

TRICKSTER IN THE TIDE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CORD HOUSE - YARD - DAY

A small, single story clap-board home. Fishing net spills from the bed of a rusted Ford pick-up in the drive.

A draw-shave strips bark from a log.

Faces carved in wood, totem animals. Bear. Eagle. Wolf.

Wood chips scatter from chisel blows.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE

A bed-sheet hung to dry is thrown aside. TAY CORD, 7, raven haired, native American, races through into the

YARD

eager to catch up to a pair of OLDER GIRLS, 12, as they hurry across a dirt road ahead of her, laughing.

EARNEST (O.S.)

Tay!

His tone stops her in her tracks. The girls slip away.

EARNEST CORD, 40s, portly, native American. He's surrounded by wood carvings in various stages of completion.

Earnest watches sullenly as Tay kicks at the dirt, crestfallen. He returns to chiseling the log.

A police cruiser rattles by. At the wheel, TOMMY KNOX, 30s, crew cut. Eyes hidden behind shades.

Earnest flicks a him a wave. Knox nods and continues.

EXT. BLUFF - NEAR CORD HOUSE - DAY

Tay looks out over a vast, restless ocean. She turns a small carving of a coyote in her hand.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

A finger of sand hugs a rugged coastline. Driftwood piled high with each passing tide lines the foot of a hillside.

Earnest and Tay scour the driftwood, pausing every so often to pull at a timber.

EXT. BEACH - NEAR CAVE

Tay wanders alone. Her hand traces the contours of a log. The wood sun-bleached and smoothed by the elements.

A point of rock juts out from the land ahead. A small cave at its base.

Tay peers into the darkness.

EARNEST (O.S.)

Hey!

Startled, she turns to see him vying to haul a length of driftwood along the beach.

Something catches her eye amongst the brush on the hillside. A pair of canine eyes watches her. She stands mesmerized, unafraid.

EARNEST

This don't got wheels.

Tay looks to her father and back -- the eyes gone.

EXT. BEACH

Earnest and Tay drag their find along the shore.

INT. CORD HOUSE - DINING AREA - NIGHT

Dimly lit. A stack of dishes beside the sink. A B/W TV set plays an old Topcat cartoon.

A sickly COUGH from an adjoining room.

Tay sits at a table, one eye on the TV show as she spoons noodles from a bowl.

A heavy KNOCK on the front door.

EARNEST (O.S.)

Get that.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM

Tay peers shyly round the door-frame.

Earnest sits beside ELIZA CORD, 40s, native American. A worn, fragile beauty. She lies propped in bed as he brings a spoonful of noodles up to her mouth.

He turns to see Tay flanked by a grave looking Knox.

EXT. CORD HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Earnest watches grimly as a line of torch beams scour the darkness towards the shore -- a search party.

Behind him, Knox crouches before Tay.

KNOX

Did MacKenzie and Julia tell you
where they were going?

TAY

To look for shells.

Tommy taps his finger on a hand-rail. Forces a smile.

KNOX

Okay.

EARNEST

I'll get a flashlight.

(to Tay)

Go inside.

INT. CORD HOUSE - MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

A number of small hand carvings line a shelf. Eagle. Raven. Wolf. There's a conspicuous space in the line-up.

Tay leans on a windowsill beside the bed. Listens as a coyote HOWLS in the distance. Eliza strokes her hair.

ELIZA

You take my coyote, baby?

Tay, bashful. Eliza smiles, doesn't mind.

TAY

How come animals don't talk?

ELIZA

What would they say if they could?

TAY

(affects a voice)

I don't like dog-food.

Eliza laughs.

ELIZA

(re: howling)

They talk. You gotta learn to hear
them with your eyes.

Tay frowns. FOOTSTEPS from the lounge interrupt. Tay leaps up. Eliza grimaces in pain, careful not to let her see.

