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"NOCTURNE DESCENT"

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

It's a cold winter's night on the snowy prairies of the Mid-West. The roads are empty save an old rusted Buick, with its narrow headlights barely hitting the icy road, making its way West. Frost and snow have gathered on the bumper and edges of the window.

CUT TO:

INT. BUICK - NIGHT

ADEN, a 24-year-old man drives the car, while his sister ROCHELLE, 19, sleeps soundly in the passenger's seat. Dust covers the torn burgundy dashboard, and static filled country music softly comes out of the speakers.

All of a sudden, the radio starts to flicker off and on. The signal starts to break up and is lost.

Aden hits the old car radio with his fist, trying to get the music back, but only a soft 'hiss' is found on the airwaves. He gives up and turns it off. The radio display turns to the clock, which now reads 2:12 AM.

With a sigh, Aden focuses his attention back onto the highway. Small flakes of snow dance in the in front of the headlights as the car flies through. As Aden watches the snow, his eyes become heavy and unfocused.

With a jolt, he wakes him self up and shakes his head back and forth. He reaches to the floor and grabs a bottle of warm Coke and takes the last flat swallow.

Slowly his eyes drift back toward the road, but this time become fixated on the yellow dividing line in the middle. Again, fatigue overtakes him and his eyes close completely.

His head falls slightly forward as sleep envelops him.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE ROOM

A young woman sits on a couch, looking at Aden. Tears are in her eyes, but she holds them back.

CUT TO:

INT. BUICK - NIGHT

Abruptly, the radio turns on and the piercing voice of the female singer comes loudly from the speakers. Wide eyed and terrified, Aden jumps back into consciousness to notice he is on the wrong side of the road.

He roughly turns the steering wheel and corrects the car back onto the right side. The tires spin out as they slide over the ice. Aden throws the steering wheel the other way to gain control.

After regaining his bearings, he pulls the car off to the side of the road. With his heart pounding and breath heavy, Aden slams the shifter into 'park'.

Looking over to his sister, he sees that she has not even opened her eyes and continues to breath on the verge of snoring. He reaches over and shakes her. Nothing. He shakes her harder. She doesn't move.

Aden grabs the empty plastic Coke bottle and hits her on the head. She opens her eyes.

ROCHELLE
(confused)
No...stop...what.

She looks around.

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)
Why are we stopped? What's up?

Aden turns on the light inside the car. His face is sweaty and pale; he continues to breath heavily.

In sign language says "Your turn."

ROCHELLE
For real?

"You've been sleeping since Missouri," he signs.

ROCHELLE
Fine. Damn.

She leans back in the seat, but doesn't move. Aden notices that she has closed her eyes again. He punches her in the arm. She opens her eyes and rubs them.

ROCHELLE
Okay!

They both get out and walk around the car to switch sides. Aden puts his seatbelt on as his sister gets in.

ROCHELLE
I'll drive until Colorado. It's
all you after that.

"Maybe."

Rochelle pulls the car back onto the highway and accelerates. She turns the dial on the radio and tries to get a station, but can't.

She turns to tell Aden to fix the radio, but he has already fallen asleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

A soft breeze blows through the forest, whipping around the tree trunks and branches above. Aden's entire body shakes violently as he lies on the snow covered forest ground. He opens his eyes and looks up.

Tall evergreen and oak trees surround him and sunlight streaks through the openings between branches.

Aden sits up and looks at himself. He is still dressed in the T-Shirt and jeans from the night before, and his skin is almost blue.

Snow clings to his body and hair and his muscles tense up painfully from the bitter cold.

Aden looks at his arm and sees four perfectly straight lines running from his shoulder to his wrist cut deep into his skin, but no blood.

Aden pushes himself to his feet, although cannot stand straight up. Looking around, he sees nobody. No homes, roads, or any sign of his car or sister.

He looks at the snow around him. Clean, and undisturbed. There is no sign of footprints, not even his own.

He walks towards a clearing near the edge of a hill. Once there, he looks out over the forest and can see nothing but trees for miles in every direction.

But in the distance, a small flume of smoke rises above the trees and slowly dissipates in the air.

With deep breath, he begins to walk rigidly down the hill, toward the smoke.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

Aden walks out of the woods and toward the source of the smoke: an old train engine and dozens of boxcars behind.

The train idles on the tracks with a soft chugging. Shivering even more violently, Aden walks to the engine and looks around for anyone, but there is no one.

On the ground, beneath a boxcar, lies a dirty brown canvas bag. Aden grabs it and wraps it around himself as he sits next to the wheel of the boxcar. Thirsty, he grabs a handful of snow and slowly begins to eat it.

