

STAIRWAYS

Written by

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WHITE PAGES (08.24.14)

BLUE PAGES (09.14.14)

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY CENTER BACK DOOR - DUSK

A woman smokes at the back door of a Skid Row community center.

This is CHARLOTTE, 45, with a worn complexion and wearing a COMMUNITY OUTREACH UNIFORM. Her gaze focuses between the homeless men and women in the alley and a bus ticket in her hand.

She takes a breath and puts the ticket in her pocket. She smooths the days wrinkles from her shirt and walks inside.

2 INT. LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY CENTER SOUP KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Crowds of homeless men and woman fill the hall's tables. The dinner time noise is loud, almost overwhelming.

Charlotte enters and chats with center members as she makes her rounds. They smile at her with admiration but she holds something back.

BIZ, 22, young, hip and from the neighborhood, jokes with men dropping off lunch trays. She wears a similar uniform to Charlotte.

Charlotte keeps an eye on a girl across the room. This is ROSE, 22, homeless and rough but wearing clean clothes. Rose is unfocused on her tray of food.

Rose gets up and walks away. Charlotte follows down the hall.

3 INT. LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY CENTER BUNK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rose walks into a room with rows of beds. Charlotte watches from the doorway, unseen by Rose.

Rose sits on a bed and pulls something out of a duffle bag. It's a small drug baggy of heroin.

She contemplates, then walks to the bunk room bathroom.

A4 INT. BUNK ROOM BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rose sets a needle on the bathroom sink and starts to fill a spoon with water and heroin.

Charlotte watches from the door. She notices and quickly but quietly approaches Rose. She snatches the bag from Rose's hands.

ROSE  
That's mine!

Rose tries to grab the bag back but Charlotte holds it away.

CHARLOTTE  
Really Rose!?

Rose stands and grabs for the bag. She pushes forcefully.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
You're gonna give up just like  
that?

Charlotte and Rose tussle against each other for the bag.

ROSE  
Gim'me my shit!

Biz enters and tries to separate Rose from Charlotte.

BIZ  
Hey now!

Rose inadvertently hits Charlotte in the eye as they scuffle.  
Charlotte falls back.

Rose's toughness drops for a moment as she takes in what  
she's done to Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE  
You know you can't stay here if you  
bring this in. You were doing so  
good too.

Rose summons up her street-tough front again and breaks free  
from Biz.

ROSE  
Fine. I don't need your stupid ass  
community center or your bullshit.

Rose walks out of the center.

Biz helps Charlotte to her feet and brushes her off.

BIZ  
Dang. I thought we were getting  
somewhere with that one.

Charlotte shakes her head in disappointment.

BIZ (CONT'D)  
We'll see her again.

CHARLOTTE  
I know. And she'll be strung out  
again too. I'm tired Biz. I'm done.

BIZ  
You always say that.

CHARLOTTE  
Really this time.

BIZ  
Nawww.

Charlotte pulls a ticket from her pocket.

CHARLOTTE  
I've been in this neighborhood too long and nothing's changed. I'm going up to San Francisco tonight.

Biz takes it in.

BIZ  
And you didn't tell me?

CHARLOTTE  
I didn't tell anybody.

BIZ  
And you'd disappear on us just like that? You don't even know anyone in 'Frisco.

CHARLOTTE  
My daughter's up there.

Charlotte straightens her shirt.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
Let's grab a coffee before my bus leaves.

4 EXT. SKID ROW COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Charlotte and Biz sip bitter coffees as they stand on the sidewalk. Biz takes the last bite of her donut.

Charlotte watches the homeless men and women get ready for a night on the sidewalks.

BIZ  
I can't believe you never told me.  
What's her name?

Charlotte takes a moment before she answers.

CHARLOTTE  
Trina.

The sound of a garbage can falls from across the street.

Charlotte gestures for Biz to look. Rose lays on the ground, halfway blocking the sidewalk.

BIZ  
Is that who I think it is?

Biz heads toward Rose but stops when she notices Charlotte isn't following.

BIZ (CONT'D)  
Last one. It'll be quick.

Charlotte sighs and follows.

5 EXT. SKID ROW SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Charlotte and Biz prop Rose up. She's wearing a sweatshirt that hides a new tight black skirt. She's drunk.

BIZ  
You okay? You want to go back to the center?

ROSE  
(slurring)  
No.

Rose tries to stand but is too intoxicated.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
No. I need -- I'm staying upstairs. Help me upstairs.

CHARLOTTE  
Now you want our help.