INT. LOUNGE AREA

Earnest perches on the edge of the couch. Distant, troubled. Tay haunts the bedroom doorway.

EARNEST

You do the dishes?

She nods.

EARNEST

Get to bed. Let your mother rest.

INT. TAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

COUGHING through the thin wall. Outside the coyote HOWLS.

Tay kneels before her window. She tilts her head as a crow lands on a branch close to the house, absorbed...

A pair of eyes appear at the glass. They stare in, glowing, canine. Tay calmly rests her head on the pane and stares back.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

CLACK, CLACK, CLACK... Tay trails a stick over the driftwood as she wanders the shore.

A flash of movement ahead of her. A coyote appears. They regard each other a moment before the animal slips away.

EXT. BEACH - FURTHER DOWN

OSCAR, native American, his face as gnarled and ancient as the driftwood around it. He lies amongst the tidewrack, eyes closed, mouth open. Looks dead.

Tay glances at the stick...

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Tay struggles to support Oscar -- very much alive.

OSCAR

You always go round hittin'
people with sticks?

TAY

Thought you was dead.

OSCAR

You ain't the first.

TAY

You looked dead. Tide was comin',
it's July, king tide. You should
thank me. Fuck man, your heavy.

OSCAR

I'm waterlogged.

ROAR of an engine behind them. The police cruiser blows past and slams on the brakes.

Knox emerges. He rubs his jaw, face crinkling in confusion as he studies them through the settling dust.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

A pale, agitated Knox keeps an eye on Oscar from the rearview. The old man stares ahead, unfazed.

KNOX

Where'd you find him?

Tay rides shotgun. She cranes her neck, squinting into the sun as a crow paces the cruiser from above.

KNOX

Taymah? I asked you a question.

OSCAR

Right where you left me.

EXT. CORD HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Earnest chisels away -- a face starting to emerge from the log. His eyes narrow as the cruiser draws to a halt.

EXT. STREET

Tay stands chastened. Earnest regards Oscar through the cruiser's window. His face hardens, suspicious.

KNOX

Found him up at the old Berry
place a few days back. Said he
was a caretaker.

Earnest, quizzical -- Knox shrugs.

KNOX

Had a key.

EARNEST

You ask him where he was last night?

KNOX

Shit Earn' it hadn't occurred to me.

He sends Earnest a dark look and hops in the cruiser.

KNOX

Try keepin' your kid home. Hell,
maybe have her square away some
of this crap you don't sell.

Earnest bristles as Knox peels away in a cloud of dust.

EARNEST

Go inside. You an' me gonna talk.

Tay, not listening. She tracks the crow as it swoops from its perch after the cruiser.

INT. CORD HOUSE - LOUNGE AREA - DAY

Tay closes the front door. She pauses, lost in thought.

INT. TAY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She beelines for the window. Lifts the sash.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Tay charges through several neighboring yards towards a stand of trees.

EXT. BERRY TRAILER - DAY

A weather beaten trailer sits in a clearing. All rust stains and cracked windows.

The cruiser parked out front.

The floor CREAKS from inside.

KNOX (O.S.)
...Tough old son of a bitch, I'll
give you that. Hell I swear I never
seen the like. Drownin' was too
fuckin' easy on you--

A commotion. SLAPS. THUDS. Somebody taking a beating.

KNOX (O.S.)
So we'll start over, do it right.

The beating continues. CRACKLE of radio static interrupts.

DISPATCH (O.S.)
(filtered)
I got a call from Earn' his kid
took off -- neighbor says she saw
her runnin' through the yard.

KNOX (O.S.)
Fuck... Copy that... Fuck!

A series of WHUMPS interspersed with SPUTTERING. It climaxes with a sickening wet THUD.

A canine HOWL goes up from the surrounds.

Knox bangs out onto the deck. He grips the handrail, hands bloodied. Seething. He casts a nervous look around as the HOWLING tapers off.

He spots a faint trail of mud on the boards.