Exhaustion overwhelms him, and Aden falls to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE ROOM

A tear falls from the eye of the young woman. She makes no move to wipe it away, and it slowly moves down her cheek.

WOMAN

It's just that you don't see things
for the way they truly are. I see
you, but I know you're not there.
You always leave...where do you go?

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Aden awakes to the sound of two men arguing outside. Weak and cold, Aden crawls out of the cab to get help.

He sees the two men around a fire about one hundred yards away. One of them, Bennett, a spastic bald man, stands up and yells at the other one, and then sits back down just as quickly. Aden wraps the canvas bag tighter and walks toward them.

As he approaches the men, he can see that the men are young, and have short dirty beards.

The leader, Wayne, a strong quiet man, is eating out of a rusty can while Bennett plays with a stick in the fire.

Aden steps into the light of the fire. Bennett sees him and jumps to his feet.

BENNETT

Hey!

Wayne stops chewing and looks at Aden with beady eyes. Aden stops, scared.

BENNETT

Who the hell 'er you?

He takes a couple steps toward Aden. Aden holds his hands out, telling the man to stop.

BENNETT

What's yer name?

WAYNE

Speak up!

Aden quickly motions to his throat and mouth, shaking his head.

BENNETT

Who are ya?

Aden takes a step back as the man approaches quickly. Bennett grabs the canvas bag and pulls Aden toward him. Aden falls to his knees as the man pushes him down.

WAYNE

Can't talk?

Aden shakes his head. The man walks over to him.

BENNETT

Shit. Hey, Wayne, look at his arm.

Wayne looks and sees the cuts on Aden's arm. He grabs Aden's arm and looks closer.

WAYNE

Well...

A smile creeps across Wayne's face and slowly he starts laughing. Bennett helps Aden to his feet and points to an open boxcar.

BENNETT

It's okay. We got blankets. And water. Looks like you need both.

Aden looks at him wearily.

WAYNE

Get in. The train'll be leaving soon.

Wayne and Bennett kick snow over the fire and extinguish it. Aden limps toward the car, and tries to climb in. Bennett jumps in and Wayne gives Aden a boost from the ground.

Once inside, Wayne closes the door.

INT. BOX CAR - NIGHT

Moonlight streams in through the cracks and holes in the roof of the boxcar. Wayne tosses Aden a blanket, removes a knife from his pocket and sets it down on the floor.

BENNETT

Ya thirsty?

Aden wraps the blanket around him and nods. Bennett dips a dirty tin cup into a bucket of water and hands it to Aden. Despite the dirt, Aden swiftly drinks all of the water.

The three men sit silently for a moment.

WAYNE

How did you get here?

Aden shakes his head.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Good. Is anyone else with you?

No.

BENNETT

So ya can't talk?

No.

Bennett and Wayne stare quietly at Aden from across the boxcar.

Wayne picks up the knife and opens up the blade. Aden's eyes grow wide and fixate on the steel blade. He sets the cup down and moves back. Wayne and Bennett creep closer.

WAYNE

Now.

The two men jump onto Aden and pin him down. Aden fights back but he is too weak to escape. Bennett presses his knee into Aden's stomach, knocking the wind out of him.

As Aden gasps for air, Wayne grabs Aden's cut arm and holds it to the ground. Aden's t-shirt sleeve is cut away with Wayne's knife.

Wayne examines his shoulder. Frustrated he tears away more of the shirt.

BENNETT

Where is it, Wayne?

Wayne cuts more of the shirt off but can't find what he's looking for.

WAYNE

Where? Tell us where it is!

Aden shakes his head back and forth as tears stream from his eyes. Wayne brings the knife to Aden's clean arm and presses it down.

WAYNE

I know ya can talk. Now do it!

The blade slowly presses into Aden's skin. His mouth wide, he breathes heavily, kicking and thrashing.

WAYNE

TALK!

The blade continues to press in, threatening to cut, until finally Aden takes a deep breath and screams.

ADEN

No!

Bennett and Wayne quickly move back, surprised and scared. Aden looks down. He shakes his head and takes a deep breath.

ADEN

I...I...

WAYNE

You can talk.

Aden looks around and touches his throat and mouth.

WAYNE

Ya go your whole life without. And
then one day... ya just can.

Wayne rolls up the sleeve of his shirt and holds out his arm. In the moonlight, Aden sees dozens of short slashes from Wayne's wrist to his shoulder.

WAYNE

It's because of them.

BENNETT

They told us there would be a mute.

Wayne nods his head and sits back down. Bennett reaches into a knapsack and pulls out a small silver ball.

WAYNE

We've been waiting for you for
'bout fifteen years. Never thought
I'd see ya though.

