

"STRAY"

FADE IN:

INT. AUTOMOBILE - DAY - INTERSTATE 65

Through the windshield a flat, grey two-lane highway stretches out into the distance of the northern Indiana plains. Few cars occupy the road. In the distance, there are several farmhouses like islands in an ocean of dormant cropland. Clumps of tall, ageless trees hint at the grandeur of the once-massive Indiana forests. The RADIO gives us a hint at the present state of the area.

RADIO EVANGELIST

You've got to hold JESUS in
your heart. You have got to
tell Him that He is your one
and only.

The monologue continues. We see the driver of the car. DORMAN CLARK is listening to the evangelist. Dorman is about 35 years old, dressed in unremarkable clothes, and possesses perfect eyesight. He calmly navigates his 1979 Ford Granada down the highway.

EVANGELIST

(continuing)

Jesus knows who you are. He
knows the birthright you
possess, the birthright He
has given you.

The warm wind blows Dorman's hair. He stares through the windshield, his eyes follow the passing sights.

EVANGELIST

(continuing)

You cannot forget Him, I
dare you to forget Him. For
God so loved the world that
He gave his only begotten
Son that he who believes on
Him shall not perish from
the Earth but shall have
everlasting life, for Thine
is the kingdom and the power
and the glory of Heaven,
Amen.

Dorman's eyes stare away into the distance. They almost seem ecstatic. The wind whips his hair.

An ANNOUNCER's voice follows the Evangelist's sermon.

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER

Hello, friends. We urge you to join the Reverend J. Watley next week when he will continue his series of sermons on the topic of Modern Morality. For a cassette tape copy of today's sermon, please send \$13.99 to "Sermons", c/o Watley Ministries, PO Box 512, Warren, Indiana 48901. Once again, here is Reverend J. Watley.

EVANGELIST

Friends, it gives me great pleasure to come to you over the radio like this every week. You make it possible. I thank you for your generous giving and support. Whenever I can, I like to share my hopes and wishes with you about the future of Watley Ministries. Next week, we will be upgrading our transformer...

The radio crackles as it tries to pull in the distant signal.

EXT. INTERSTATE 65 - POWER LINES

Dorman's car passes beneath an array of power lines held aloft by a huge steel structure. The radio signal disappears under the interruption caused by the electrical current.

INT. CAR - CU - RADIO

Dorman's hand reaches to tune the already lost station. Unable to do so, he turns it off.

+DORMAN

He shivers with the onset of evening chill. He rolls up his driver's side window. In his newfound silence, he begins to whistle.

+ANGLE ON DORMAN

Happily, Dorman's whistling becomes a tune catchy enough that it needs words. He adds them as best he can.

DORMAN

(singing)

Gotta be with Jesus. Gotta
love you, Jesus. Don't
forget to be righteous. Uh...

+ANGLE THROUGH WINDSHIELD

There is an uneasy moment as Dorman tries to think of a word with which to begin the next phrase. Across the expanse of the Indiana plain, the sun shows through the sparse trees. From the distance, an inexplicable RIFLE SHOT rings out.

EXT. BEHIND DORMAN'S CAR - SLOW MOTION

The car violently swerves to the right. Dorman's head whips to the left ("back and to the left, back and to the left").

+DORMAN'S EYES

As they shift toward the passenger's seat. He is confused.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT - CAR - WOMAN'S HAND

Suddenly, the day has become one rainy night. A woman's hand wipes nervously at the water she has dripped onto the car's upholstery.

HITCHHIKER

Thanks...

+NIGHT - HITCHHIKER

A HITCHHIKER, a young, strong woman, sits in the passenger seat. She is nearly thirty years old. Her hair is wet from the rain outside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HITCHHIKER

(continuing)

...for picking me up. You
haven't seen a little girl
along this same road, have
you?

CUT TO:

+DAY - PASSENGER SEAT

There is blood and flesh on the seat.

+DORMAN - SLOW MOTION

His head leans back.

CUT TO:

+NIGHT - DORMAN

Silent and calm, as he had been with the evangelist
on the radio, Dorman watches the road.

+NIGHT - HITCHHIKER'S HAND

She shifts her weight onto her hand as she leans
toward Dorman. We follow her arm up to her face as
she leans against Dorman. Familiarly, she nuzzles
into his neck. She kisses the neck. She moves
toward his cheek, to his temple, breathes in
Dorman's ear, and begins to kiss. Suddenly there is
an EXPLOSION. BLOOD and GREY MATTER propel the
woman away and into the passenger window. Dead.

