

STRAYERS

~~XXXXXXXX~~

by

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MUSIC UP FULL:

FADE IN:

EXT. DISTANT HILL - DAY

The early morning sun cracks over a break in a series of rolling hills. IN SLOW MOTION, a young boy enters our view ^{running} down a dirt road towards us. The boy's hair is long and his bangs are matted wet against his forehead. On the front of his jumpsuit, in stencil style writing are the numbers #012765. His smile is radiant and with every step, he comes to realize that he is FREE. He gasps for air. The jump suit he is wearing is soaked. TITLE CREDITS ROLL OVER THE ACTION. He continues to run to us... he is almost making ground, we can see success in his face and the screen quickly....

CUTS TO BLACK:

MUSIC OUT.

EXT. - JUNKYARD - DAY

With rotting tires, twisted metal and rusting car bodies in the foreground, we have a view of a weathered barbed wire fence. The boy enters the frame, lifts the barbed wire and slides underneath it into the junkyard. ~~ASA~~ ASA, the boy, weaves his way through the junk. He is a fifteen year old child, but his physical features are mature beyond his years. He climbs the largest pile of junk and scans the area in delight. This is his new playground. He sees a rusted toy wagon, jumps off the junk heap and runs to it. He climbs on the wagon, rocks in it and a wheel falls off. ASA rubs his elbow, picks himself up from the ground. ASA climbs and bounces on a pile of tires and crawls through one tire before rolling it down the hill. He scales a rusted car roof and heads back down the junkyard road. ^{No 4}

EXT. - JUNKYARD ROAD - DAY

ASA comes around a bend in the road and stops. His eyes widen. From ASA's POV, we see a small POND through the trees. ASA smiles.

ASA

Watuh!

EXT. - POND - DAY

We see rippling water. The back of ASA's head bobs into, and then out of the FRAME as he splashes the water on his face. ASA looks at his reflection in the pond. ~~He~~ gets close to the water and smiles again. He begins to laugh but no sound comes from his mouth. ~~ASA~~ wipes his face off on his bare arm, stands, and dives into the pond. Even though ASA is not a talented swimmer, he is at ease and happy playing in the water. As he half-swims, half-splashes around the bend in the pond, he sees an old man fishing from a small pier. With a mischevous look in his eye, ASA goes under water and disappears from sight.

EXT. - FISHERMAN'S PIER - DAY

EZRA, the old man, sits on a small stool with a fishing rod dangling in the water. EZRA's beard is scruffy and grey, his clothes are ill-kept. EZRA's head droops forward as he fights sleep. For one moment, the pond is calm and silent. In the next moment, ASA is exploding from the water, waking EZRA and nearly knocking him off the back of the pier.

EZRA
Whaa?! What?! Who?!

As EZRA picks himself up.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
Why you little Judas Priest, boy!
You purty near ~~dumped~~ ^{where it fell in} me in.

ASA grabs the pole from the water.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
Give me that!

ASA stares at EZRA. EZRA gives ASA a long look before taking the pole.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
What you doing scaring my breakfast away from me anyway, you.... Come up out of there, boy!

EZRA pulls ASA out of the water.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Look at you, here now. Soaked through to the skin, aren't you? Haven't you the brains enough to take your britches off? ~~Don't~~ suppose you thought of that now, did you. I swear...

They start to walk off the pier and onto the camp grounds.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Watch it here, you're soaking me now! Well, come on, get up here and dry yourself -- pull those off there, boy.... Never knew a boy with so little sense....

EZRA gets a blanket from his cot by the fire and throws it at ASA, nearly knocking him over.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Here now -- pull this around you -- I'll string these out here.

EZRA lays ASA's clothes on sticks over the fire. ASA shivers in his ~~boxer~~ shorts.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Well, of course you're chilled clean through. That there pond had a shiny coat of ice not three weeks ago....

ASA stares in amazement at the fire.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
(to himself)

Damn kid, scares my bluegill away....

EZRA takes a spoonful of old beans from a tin can in the fire.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

These beans'll have to do. You let him warm through, then he'll have to go. ~~He~~ can't put up with his....