The boxcar jerks forward violently, sending the three men falling to the floor. Bennett and Wayne look at each excitedly. Bennett opens the door and watches the ground below start to move.

BENNETT

It's...finally.

ADEN

(softly)
W-where...

WAYNE

You'll see soon. Just be quiet for
now.

Fatigue suddenly overcomes Aden. Dizzy, he lies down on the wooden floor of the car.

Through a crack in the side, he watches the small flakes of snow dance in the moonlight as the train rushes through.

As Aden watches the snow, his eyes become heavy and unfocused. Unable to stay awake, he falls into a deep sleep.

Bennett and Wayne each grab a blanket. They smile at each other and they too lie down and close their eyes.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE TO:

INT. WHITE ROOM

She stares at the floor. The tears have stopped, and now her eyes are cold, and distant.

WOMAN

You never knew me. You never tried to.

For a moment, she looks at Aden. He blinks. She stands up and walks towards the door. She pauses for an instant, and takes a breath. Aden says nothing, and she walks out the door.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE TO:

INT. BOX CAR - MORNING

The morning sunlight streaks through the cracks of the boxcar. Bennett and Wayne sit in the corner with their backs to Aden, as they talk to each other. Aden opens his eyes and slowly sits up.

ADEN

Where are we going?

Wayne and Bennett turn slowly and look at him. Wayne has the silver ball in his hand.

WAYNE

We'll be there soon.

ADEN

(pause)

Tell me what happened.

BENNETT

What do you mean?

ADEN

Why am I here?

WAYNE

You don't know?

ADEN

(beat)

No.

Bennett and Wayne look at each other, both a bit confused. After a moment, Wayne speaks up.

WAYNE
Well...what's the last thing you
remember?

Aden thinks for a moment.

ADEN
I was driving...with my sister. We
were going to visit our dad.

BENNETT
...in Nevada.

ADEN
(looks up quickly)
How did you know?

BENNETT
(slowly)
Well, they told us. We've been
waiting...

WAYNE
You were supposed to tell us what
we're gonna do.

ADEN
(shaking his head)
I don't understand.

WAYNE
They told us you would
have...the...the...

BENNETT
...answers.

ADEN
To what?! Where is my sister?

Wayne and Bennett both stop talking. Bennett looks away timidly and Wayne stares at Aden intensely.

WAYNE
Dead. The car rolled over that
night and killed her.

ADEN
No it...didn't. I was there. I...

WAYNE

You were taken from the car before
the accident.

Aden starts breathing heavily, looking around confused.

ADEN

I would remember this. You're
lying.

BENNETT

It's th' truth. I know it too.

ADEN

I need to go. I need to find her.

WAYNE

(beat)

She's gone. Besides, that
happened...

Aden looks over to Wayne.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

That was forty years ago.

ADEN

No! I was there last night.

ADEN

(after a long pause)

This isn't real.

WAYNE

They were supposed to tell you all
of this.

ADEN

I don't know who you're talking
about.

BENNETT

The Ancenites.

WAYNE

We're supposed to prepare to go
back.

ADEN

This is a dream.

Bennett points to the silver ball in Wayne's hand.

BENNETT

Let them tell 'em, Wayne.

Wayne looks at the ball and nods his head.

WAYNE

They'll take care of it. Here hold this.

Wayne hands the ball to Aden. Aden examines it.

ADEN

What is this?

BENNETT

It's how we talk to them. You just need to listen.

Aden cradles the ball in his hand and sits quietly. After a moment he sighs and shakes his head.

ADEN

What...this is stupid.

He rolls the ball back to Bennett, who quickly grabs the ball and covers it with his hand.

BENNETT

Are you crazy?!

He picks up the ball and brushes it off.

WAYNE

Give it.

Wayne grabs the ball away from Bennett. Holding it tightly he closes his eyes and sits silently.

After a moment, he speaks.

WAYNE

It's a test. (beat) They say they won't let 'em continue until he agrees to th' task.

(beat)

They don't want him unless he chooses to go on.

Opening his eyes, he hands the ball back to Bennett. He speaks without taking his eyes off of Aden.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

And they won't take us unless we have him.

Bennett perks up at this comment.

ADEN

So...I have a choice.

Wayne nods slowly.

ADEN (CONT'D)

I can either go with you to...wherever we're going.

Wayne nods.

ADEN (CONT'D)

Or I can leave and go free?

Bennett opens his eyes and reveals the silver ball in his hand.

BENNETT

No.

Both Aden and Wayne look quickly over to Bennett.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

You either come with us, or you go back to them forever.

ADEN

Forever?