EXT. NIGHT - BEHIND CAR - SLOW MOTION

The car swerves violently.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY - BEHIND CAR - SLOW MOTION

The car continues its slow motion swerve to the
side of the highway. As the car stops, the motion
has returned to normal. Dorman's head has
disappeared from sight.

+SIDE OF STOPPED CAR - BULLET HOLE

A lone BULLET HOLE graces the driver's side window of Dorman's car. Through the window, we can see the BLOOD and GORE spread against the passenger window. Suddenly, Dorman rises from below the window. He has a huge wound near his temple. He opens the car door and stumbles out.

+ABOVE THE CAR

Dorman stumbles into the roadside ditch and through the field on the other side. He is making his way toward a house in the distance.

+FROM ABOVE HOUSE'S YARD

Dorman, absolutely unable to move another step, falls face forward into the unkempt grasses in front of the house. Unnoticed.

FADE TO:

+THE NEXT MORNING - SAME ANGLE - DORMAN

With Dorman still in the grass, LILLY, a little Nazarene girl, runs from the barn toward the house. As she nears the front steps, she swerves toward the unfamiliar sight of Dorman's body in the front yard. She stops and screams.

LILLY
(top of her
lungs)
MOMMA! MOMMY!

Her MOMMA, a young, strong Nazarene woman appears in the house's doorway. She runs out with a LARGE STICK. She reaches Dorman's body, Lilly slowly moves toward it, too. Firmly, Momma turns Dorman over with the stick. He is alive.

MOMMA
Get inside and get me that
first aid kit.

Lilly complies with vigor. She bursts into the house.

+HOUSE - KITCHEN - LILLY

Lilly searches the cupboard for the much needed supplies. She looks through the window to the front yard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Momma has raised the stick above her head and is about to bring it down upon Dorman's head. She strikes. She raises it. She strikes again.

+FRONT YARD

Lilly arrives with the possibly too late supplies. Momma kneels beside Dorman.

MOMMA
Help me get him inside.

LILLY
Is he dead, Mother?

MOMMA
No, but he should be.

Momma and Lilly drag Dorman's body toward the house.

FADE TO:

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM COUCH - DORMAN

In a darkened room, Dorman's eyes flicker and open. Lilly, who is seated on the floor in front of the couch, has been waiting.

LILLY
Momma. He's awake.

She turns to her mother, who was behind her. Momma kneels beside Dorman.

DORMAN
(weakly)
I...think I had an accident.

MOMMA
Well, you have a big hole in your head.

LILLY
Can we clean it again,
Momma?

MOMMA
It's clean enough.
(to Dorman)
I just don't know why you haven't bled to death. It don't bleed.

Dorman has no answer to this.

CONTINUED:

LILLY

Momma, ask him.

Momma looks a bit embarrassed.

MOMMA

Well, I know it isn't polite, but we needed some answers. In your wallet it says you're a man of God.

Dorman struggles to remember just what a man of God is. He stares. The girl seems eager.

LILLY

We're Nazerene. Church of the Nazerene...

MOMMA

Her Daddy was a member of the Church of the Nazerene.

LILLY

So am I, Momma.

MOMMA

You can think what you like, Lilly, but you haven't been confirmed, yet.

LILLY

But, I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my saviour.

MOMMA

That's diff-

Dorman makes a sound.

DORMAN

Yes. I...

They turn to him.

DORMAN

(continuing)
I'm from the Church.

LILLY

I knew it.

FADE TO:

+LILLY - CU

LILLY

But what I don't understand
is if he is really a man of
God, why does he have that
hole in his head. I mean,
who would have shot him like
that? I suppose that it is
God's will. But, if this man
is a man of God, and it was
God who willed him to be
shot, then why is it God's
will to shoot a man of God?
And why would a man be a man
of a God who would will him
shot? Unless he did
something to God, unless he
is not as innocent as he
seems, unless he really
isn't a true man of God...like
Daddy...a faker.

Lilly turns to her mother. She is not there. Lilly
rises to search for her mother. She enters the room
where Dorman lay. Her mother is resting her head on
Dorman's chest. As Lilly enters, Momma slowly
responds to her presence.

MOMMA

His heartbeat seems normal.

She releases his hand.

FADE TO:

+LIVING ROOM COUCH - DORMAN

He is sitting up, now. Lilly is seated at his feet,
asleep with her head on the couch. Dorman puts his
hand out and pets her head. He rubs his hand down
her neck.

MOMMA (O.S.)

She's a good girl

+DORMAN - CU

He looks up to Momma. He offers a quiet smile.

+LIVING ROOM WINDOW - MOMMA

She looks out the window at Lilly who is now
outside, running.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILLY
(outside)
Jeremy! Jer-e-my! Where are
you, dog?

DORMAN
You're lucky to have her.