ASA watches EZRA eat from the can. EZRA makes no move to give ASA any beans, so ASA sees another can near the fire next to EZRA's fishing pole. ASA reaches in to eat from it, just like he sees EZRA doing...and pulls out a hand full of dirt and worms. ASA has the worms to his lips when EZRA catches him.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
(spitting out beans)
What the hell ¹²

ASA is startled by EZRA's action and drops the can of worms into the fire.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
Just what kind of idiot are you, boy?!
First you deny this old boy dinner, then you
nearly eat up the fish ~~meal~~ as well!
Here, if you must have something, eat
this.

EZRA hands ASA the can of beans, and ~~he~~

pulls worm can out of fire with a stick.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
You've done in my appetite anyhow....

ASA grabs the beans and runs to the houseboat and eats greedily.

good EZRA
(Cont'd)
(to himself) *this stray*
You are a knot-headed sunvabish --
giving ~~that sprout~~ your ~~only~~ grub after
all the trouble he's given you. Just
what the hell did you have to go and be
so goldarn ~~to~~ him for? He's got
no damn right to your food, your
pond, your fire....

ASA sees a tire swing. He goes to the tree, crawls through the tire and hangs while eating the last of his beans.

EZRA
(Cont'd)
(to himself)
You ain't had nobody 'round here for
twenty years. No need to start now....

ASA drops the empty bean can and begins to swing wildly in the tire. He loves this new toy. EZRA stops talking to himself and catches the boy playing.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Hey boy, get off that thing!

ASA does not respond to the old man and he continues to swing.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Now look what you've gone and done....
Hey! I tell you get off that thing!
That old tree's not gonna....

The tree limb bends and groans. ASA continues to swing.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Boy! Hey boy! Now that branch....!!

ASA continues to swing. EZRA races to him. The tree limb cracks and sends ASA and the tire swing to the ground. EZRA yanks ASA to his feet. ASA is bewildered but unhurt.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

What kind of stupid stunt was that, boy?!
You heard me yelling at you! Do you
think you can just....

ASA smiles and looks over EZRA's shoulder at the pond.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Hey, look at me when I'm talking to you.

EZRA shakes ASA hard. ASA stares wide-eyed and scared at EZRA.

EZRA
(Cont't)

Listen to me.

EZRA almost slaps ASA.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Hey, don't you hear me?

ASA only stares wide-eyed. EZRA snaps his fingers near ASA's ear. ASA has no response. EZRA sighs and releases ASA.

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Deaf as a flat iron.

ASA questioningly searches EZRA's face. ASA smiles broadly, ~~as EZRA squeezes his face~~ *prompting a half-smile from EZRA.*

EZRA
(Cont'd)

Well I'll be jiggered.

CUT TO:

MUSIC UP FULL

EXT. - PIER - DAY

ASA and EZRA are on the pier. ASA's feet dangle in the water. EZRA shows ASA a worm, then he pushes the worm on the hook. ASA re-coils when EZRA sticks the squirming hooked worm in ASA's face. EZRA laughs and casts the hook into the water.

EXT. - HOUSEBOAT - DAY

With ASA wearing the jumpsuit, EZRA cuts the arms and legs off. EZRA takes off a red bandana from around his neck and gives it to ASA. ASA rolls it up and ties it around his head.

EXT. - WOODS - DAY

With lines of ash streaked on his face like war paint, ASA hides behind a tree. EZRA, with the sleeves of ASA's jumpsuit balanced on his shoulders like epaulettes, walks with the air of a general. ASA leaps out from behind the tree and lands on the old man's back.

EXT. - CAMPFIRE - DUSK

EZRA builds a fire. He takes the lantern and puts a little bit of kerosene on the twigs. EZRA lights a match, and ASA's face lights up. ASA reaches out to touch the match, and when he feels the heat, his hands jerks back. EZRA lights the fire, it flames gently and ASA sucks on his burnt finger.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

That night, EZRA whittles from his ~~travers~~ *cot.* ASA sleeps close to the fire. EZRA gets up, throws the whittled wood into the fire, covers up ASA with a blanket, and then beds down ~~out.~~

