

Strays

Draft Two

by

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Adapted from the book STRAYS, a Lost Cat,
a Homeless Man and their Journey Across America
by Britt Collins

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On a roadside two homeless men huddle against the rain. The older man opens a can of beer and dumps it into a half-empty bottle of cheap malt liquor. This is MICHAEL KING (47). Michael looks old and worn, his sharp cheeks sunken and heavily lined after years of hard drinking and sleeping rough. Michael drinks, then passes the bottle to his friend JOSH STINSON (27). Stinson takes a wary sip. Stinson sometimes calls Michael by his nickname, "GROUNDSCORE".

STINSON

That's lethal! Did you siphon it from someone's car?

MICHAEL

That my friend, is a Sidewalk Slam.

Michael drunkenly wipes booze from his beard and takes the bottle back. He is a collection of scars, both literal and metaphorical. As he gets up unsteadily we see he is tall, thin, with long greying hair, striking blue eyes, and we wonder, what did he look like *before*? The rain drips off his face.

MICHAEL

Let's get outta this.

Stinson gets up. He is grubby and unshaven but rockstar good looks hide beneath the disheveled appearance. Stinson's easy wit is a tonic for Michael, who is always just moments away from another wave of depression.

STINSON

Where to?

MICHAEL

Tabor Hill. We can stay there 'til it stops.

CUT TO:

Michael and Stinson duck under the awning of a dingy old-time diner, the Tabor Hill Cafe. The rain hammers down. Stinson collapses onto a chair.

STINSON

That's more like it.

A flash of white under an outdoor table catches Michael's eye. He stoops down.

STINSON

What is it, Groundscore?

Two glowing eyes stare at Michael; a cat is hiding from the rain.

MICHAEL
(disappointed)
It's not money.

The cat's stripy white fur is covered with dirt. She has an open gash on her face.

STINSON
(kneels down next to Michael, sees the cat)
Hello there, kitty-cat. We should grab it so it doesn't run on the road.

Stinson reaches under the table but the cat springs back. A lone car heads down the street, headlights glowing in the rain.

MICHAEL
Careful.

The cat tries to scurry past but Stinson grabs it. He pulls the animal to his chest.

STINSON
Shh, it's okay.

The animal's breathing hard but she doesn't fight.

STINSON
We should bring her back.

MICHAEL
We got her out the rain and off the road. That's enough.

STINSON
Come on, Groundscore. The poor thing's scared.

MICHAEL
(softens, to the cat)
Is that so? You wanna come back with us?

The cat blinks.

Beat.

MICHAEL
I'm a sucker for beautiful eyes.

OPENING CREDITS.

MUSIC CUE: "RAINFALL" BY THE VINES.

2

EXT. STREET. NIGHT

2

Michael takes the cat from Stinson and tucks it inside his jacket. They walk off.

CUT TO:

Michael, Stinson and their new companion reach a small alcove behind a UPS store. This is their sanctuary, a quiet and isolated place, shaded by a sprawling red maple tree. Across the street is a supermarket. Fertile ground for begging.

MICHAEL

Here we are, puss.

Michael sets the cat down, then pulls his backpack and sleeping bag out of the shrubbery. Stinson picks the cat up and checks her.

STINSON

Looks like a girl.
(feels her, shocked)
She's all bones.

MICHAEL

Keep her here. I'll be back soon.

The cat settles on Stinson's lap. Only now do we see how dirty and beaten up she is with a cut on her cheek.

CUT TO:

Michael puts a burger container filled with Meow Mix in front of the cat. The animal eats hungrily.

MICHAEL

That cut's nasty.

He digs into his backpack and takes out a stack of napkins and a mini first-aid kit. Michael picks the cat up and cleans her wound. The cat doesn't flinch as if she knows Michael is helping her.

MICHAEL

(dabs the wound)
There. Done. No more cat fights,
little lady.

Michael hands the cat to Stinson, unrolls his sleeping bag on a pad of cardboard and gets in.

He opens a can of beer and drinks. The cat hurries back to Michael and sits in front of him, her tail twitching in expectation.

MICHAEL
(to the cat)
What do you want now?

STINSON
I think she wants in your bag.

MICHAEL
You must be desperate, kitty-cat.
Go on. Go hunt mice or something.

Michael turns away from Stinson and the cat.

MICHAEL
She'll be gone by sunrise.

3

EXT. UPS PARKING BAY. EARLY MORNING

3

The cat licks Michael's face.

MICHAEL
Huh?

Michael opens his eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Get off me!

Michael pushes the cat away. She trots over to Stinson, slides under his arm and purrs. Michael drags himself to his feet and stashes his gear behind the bush.

STINSON
(catches Michael's scowl)
What's with you?

MICHAEL
That cat licked my mouth.

STINSON
Michael, you eat from bins.

MICHAEL
Just get ready to head into town.

STINSON
Yessir. Gimme a minute.

The cat turns away and disappears up a tree. The two men pull on their backpacks. As they are about to head off, Michael stops and looks up into the tree.

MICHAEL
That's the last we'll see of her.

STINSON
(pointed)
That's what you said last night.

4 INT. CAFE. DAY

4

Michael plugs two mobile phones into a wall socket. This is modern homelessness where the destitute are online and social media savvy. Outside Stinson sits cross-legged next to his begging cup and a piece of cardboard with "Spare A Little Kindness" scrawled on it.

CUT TO:

Michael hands Stinson his phone.

MICHAEL
How we doing?

Michael peers into the begging cup: just a few coins and a half-smoked cigarette butt.

STINSON
Not feeling the love today,
Groundscore.

5 EXT. UPS PARKING BAY. EVENING

5

Michael and Stinson return to the UPS squat. The cat shoots out of the bush.

STINSON
Hey, look who it is.

The cat rubs herself against Michael's legs.

MICHAEL
Dammit, the cat's sticking around.

The cat hops onto a bag. It claws out an open can of sardines, drops it to the ground and licks it.

MICHAEL
(impressed)
Look at that. She's more a raccoon
than a cat.

STINSON
We should keep her, Groundscore.
She's cool, cute, and she doesn't
complain.