BENNETT

As a prisoner.

Aden doesn't say anything. He just shakes his head.

WAYNE

They'll crown you. It's like a prison. A dream that they control.

Aden gives a half-smile.

ADEN

So I really don't have a choice then...

BENNETT

You have a choice.

WAYNE

See...the problem here is that without you...we're screwed. If we show up without you...We have to stay here.

BENNETT

(beat)

And we don't want that.

WAYNE

Your choice...It's like this train, Aden. There's no swerving, or turning, or leaving the track. You're just going along for the ride. There's only one inevitable destination, and you can't control it.

The three men all sit for a moment. Silent. Finally:

ADEN

No.

BENNETT

No?

ADEN

My answer. No.

Bennett shakes his head.

WAYNE

(in a loud, intense voice)

Listen you little prick. I didn't just live in this goddamn forest for twenty years so you can come along and fuck everything up. You say yes, now. And everything is okay.

ADEN

No.

(beat)

This -is my- dream.

Wayne stands up and walks to Aden. With a strong backhand, he slaps Aden across the face.

WAYNE

Feel that?! This, son, is not a dream.

BENNETT
(calmly)
Stop, Wayne. An' sit down.

Wayne turns around.

WAYNE
(yelling)
Shut up, Bennett. You
know damn well we need
this kid. We can't go
anywhere without the
codes!
Without...(beat)...his arm.

Aden looks at the long scars running down his arm. No one else notices as Wayne pulls out a pocket knife and unfolds the blade.

BENNETT
It's his choice. (pause) You have
one last chance to change your
mind.

Aden stares at Wayne and then looks to Bennett.

ADEN
No.

WAYNE
(slowly)
Wrong answer!

Wayne kicks Aden in the stomach and steps on his arm. He brings the knife into view and stabs it into Aden's arm. Aden cries out in agony.

BENNETT
Stop!

Bennett rushes over to Wayne with the silver ball in his hand, and places it on Wayne's forehead. Wayne's entire body goes limp and he passes unconscious. Aden grabs his bloody arm, breathing heavily.

BENNETT
I'm sorry. He shouldn't-

But he doesn't finish his sentence. With a rage, Aden kicks Bennett in the stomach, sending him flying backward, and the silver ball shattering on the floor.

With a burst, Aden opens the boxcar door and jumps into the snow covered ground below.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST/PRARIE - DAY

Aden tumbles to the ground and rolls for a few feet before stopping. He pushes himself up onto his knees and looks at the passing train.

CUT TO:

INT. BOXCAR - DAY

Bennett catches his breath and walks to the boxcar door. He sees Aden in the distance and then jumps out.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST/PRARIE - DAY

Bennett quickly jumps to his feet and begins to walk toward Aden. Aden, still weak, tired, and now injured, is slower to get up. Bennett walks toward Aden menacingly.

BENNETT

This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. You have no idea how important you are. They should have told you.

Aden finally brings himself to his feet.

ADEN

(desperately)
This isn't...

BENNETT

Open your eyes. It is. This is all real...you just choose not to see it, you don't want to.

Aden shakes his head.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

But it doesn't matter. You've made up your mind. There's no going back.

Aden turns around and starts to quickly limp away. Bennett continues to walk.

BENNETT

It doesn't matter where you go.
They already have you. You're a
prisoner.

ADEN

(under his breath)

No.

BENNETT

But they're still human. And if
you ask, they might just give you
one request.

Aden turns around and looks at Bennett. Holding his arms out, Aden shakes his head.

ADEN

I just want to wake up!

Bennett nods his head softly, turns around and walks away from Aden.

BENNETT

(to himself)

Then you will.

Aden stands there for a moment before looking up to the sky. A clear, cold, winter sky.

FADE TO:

INT. BUICK - DAY

The clear winter sky reaches down to meet the snowy Midwest prairies on the horizon. Aden opens his and looks around. A static filled music comes out of the old speakers. Rochelle mouths the words to the country tune.

Aden seems a bit dazed, but can't put his finger on the problem.

ROCHELLE

Morning. Sleep okay?

Aden opens his mouth for a moment, but nods his head. Rochelle puts her focus back onto driving and starts singing again.

Stretching his arms above his head, Aden notices something on his arm. He pulls his sleeve back to reveal four perfectly straight scars running the length of his arm.

He stares at them blankly, touching them, and trying to remember why he has them...but he can't. He pulls his sleeve back over his arm and stares out the window blankly.

His mind wanders aimlessly as he watches the road rush beside him. Aden's eyes become fixated on the white painted line on the road.

The ground and line and snow and sky all become a blur as Aden closes his eyes.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END OF PART I