

STRAYS

written by

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EXT. LOS ANGELES FREEWAY - TWILIGHT

The downtown Los Angeles skyline looms in the distance. Bumper to bumper traffic. Red taillights as far as the eye can see. A clogged artery to the heart of the city.

BEEP. HONK. BEEP BEEP BEEP.

CRANE DOWN: We sink from the skyscrapers down to the freeway. And then we go beneath the freeway. To the dark crevices between the concrete and the earth.

EXT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

LANDRY (60s? 70s? 80s?) reclines in a ragged lawn chair. He plucks feathers off a dead crow. He thoroughly inspects each feather. He rejects them all until...

... Bingo. He holds up the perfect crow feather.

INT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - MOMENTS LATER

DELPHINE (80s? 90s? 100s?) crouches over a makeshift cookstove. A viscous, tar black liquid bubbles in a flame-scorched pot. She stirs it.

The tent is larger than it appeared on the outside. Several different tents have been stitched together to create one sprawling domicile - a Frankenstein tent.

Animal bones hang like macabre wind chimes throughout the tent. Piles of tattered clothes, husks of furniture, and decades of assorted garbage threaten to overtake every inch of inhabitable space.

Landry ENTERS. He holds the crow's feather.

DELPHINE
You find one?

LANDRY
It ain't perfect. But it oughtta do.

DELPHINE
They's never perfect.
(re: crow's feather)
Less have a look at it then.

Landry hands her the crow's feather. Delphine scrutinizes it. She drags her calloused fingers across its fuzzy edge. She pokes the quill into her cracked palm.

DELPHINE (CONT'D)

It oughtta do.

Delphine hands the crow's feather back to Landry. She pulls the pot from the cookstove. She pours the viscous liquid through a sieve. The liquid TRICKLES into a glass jar. Blood.

Delphine picks up a mortar and pestle. She reaches into her pocket and, after a moment of digging, produces a handful of small animal bones. She drops them into the pestle.

They CRUNCH as she grinds them into a fine powder. She sprinkles the skeletal dust into the same glass jar.

Landry reaches over and drops a clump of matted hair into the jar. Delphine seals the jar with a lid. She picks it up and SHAKES it.

Delphine unseals the jar. She holds up the crow's feather. She dips the quill of the feather into the dark liquid. She rolls up her sleeve, lifts the dripping quill out of the jar, and...

... JABS the point of the quill into her forearm.

Euphoria. The crow's feet around her eyes smooth out. Her cheeks flush with color. A decade of age melts off of her. And then her body goes as limp as a discarded marionette.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - NIGHT

Landry and Delphine lie next to each other beneath a ragged patchwork quilt. The occasional passing of car headlights illuminate the tent like roving prison searchlights.

DELPHINE

(dreamy)

You remember the mountains?

LANDY

(rote)

I remember the mountains.

DELPHINE

It was cold in the mountains. Too cold.

(beat)

You remember the swamp?

LANDRY

I remember the swamp.

DELPHINE

Why can't we go back to the swamp?

LANDRY

They run us out of the swamp.

DELPHINE

We could go back. They wouldn't run us out. They wouldn't even know we was there.

LANDRY

They always know. They'd run us out. They run us out of the mountains. They run us out of the swamp. That's all they know.

DELPHINE

I'm tired, Landry. Bone tired. They run me ragged.

LANDRY

I know, Delphine. They run me ragged, too.

A long beat of silence.

DELPHINE

Landry? You think we could--

LANDRY

No, Delphine. I told ya. We can't.

DELPHINE

I need it. I'm afeared I might die if I don't.

LANDRY

You ain't died yet.

(beat)

It'll get better. It has to.

EXT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - MORNING

Delphine smokes a hand-rolled cigarette in the camping chair. She surveys her kingdom from atop the incline of dirt.

A MOTHER (35) and her daughter, SIERRA (6) hurry along the sidewalk below. Sierra wears a Catholic school uniform. She lags behind. Her mother grabs her arm and tugs her along.

Delphine stares at Sierra, fixated. She takes a long drag on her cigarette.

Nearby, Landry clocks the intensity of Delphine's gaze.

EXT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - LATER

A cat slinks through the forest of garbage outside the tent. Its ribs poke through its ragged fur. It's old and battle-scarred. It cautiously approaches a can of tuna. Relaxing, it eats.

Landry spies on the cat.

LANDRY
(to himself)
You must be real wore out, Mr.
Kitty Cat. You don't get to bein'
that old from bein' this desperate.

Landry raises a pellet gun. He aims at the cat. CLICK.

INT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - LATER

Delphine examines the dead cat.

DELPHINE
Christ Almighty, Landry. This is
what you got? It ain't got but a
pound a meat on it. Wormy, too, by
the feel of it. And fleas. Christ.
Bringin' me a wormy scrap o' cat.
Ain't that somethin'.

LANDRY
Cat's a cat. We need it, Del.

DELPHINE
What we need is somethin' with a
little bit of goddamn life in it.
That's what we need.

LANDRY
You know we can't.

DELPHINE
We could and you know it. Can't
live off of cats no more. Least you
could do is find a dog with a
little bite for me.

LANDRY
Gotta be cats. Dog goes missin',
signs go up. People come lookin'.
(MORE)

LANDRY (CONT'D)

Ain't no more stray dogs pokin'
'round like they used to be.