Biz gives Charlotte a quick glare.

BIZ  
We can't just leave her out here.

6 INT. SKID ROW APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

Charlotte and Biz carry Rose toward the lobby elevator.

BIZ  
Where we going girl?

ROSE  
Four-o-seven.

Charlotte pushes the elevator button. There's a broken grinding sound.

Biz points to a handwritten sign that's fallen on the ground. It says, "ELEVATOR BROKE".

Charlotte looks at the steps.

CHARLOTTE

Come on.

7 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRS - NIGHT

Charlotte and Biz help Rose up the stairs.

CHARLOTTE

Walk a little, hun.

Rose is too intoxicated to do anything but get dragged along.

Charlotte notices that Biz has been staring at her.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

What?

BIZ

You gonna miss me?

CHARLOTTE

Yes Biz. Yes I will miss you very, very much.

BIZ

I bet you'll be back. You'll miss The Row too much.

CHARLOTTE

What? The dirty sidewalks? Some bad coffee?

BIZ

How 'bout the people.

Charlotte shakes off Biz's comment.

Rose's head falls across Biz's chest. She vomits on Biz.

BIZ (CONT'D)

Oh, nasty!

8 INT. SECOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

They set Rose on the top of the second floor steps.



Biz stands stiffly, not knowing what to do.

BIZ  
Why do I always get it!? You never  
get hit.

CHARLOTTE  
You just gotta develop instinct  
girl. Don't worry you'll get it.

Biz turns to leave downstairs.

BIZ  
Damn. This is too much.

Rose groans. Charlotte sits down next to her.

CHARLOTTE  
You don't look so hot.

Charlotte pulls Rose's small skirt over her legs a little.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
I know it seems like good money  
now, but once your habit gets too  
deep turning tricks won't even  
cover drugs, let alone rent here.

Rose sways and Charlotte grabs her by the shoulder.

ROSE  
I don't need your stupidass advice.

CHARLOTTE  
Fine. Stand up then. I've seen too  
many girls just like you to keep  
wasting my breath.

Charlotte helps Rose to her feet. They walk.

A woman, DIANE, stands in her doorway and talks on the phone.

DIANE  
I know! They were stompin' around  
all night! They didn't listen!

Diane notices Charlotte as they walk upward. Her posture  
changes. She smiles broadly as she hangs up quickly.

DIANE (CONT'D)  
Oh hi sugar! It's good to see you!

Charlotte doesn't recognize her. Diane helps Charlotte walk  
Rose up the steps.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Honey! Honey come show your pretty face out here. It's-- Charlotte, right? Charlotte helped us get our place last Christmas, you remember.

A LITTLE GIRL stands up at the third floor landing.

9 INT. THIRD FLOOR - NIGHT

The three women make it to the third floor landing.

CHARLOTTE

So-- You guys doing good?

DIANE

Not bad. It's been worse.

Charlotte peeks inside the apartment and smiles.

Diane smiles back.

DIANE (CONT'D)

Well, I'll let you do your job then. It's good to see a smiling face around once in a while. You should come by again.

Charlotte nods and continues upward with Rose.

As they reach midway on the flight of stairs, Rose stops.

CHARLOTTE

Come on, keep moving.

Rose leans against the wall. She takes a liquor bottle out of her cowboy boot. Charlotte grabs it.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Hey! I'm not doing this so you can just get drunk.

Suddenly a SCREAM rings out downstairs. Charlotte listens. When it rings out again Charlotte runs toward it.

10 INT. THIRD FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

A door slams shut down the hall. A LITTLE GIRL and a LITTLE BOY stand huddled together in front of it.

The Big Woman looks out into the hallway.

The sound of a MAN and WOMAN arguing in Spanish seeps through the closed apartment door.

Charlotte approaches.

CHARLOTTE  
Are you okay?

The little girl places her head against Charlotte.

The sound of a crashing pot rings from inside the apartment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
They left you out here?

Charlotte picks the girl up and knocks on the door.

The yelling continues.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
Ma'am! Sir! Is everything okay?  
There's a center on San Pedro and  
5th for couples counseling if you  
need it.

Silence for a moment.

The door swings open and a SHORT WOMAN with tussled hair stands in the doorway.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
Ma'am, did he hit you?

The woman grabs the girl from Charlotte's arms and scoots the boy inside.

WOMAN  
Mind your own damn business.

The door slams shut. Charlotte takes a moment. She walks back upstairs toward Rose.