AROUND THE CORNER

A pair of muddy feet. Tay, pressed flat to the trailer's wall, not daring to breathe.

The cruiser's engine ROARS into life.

Tay stands on tiptoes, peers in through a window.

TAY'S POV

A wrist hand-cuffed to a bed-frame. Boney fingers outstretched and bloody. Movement in the shadows beyond the bed. Two pale faces, gagged, blindfolded and terrified.

A blast of STATIC.

END POV

Tay whirls to see Knox.

KNOX

That's just plain bad manners.

DISPATCH (O.S.)

(filtered)

Think she might be headed up to
Berry's old place, you up that way?

Knox winces.

KNOX

Why don't we try this again?

Tay glances at his blood smeared hands. She shrinks back. Desperation washes over Knox. He kneels. Sincere.

KNOX

He was a bad man. Real evil. This
is my town. See this badge? I'm
big-bear here. Take care you all.

She wavers, unsure. Knox takes a breath, face hardens.

KNOX

He killed your friends Taymah, an'
he would've come for you.

She breaks for it, he grabs her. She swings around, pushes a hand into his face. Knox shrieks, clutches his eye.

The coyote-statue skitters across the boards. Blood glistens from the pointed ears.

EXT. CLEARING

Tay races away as Knox reels on the porch growling in pain.

EXT. HILLSIDE - TOWARDS BEACH

Tay skitters and slides down an animal trail.

EXT. CLEARING

Knox hurtles after her, his face streaked with blood.

EXT. BEACH - NEAR CAVE - DAY

Waves CRASH. Tay hunkers amongst the driftwood. She draws her feet in tight as the surf washes in close.

She peeks through a tangle of branches -- Knox the other side, back turned. She ducks, glances back to see the cave.

Knox bursts around the log -- Tay, gone. He circles, winded. Vies to stem the flow of blood from his eye.

He spots the cave. Creeps towards it.

A shuffling from inside. Knox draws his baton and disappears into the gloom. A moment of silence...

A feral SNARL, Knox SHRIEKS.

Tay crawls out from under the trunk, soaked, gasping for air. She pulls herself up. Wide-eyed as Knox CRIES out.

EXT. BERRY TRAILER - DAY

Earnest's pick-up parked beside the idling cruiser.

He kneels, holds the bloodied coyote carving in concern.

TAY (O.S.)

Dad!

Tay stumbles across the clearing towards the trailer.

Earnest clutches her tight. Relieved.

EXT. BERRY TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Earnest shoulders through the trailer door into

INT. BERRY TRAILER

MACKENZIE and JULIA lie whimpering on the floor.
Earnest sets to work untying them.

Tay enters, sees the handcuffs. One end locked to the bed-frame, the other dangles free, still locked.

EXT. BEACH - NEAR CAVE - DUSK

The tide washes a bloody drag mark from the sand.

Knox clutches his neck as he claws his way from the cave. Blood courses from his eye and through his fingers. He winces as the salt water licks the wounds.

OSCAR

Long way to where your goin'.

Oscar perches on a knot of driftwood above.

Knox growls and collapses in defeat.

OSCAR

King tide, better keep crawlin'.

KNOX
Won't you fuckin' die?

OSCAR
Asked myself that many times. Guess
that's the difference between us.

Oscar gazes out across the ocean.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Tay and Earnest stand side by side. The sweep of red and blue lights behind them. The CRASH of waves below.

A fleeting glimpse of canine eyes in the undergrowth.

INT. CORD HOME - MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

The animal carvings, the coyote in its place amongst them.

EXT. CORD HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Earnest adds a daub of paint to form the pupils of a crow carving.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

Tay faces the ocean. THUNDER rolls from a grey sky.

She makes a guarded look around her and holds out a hand.

A crow swoops down and lands on it. She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, savoring the coming storm.

EARNEST (O.S.)
Hey!

Tay smiles and releases the bird.

FADE OUT