(beat)

Stray cats, though. One o' them ol'
stray tom cats goes missin' and
don't no one notice. Gotta be cats.

DELPHINE

There ain' hardly no power in a
stray. We ain't s'posed to live off
'em. That's not how it's s'posed to
be, Landry. It ain't proper.

(beat)

They used to bring them innocent
ones right to us, Landry. You
'member that? All the way out to
us. Fat and rich with love. Tender.
And they'd thank us. Christ, yes.
They'd thank us. And they was
scared of us. They was scared of
what we might do. But we never did--
we never did nothin' wrong or mean-
spirited like, did we, Landry? They
knew the way of things. Yes, they
did.

(beat, sad)

They've forgot, Landry. They've
forgot how things is s'posed to be.
They don't even know who we is.

A silent beat.

LANDRY

You gonna skin it or not?

DELPHINE

'Course I'm gonna skin it. Gimme
that knife.

INT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - LATER

Delphine SHAKES the glass jar. She dips the crow's feather
into the blood. She hands the feather to Landry. Landry, as
Delphine did before, pierces his scarred forearm.

Delphine takes the crow's feather from him, dips it again,
and forces the quill into her own arm.

EXT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Delphine slouches in the lawn chair, strung out. She smokes a cigarette. She chases her drag with a pull from a plastic pint of whiskey.

Sierra and her mother reappear, headed in the opposite direction. School's out. As before, Sierra lags behind. The mother TALKS on her cell phone, passionately gesticulating.

Delphine fixes her gaze on Sierra. Delphine WHISTLES. It's a melodic whistle, as bright and inviting as a birdsong.

Sierra searches for the origin of the WHISTLE. Then she clocks Delphine. Delphine WHISTLES again. Sierra stops and stares. The two lock eyes.

Delphine raises her hand and waves at Sierra. Sierra cautiously returns the gesture.

The two stare at each other, transfixed. Sound FADES away. Delphine silently mouths the word "hello". Sierra soundlessly mouths the word "hi".

Delphine mouths "what's your name?". Sierra mouths "Sierra".

Delphine takes her hand and gestures "come here, it's OK."

Sierra takes a tentative step toward Delphine when...

... Landry GRABS Delphine's arm. Sound EXPLODES back into the scene. The connection is broken. Delphine shoots daggers at Landry.

Sierra's mother rushes back to her, grabs her wrist, and tugs her along.

DELPHINE

Maudis-toi! Laisse moi partir!

Landry stares at her. His face is severe. He squeezes harder.

DELPHINE (CONT'D)

You're hurtin' me.

Delphine rips her arm free. She rubs her wrist. She gets to her feet.

DELPHINE (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that.

Delphine storms off toward the tent. Landry SIGHS and follows.

INT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Delphine stuffs clothes into a knapsack. Landry ENTERS.

LANDRY
You goin' somewhere?

Delphine does not answer. She continues packing. Landry steps closer to her. Delphine backs away.

DELPHINE
No. Keep away from me. You don't get to touch me like that.

LANDRY
Del. I'm sorry. I had to.

DELPHINE
You don't *have* to do nothin'. You ain't in charge. You don't own me. Don't no one own me anymore.

LANDRY
Come now, Del. That's not what I think.
(re: Delphine packing)
Would you stop that? Put that sack down and talk to me.

DELPHINE
I'm not livin' like this anymore, Landry. I can't.

LANDRY
Dammit, Delphine! We don't have a choice! You think I want to live like this? We've done what we had to to survive. Things ain't good now. But it'll get better.

DELPHINE
You're a damn fool, Landry. It ain't ever gettin' better. And it sure as shit can't get much worse.
(beat)
And I ain't gonna be here to find out what worse looks like.

Delphine heads toward the exit.

LANDRY
You know I can't stop you, Delphine. But this ain't the first time you done this.
(MORE)

LANDRY (CONT'D)

And I don't know that I'll be here
for you when you come back.

Delphine stops at the threshold.

DELPHINE

You'll be here. But I ain't comin'
back this time.

Delphine EXITS. Landry stands in the tent. Alone.

EXT. CATHOLIC SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Sierra sits on a bench kicking her feet. She looks up and
down the street. *Mom's late.*

WHISTLE. The same beautiful birdsong as before. Sierra's ears
perk up.

DELPHINE (O.S.)

(dreamy, distant, echoey)

Sierra.

Sierra looks around. She can't pinpoint the origin of the
sound.

SIERRA

Hello?

DELPHINE (O.S.)

*Come here, Sierra. It's all right,
child. Come now.*

Sierra clocks the entrance to the nearby pedestrian tunnel
that crosses beneath the busy street. The chain links of its
gate are rusted and sharp as barbed wire. Sierra approaches
it.

DELPHINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*That's right, child. Down here.
I've got something I want to show
you. A gift.*

Sierra peers down into the dark tunnel. Garbage litters the
grimy cement staircase. The lock on the gate is broken. The
gate is open a crack.

Sierra opens the gate.

A pale white hand reaches out of the darkness.

Cars WHIZZ past on the street. The gate hangs open. Sierra is
gone.

EXT. LANDRY & DELPHINE'S TENT - SUNSET

Landry sits in the chair. He watches the street below.

CAW CAW.

Landry clocks a crow on a nearby tree. He stares at it. The crow CAWS again and then takes flight. Landry watches as it flies away.

THE END