MUSIC OUT.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY

It is the early morning of the next day. ASA is still asleep by the fire. We hear the **SOUND OF A SAW** against a tree branch. ASA wakes up, picks the sleep out of his eyes. He looks to the ~~fire~~ ^{cot,} and doesn't see EZRA. ASA goes to the fire pit, which is now no longer hot, and takes a tin can off of the grill. ASA digs a couple ~~of~~ ^{of} beans out and eats ~~them~~ ^{them}. ASA remembers the fire, and he cautiously feels for heat. Nothing. ASA decides to build a fire. ASA searches for wood, and sees EZRA on a ladder, cutting down the branch supporting the tree swing. A lighted lantern hangs on the ladder, and ASA playfully steals the lantern from EZRA. EZRA doesn't see the boy take the lantern. At the fire pit, ASA takes twigs and bark and ~~builds~~ ^{builds} a fire just like EZRA ~~showed him.~~ ^{showed him.}

~~EXT. - TREE - DAY~~

OVER EZRA'S SHOULDER, we see ASA. EZRA continues to saw, and he sees that the boy is working on something.

~~EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY~~

Close with ASA now, he takes the lantern and dumps out a large amount of kerosene on the wood. ASA finds the matches on the ground, lights the match and begins to drop the match on the kerosene and wood.

~~EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY~~

~~From EZRA's angle,~~ ^{pulls back unhurt,} with an angle on the old man, we see a GIANT FIREBALL ERUPT three feet into the sky. ASA ~~races to the old man,~~ but the surprise and shock of the accident causes EZRA to lose his balance on the ladder and he FALLS OUT OF THE FRAME.

EZRA

Kid! Look out!

On ASA now, we see him race to the tree. When he sees EZRA now on the ground, motionless, bleeding from the head, he stops. ASA bends down to EZRA, shakes him as if to wake him. ASA walks around the body. ASA takes off his bandana and tries to wipe the blood off of EZRA's face. ASA blinks, stands, and hooks his hand underneath EZRA's arm pits and pulls.

CUT TO:

EXT. - JUNKYARD - DAY

Through piles of junk, we see ASA dragging EZRA on ~~the travois~~ ^{his cot-turned-travois} down the road. ~~They are on a Blue Highway~~ ^{We hear the} sound of the travois grating against the gravel. ~~how it feels.~~

EXT. - TRAIN VIADUCT - DAY

ASA pulls ~~WALTER~~ ^{EZRA} underneath the train tracks trestel. He pulls the old man up a slight hill into a small town. SALLY, JEANNIE, and LIZBETH, a trio of young teens pass ASA and EZRA. The girls giggle as they pass.

EXT. - HARDWARE STORE - DAY

ASA stops at the first shop he comes upon. He peeks in the window and does not see anyone. Suddenly, ~~TILLIE~~ ^{What! Suddenly!!!} the Hardware Woman, grabs ASA's arm and spins him around to face her. TILLIE has a thick Greek accent, and a a push broom is crooked in one arm.

TILLIE

Ah, ha! You religious fanatics in town again, eh? We'll I'm bone dry.

TILLIE releases ASA and begins sweeping dust and dirt on EZRA.

TILLIE

And get your friend off my front stoop. Do I look a park bench?

ASA

Watuh.

TILLIE

Look, I don't need help. We're in a depressed economy, you know.

ASA

Watuh.

TILLIE

Okay, okay. ~~Don't worry~~ ^{Don't worry}. I'll take your name and address. I'll give you a ring if I can use a new stock boy.

TILLIE takes out a pad and a pencil from ~~her~~ ^{her} shirt pocket.

TILLIE

What's the name again?

ASA

Watuh!

TILLIE

Easy, easy, friend. You might try Tippy
Lipton o're the Steak House. He might
need a waiter.

THOMAS, a business man, struts out of the BARBER SHOP. THOMAS is well-dressed and his shoes have a slick shine. THOMAS passes ASA, stops, digs into his pocket and pulls out a one dollar bill. THOMAS takes ASA's hand, shakes it and leaves the dollar bill in ASA's palm. As THOMAS walks on, ASA stares at the bill. ASA blows his nose on it and drops it. ASA grabs the travois and pulls EZRA through plumes of dust from TILLIE'S frenetic sweeping.