11 INT. MID-WAY BETWEEN THIRD AND FOURTH FLOOR - NIGHT

Charlotte sees Rose sitting on the floor.

CHARLOTTE  
Let's go.

Charlotte tries to pull Rose from her position on the floor.

ROSE  
I'm tired. I'll stay here.

CHARLOTTE  
No, no, no. Let's go. You're close.

Charlotte pulls Rose harder.

ROSE  
Ouch! That hurts!

CHARLOTTE  
Stand up and walk then!

Charlotte grabs Rose and starts to pull her up the stairs.

Rose pulls away her arm.

ROSE  
Calm down.

Rose takes a moment, then stands and starts to walk slowly.

CHARLOTTE  
Good. You got it.

Rose makes it upward step by step.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
Picture how good it will be. Get a shower, pass out in your own bed.

Rose makes progress on her own. Charlotte smiles.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
You can do it. Hey, you ever try cooking for yourself? Spaghetti's easy. I could show you.

Rose doesn't answer. They keep walking.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
And if you feel like it, if you want to get straight again, there's always people at The Center. When your feel like it though.

They walk up in silence for a moment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
I know you can do it, Trina.

As they hit the fourth floor Rose stops, confused.

ROSE  
My name's Rose.

12 INT. FOURTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Suddenly something strikes Rose from behind. A man in a crooked baseball cap and a white wife-beater tank-top, stands behind them. This is JOHNNY, a drug dealer in the building.

JOHNNY

Do I have to drag you the fuck out again!

Johnny grabs Rose. He pulls her back towards the stairs.

CHARLOTTE

She lives here!

JOHNNY

No she's don't! She just comes beggin' for a hit.

Johnny pushes Rose against the wall. Charlotte takes a moment to give Rose a dirty look.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You're a pain in the ass. I should teach you a lesson.

Johnny pushes Rose harder. Charlotte gets between them.

CHARLOTTE

Don't touch her.

JOHNNY

You wanna get in it too?

Johnny gets in Charlotte's face now.

He pushes Charlotte hard onto the ground.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

No more free rides. Time to pay up.

Johnny pulls Rose down the hall towards apartment 407. Charlotte watches. Rose locks eyes with her.

Charlotte takes a deep breath and stands up.

She quickly follows after Johnny and Rose.

Charlotte grabs Rose's hand and pulls. Johnny turns around. He backs Charlotte against the wall and gets close to her.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You want to take her place, sweetheart?

Charlotte holds eye contact. She looks at Rose. Rose looks back.

Charlotte hears the click of a pistol and feels the cold metal of a gun barrel push against her throat.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Is this chick worth it to you?

Charlotte takes a breath. She pulls Rose's arm harder.

Johnny caresses the gun's trigger.

Charlotte pulls harder.

Johnny pulls back but then lets go.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Fuck it. She's not worth the bullet.

Johnny puts his gun down. He walks away.

Charlotte stands over Rose. Rose won't make eye contact.

CHARLOTTE  
You know where we're at.

Charlotte walks away. Rose's gaze follows Charlotte and then back toward The Man's door.

Biz walks up. Charlotte motions for Biz to follow her.

BIZ  
What happened?

CHARLOTTE  
It's time to go.

13 INT. FIRST FLOOR LOBBY - LATER

Charlotte sits down on the bottom of the first floor steps. She holds her bus ticket.

Biz sits down next to her.

BIZ  
You can still make your bus.

Charlotte looks at the bus ticket.

Biz nudges her. Charlotte doesn't get up.

BIZ (CONT'D)  
Let's go. Your daughter's waiting.

CHARLOTTE  
She's not there, Biz.

Charlotte folds the ticket in half. She puts it in her pocket.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
No. She OD'd in SF though. Twenty-three years old and gone. I coulda' helped but I was strung out too.

Charlotte nods.

BIZ  
You're making up for it.

CHARLOTTE  
You can't make up for things like that.

Their attention is broken as an OLD WOMAN walks toward the elevator with a wheeled cart full of groceries.

She pushes the elevator's "up" button, but only the broken grinding sound comes from the elevator shaft.

Charlotte slowly stands and heads toward the old woman.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)  
It's broken today.

Charlotte gently guides the woman back toward the stairs. Biz grabs the woman's cart.

As they turn, Rose is standing at the bottom of the stairs.

ROSE  
Can I try again?

Charlotte nods "yes".

Charlotte helps the old woman slowly walk up the stairs, step by step. Biz pulls the cart up behind them. Rose watches.

FADE TO BLACK.