the town's founder provides the genesis for this haunting tale." But words alone cannot do this story justice. Fortunately for those of us who preach "show, don't tell,"

there is “physical” evidence...this being digitized Super 8 film. A celluloid chronicle of the legendary Sawyer seance.

As Ryan returns to Breakwater Bay the following morning, we learn that this seance has garnered a cult following or sorts, with an abnormally high demand for the objects used in said venture with the dead. But, alas, Ryan learns of an even more valuable treasure...a second roll of film that has been untouched by human hands for approximately 16,400 days...roughly a third of its value in dollars. Yet, it is a well-known principle that what is given can easily be taken away. And this is especially true of Dessie.

Upon arriving in Breakwater Bay, Will notifies Ryan that the mainland Police want to know what they did with her body. Was it a misunderstanding? Was it theft? Ryan ponders the possibilities, but then quickly focuses on more pressing issues, like how to unload the remaining items for a profit. Will confirms that all of the unsold items are still present, but there was a nibble on the instamatic camera. It is then that Will notifies Ryan that the original film was still in the camera, and that he sent it off for processing. Ryan gets an idea. He races to the chest, lifts the Super 8 film camera, checks the feed window. It's been there, hiding in plain sight all along...the second roll of film, undeveloped and untouched by light for over 45 years. For unprocessed film stock, darkness is king. For Ryan, it is the dawning of a new day.

Two-hundred miles and two-thousand dollars away, Apollo gropes through the shadows... Ryan's apartment. It is as empty as Apollo's hope to retrieve his money. Ryan is gone. Is this the end of the cat and mouse game? It would be...if Ryan had not left behind a big piece of cheese. This in the form of a key and a note to his landlord...replete with a mailing address for his security deposit. They say that words are mightier than the sword. For Apollo, this was a piercing of the heart - "...he owes me two g's and he's shaking down an old lady?" Game on for Apollo and his goons.

But Will and Ryan are not concerned about the future. At this very moment, they are focused on the past. The 45 year-old photos have been electronically delivered. Some of them are faded and overexposed, as could be expected. Others were frighteningly real. There's Aunt Susie cleansing the room with sage. There's the portrait of Ursula, the phonograph, young Alexander, and of course Maddy, preparing for the historic seance. There was nothing in the photographs to prove paranormal activity, but they did prove that the objects were present at said event. It was time for Ryan to engage in a different form of conjuring, not for the dead but for the bread...a virtual auction.

The time was ripe, as were the threads that Ryan was wearing - Uncle Martin's 45-year old leisure suit. Marriage and mothballs kept Martin's prize possession in decent shape, and it seemed to fit the occasion. Cue the auction. A half dozen bidders fill the computer screen, one of them is the haggard professor from the beginning of the story. First up...the photograph. The bidding starts at one-thousand dollars. This was a relic that “saw” the rise and fall of disco, the U.S. bicentennial, and the comedic exploits of President Gerald Ford. To no surprise, the professor swoops in at the last second, and scoops up the treasure for a cool two-hundred and fifty clams.

Ryan is disappointed, but it's about to get worse. Little does he realize that exorcising past demons sometimes makes room for new ones. Fortunately for Ryan, he is on the mainland when said entities come a-calling. Will is not so fortunate. Now it should be noted that these “forces” do not originate in the netherworld. They are from New Jersey.

Will is no match for Apollo and his henchmen. For Will, this is the “perfect storm.” The landlord's check had arrived. Ryan had taken the check, as well as the auction earnings, to the mainland, leaving Will to fend off the new demons. Unfortunately, in a battle of wits and

willpower, William is a few troops short. His last resort is the wad of cash he had stashed in his dresser drawer. However, he soon realizes that Ryan had drained every penny from the Sawyer Estate, and in so doing, had unknowingly depleted Will's chances at surviving this ordeal unscathed.

Apollo feels compelled to send Ryan a message. Ryan has been blinded by the truth. Sadly, William is blinded by consequence...and Apollo's brass knuckles. The only consolation for Will is that vengeful spirits are like bookies - if you infringe on their turf without paying your dues, there is a steep price to pay. For Apollo and his henchmen, Ursula requires that all debts be paid in full. But she does not accept cash or credit. She seeks the only currency of any value in the ethereal realm...human souls.

They say that evil breeds and evil feeds. It stands to reason, then, that Apollo's demise fuels Ursula's rise. Ryan would learn this the hard way upon his return. He was successful in keeping William from entering the spiritual realm. But he would soon learn that Ursula was equally as successful leaving it. He also learns that it was the portrait that had kept Ursula contained all these years. The deaths of Apollo and his henchmen provided her with a means of escape. Yet, it was the altered portrait that provided evidence of her presence.

Alas, we return to where we started...inside the weathered cargo van. Ryan reveals to his travel companion that the house was never really haunted...only the items that were present at the seance. Ryan and companion are now on their own witch-hunt. If they can retrieve the cursed objects, and recapture Ursula, maybe they can reverse the "curse" that follows them. But, the questions must be asked...are our characters cursed by these possessions? Or, like Ursula, are our characters merely possessions themselves.

Ryan raises his damaged hand. Is it "nerve damage," as the doctors claim? Or did the use of the cursed pen cause him to not feel that which he loves the most...his newfound wealth. Was William's blindness actually caused by Apollo's brass knuckles? Or did the use of the camera contribute to the loss of vision in his good eye...his "viewfinder" eye. But what about the passenger? Why can't she remember who she is? What causes her chronic amnesia? Ryan claims that the cursed object that she had worn forced her to forget that which she loves the most...life.

These objects have already proven that it can both give and take away...the latter with frightening consequences. Ryan's companion was given new life, but in so doing she lost her ability to remember. Yet, Ryan will need her to remember in order for him to succeed in his efforts. He tries, again, to help his companion rekindle her memory. He recalls the moment he found her...dazed, disgusted, and disappointed...on a deserted island road. For Ryan, there are many questions. But for Destiny Coyne of Breakwater Bay, Maine, there appears to be no easy answers.