EXT. - CHURCH STEPS - DAY

ASA drags EZRA's body past a small white church. Sitting on the steps is VINNIE, sightless keyboard player. VINNIE is playing a jazzed up version of a religious song. VINNIE wears dark glasses and a portable electric piano sits on his lap. VINNIE cocks his head at the sound of ASA's labored breathing and at the scraping sound of ~~EZRA~~'s travois against the cement. A dented tin cup rests by VINNIE's boot. VINNIE is doing justice to a large hunk of chewing gum while he speaks and blows bubbles.

VINNIE

Hey, man! Whose there?

ASA, of course, doesn't hear VINNIE. ASA pulls ~~XAVIER~~ ^{EZRA} to rest under the shade of an oak tree and he starts up the steps.

VINNIE

What's the story here, man? Whose there anyways?

ASA goes to VINNIE and is fascinated by his dark glasses. ASA can see his own reflection in the glass. ASA sticks his face next to VINNIE's and their noses almost touch.

VINNIE

What's the sermon, man? Get outta my face!

VINNIE slaps ASA's face hard. ASA jumps back.

VINNIE

Sorry man, but you invaded my twelve inches of personal space.

ASA feels his cheek where VINNIE slapped him. It is red and hot. ASA extends a hand to VINNIE like THOMAS taught him. Of course, VINNIE can't see ASA's hand. A few seconds pass as ASA stands there holding his hand out while VINNIE cocks his ear in ASA's direction to catch any movement noise.

VINNIE

Hello?

ASA

(quickly)

Watuh.

VINNIE

Eh?

ASA

(soft, but tired)

Watuh.

VINNIE

Mmm. Just what is it with you, pal?

VINNIE shakes his head. so ASA shakes his head too, and withdraws his hand from the air. ASA grabs EZRA and leaves. VINNIE blows another bubble and starts to play his version of Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are."

VINNIE

Don't go changin', to try and puh-lease me. I love you just the way you-hoo are. Thank you. Thank you very much.

EXT. - JANE'S STREET - DAY

ASA is straining to continue to pull ~~XAVIER~~ ^{EZRA}. We can see that the boy is dead tired. His eyes are closed as he attempts to catch a nap on his feet. ~~We~~ ^{ASA} hear the squeak of a tricycle and ASA opens his eyes. He stops. The squeak stops. ASA begins to walk again, and we hear the trike start up. Sensing someone behind him, ASA continues to walk, but sneaks a peek ~~out of the corner of his eye~~ over his shoulder. He finds JANE, the most beautiful child ever created. Her eyes are a speckled deep, smoky blue. Locks of fine yellow hair cup around her face. ASA stops and she stops riding her trike. ~~ASA~~ ^{ASA} starts to pull EZRA again, and JANE starts up the tricycle again. Finally, JANE pulls around ASA and waves over her shoulder for him to follow her. ASA understands, and has to quicken his pace to keep up with her.

EXT. - JANE'S HOUSE - DAY

JANE steers into her driveway. Her house is up on a hill with steep stairs to the front porch. ~~The garage is small and on street level.~~ JANE runs up the stairs into her mother LUCY's arms. A walking sprinkler is doing its job on the front part of the lawn. When ASA sees the water, he rushes to it.

LUCY

Jane Rochelle, ~~Wahhah~~ I told you not to bring home any more strays. You there! Getaway from our lawn. Denny just fertilized it. You hear me? Who do you think you are?

ASA pulls the sprinkler to EZRA and he stops the action so that a stream of pure white water sprays into his hands and onto the driveway.

LUCY

Jane, you run inside and hide in your closet. I'm calling the Police!

LUCY scoots JANE in the house and slams the door. ASA cups some water to ~~EZRA'S~~ lips.

EZRA'S

ASA

Wahh.

EZRA does not move. The sprinkler is lame on its side. ASA splashes the water in EZRA's face. EZRA's eyes are wide open, and to ASA's surprise the eyes do not blink when the water is splashed over them. There is no reaction. ASA realizes that EZRA is dead. ~~ASA pushes EZRA'S~~ ASA backs away, and then runs away.

INT. - JANE'S HOUSE - DAY

In an OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT, we see Jane looking out the picture window and she waves good-bye to ASA as he runs off down the street.

LUCY (O.S.)