MOMMA
(correcting)
I'm was lucky to find her.
God brought her to me-

DORMAN
God took my daughter away.

Pause.

MOMMA
She's not mine. I'm barren.

Lilly enters the kitchen with a bang.

LILLY (O.S.)
Momma, I can't find him.

MOMMA
(pragmatically)
Either he'll come back or he
won't.

Dorman is beginning to seem more lively. Lilly
appears in the doorway to the living room.

LILLY
(top of her
lungs)
MOMMA!

FADE TO:

INT. NIGHT - FROM LIVING ROOM - ANGLE ON LILLY'S DOOR

Lilly's door opens from the darkness.

LILLY
Goodnight, sir.

DORMAN (O.S.)
Goodnight, Lilly.

She shuts the door. Darkness.

FADE TO:

+FROM LIVING ROOM - ANGLE ON MOMMA'S DOOR

From the darkness, Momma slips past the camera, naked. She approaches the sleeping Dorman. She kneels at the couch.

+COUCH - CU - DORMAN'S HEAD

MOMMA

Dorman...

She brushes the hair from his face. She traces the edges of his wound. She inserts her finger into it. There is a loud rap from inside Lilly's room. We follow Momma as she shoots around. She freezes.

MOMMA

Lilly?

Nothing. Through a window, ONLY WE SEE Lilly running toward the barn. Relieved to think that Lilly is sound asleep, Momma returns to her designs upon Dorman. She reaches into Dorman's shirt. She feels his chest.

MOMMA

My husband had chest hair
just like yours.

DORMAN

Did he, sister?

MOMMA

Thick...

She heads down to kiss him. As she does, he begins to speak.

DORMAN

(lispig through
her lips)

Sss...ister...

She pulls back a bit. Still close.

DORMAN

(continuing)

I know how this is going to
sound, and I don't want you
to take this the wrong way,
but right now I have the
most God-awful headache.

She leans back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DORMAN

(continuing)

Believe me, under any other
circumstances...well I don't
know just what I might do-

There is a crash at the kitchen door.

LILLY (O.S.)

(top of her
lungs)

MOMMA!

+KITCHEN - MED. SHOT - LILLY

Lilly stands in the front door with a SHOTGUN.

LILLY

(continuing)

Daddy's home.

+LIVING ROOM - MOMMA

Momma, after drifting toward her daughter's voice,
tenses at the words she has just heard. She backs
away slowly and quietly from the kitchen hallway.
Momma looks down to Dorman as Lilly enters the
living room with the gun.

LILLY

Remember this one, Ma?
Remember when Daddy would
send little squirrels to be
with Jesus? He hid it in the
barn.

DORMAN

Put that down, Lilly.

LILLY

(continuing)

Remember how I would cry
because he shot those little
squirrels?

She shakes her head.

LILLY

(continuing)

Those little squirrels? And
he said that they needed God
and that he could help them
find God. Remember?

She smirks.

CONTINUED:

LILLY
(continuing)
I know you remember.

Dorman struggles against his pain to stand.

DORMAN
Lilly, what do you think
you're-

LILLY
PLEASE, SIR!
(commanding)
Mother, outside, please.

Lilly waves the shotgun in the direction of the kitchen and the front door. Momma shuffles.

LILLY
Come on... As you are.

EXT. FRONT YARD - MOMMA

Naked, Momma ambles in front of the gun, into the weak evening light.

DORMAN (O.S.)
Lilly! Lil-ly!

The grass is wet on her mother's feet and calves. Lilly stops in the doorway.

LILLY
Now, just like a squirrel,
you deserve a chance. We'll
let God decide. Now, run.
Run SQUIRREL! GO!

Momma runs with fear in her eyes and her stride. She ambles toward the road.

LILLY
We'll let God decide.

Lilly levels the gun.

DORMAN (O.S.)
Lilly, no! NO!

+DORMAN

He finally rises from his seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DORMAN

Lilly, don't!

+LILLY

She waits and watches.

LILLY

Run, squirrel.

Behind Lilly in the kitchen, Dorman appears. He is weak.

DORMAN

Lilly. I'm home.

Lilly's eyes open from their squint. She fires.

+FRONT YARD

Momma falls on her face into the grass. Dead. Lilly fires again, this time past her mother and toward the highway.

CUT TO:

+POV BULLET

The bullet zooms toward the cars on the highway. One car in particular moves with a strangely lit interior. The man driving the car is singing.

DRIVER

Gotta be with Jesus. Don't forget to be righteous...

CUT TO:

+KITCHEN

Dorman falls to the kitchen floor. The blood from his head begins to cover the linoleum.

LILLY

Daddy!

FADE OUT.

THE END