Yes. He chased my daughter. Yes. He tried to take my sprinkler. Yes. And he dragged a dead man into my driveway on a cot. Yes. I'll hold.

EXT. - TOWN OUTSKIRTS - TWILIGHT

ASA runs through a field as the sky darkens, the town is seen in the distance behind him.

EXT. - FARMER'S YARD - EVENING

ASA races into a farmer's yard near the main house. He sees a small pool of water near the barn and runs to it. A DOG BARKS as ASA bends to drink from the ground water, then the chickens in the nearby coop SQUAWK. The farmhouse porch light switches ON just before the figure of farmer WEB is seen in the doorway.

WEB

What's all the racket out here?

The NOISE continues, ASA is still at the puddle.

WEB

Who's out there?

(to the dog)

Quiet down, Blackie. Answer me, trespasser!

WEB sees ASA's dark shape move near the ground.

WEB

Coyote! Well, I'm ready for ya this time!

WEB reaches behind the door and grabs his RIFLE.

WEB

We'll just see how many more of my chickens you'll get, varmint!

WEB fires the rifle at ASA. IN SLOW MOTION, ASA is seen bending over the puddle, splashing his face in the water. He turns to US as the GUN is HEARD again and this time, WEB has not missed. ASA's face forms a scream, but NO SOUND IS HEARD as he falls OUT OF THE FRAME.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

EXT. - POND - NIGHT

We see the RED FLASHING LIGHTS OF A SHERIFF'S CAR parked in EZRA's camp. As the view WIDENS, we SEE ASA watching the car through the trees. His arm is soaked with blood and tied with EZRA's bandana. From ASA's VIEW, a dark figure is seen searching the camp with a flashlight. ASA pulls the bandana tight around his arm and runs OUT OF FRAME.

EXT. - JUNKYARD - NIGHT

We see ASA crouched behind an old car as the SHERIFF'S CAR passes slowly out of the area.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Cautiously, ASA limps back into camp exhausted and in pain, glancing at the cold fire pit, the house boat, and the tire swing on the ground. CROAKING FROGS ARE THE ONLY SOUND, as he struggles to pull a blanket from the houseboat and crawls under it on the ground. WE PULL BACK to REVEAL ASA balled up into a small lump on the ground and as the camp is still and quiet.

DISSOLVE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY

BIRDS ARE CHIRPING in the early morning sunlight as we SEE the still water of the POND through the trees. An abrupt "plunk" breaks the quiet, and ripples the surface of the water. We PULL BACK as more "plunks" hit the pond, and we see a BOY, tossing in pebbles from where he sits on the pier. The boy is ASA and we can hear him imitating the sound of the rocks as they hit the water.

ASA
Plunk. Ploop. Splunk.

A high-pitched whistle is heard and ASA turns to look over his shoulder. A smile breaks across his face. From HIS ANGLE, we see EZRA walking down the road into the camp. ASA leaps to his feet and runs toward EZRA. WE SEE him running as fast as he can to EZRA. They embrace, EZRA lifts the boy off the ground as the boy laughs.

EZRA
Whoa, whoa, easy boy!

They turn together to walk down the road away from the camp.

EZRA
Thought I'd find you here. C'mon, I've
got a roaring fire going...we'll have a
bite of breakfast before we go fishing
today.

FAST INTERCUT.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY

It is early morning as the SHERIFF climbs out of his car.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. - JUNKYARD ROAD - DAY

ASA and EZRA walk down the road.

EZRA
We'll catch us a big ol' bass, what do
you say?

FAST INTERCUT.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY

The SHERIFF lifts the blanket off of ASA's dead body.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. - JUNKYARD ROAD - DAY

ASA and EZRA continue to walk down the road.

EZRA
I fixed the old tire swing...
good as new.

FAST INTERCUT.

EXT. - CAMP SITE - DAY

The SHERIFF lifts ASA's limp body into the car.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. - JUNKYARD ROAD - DAY

EZRA and ASA are further away from ~~US~~ now.

EZRA

What a day we'll have... just me and you.

They walk down the road together through the junkyard as the sun rises. END CREDITS ROLL, then....

FINAL FADE ~~DOWN~~ TO BLACK.

THE END