

EMBRACING SILENCE

written by

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EXT. OVER BLACK

Rubber and asphalt screech and mangle. Metal rattles and bangs and reverberates against the unbearable noise.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

An old, rickety car. Smoke swirls around its tires. The obvious aftermath of a sudden halt before a stop light. CLAMOROUS EDM music bleeds from the vehicle.

INT. RICKETY CAR - DAY

CHRISTOPHER BAKER drives. He's 23. He wears a plaid shirt, buttoned up to his neck, with a fleece vest around it. His hair somehow remains neatly combed.

JULIAN GARCIA sits in the backseat. He's 23. He harbors an over-sized coat, as well as a beanie pulled down to his eyes.

Various camping supplies lie scattered throughout the inner frame of the car, more devastation from the sudden stoppage.

Chris braces his forehead against the steering wheel. He cups his hands around his mouth- breathes into them.

The music BLARES out.

Julian lets Chris breathe. He reaches for Chris and massages his shoulders.

JULIAN

Hey! Chill, man. This'll be good
for all of us! Trust me.

CHRIS

I just... you know how he is...

JULIAN

Don't worry 'bout it, huh? Hayden's
a good guy.

CHRIS

Can I at least turn down the music?

JULIAN

No chance! Light's green.

Chris glares up. It is, in fact, green. They drive off.

EXT. HAYDEN'S HOUSE - DAY

The car stops beside a one-story home. The THUNDEROUS music can be heard from outside.

INT. RICKETY CAR - DAY

Chris honks the horn twice.

CHRIS
He's never on time.

HAYDEN LEE exits the house. He wears sweatpants with an oversize tee-shirt. He holds a jacket and a bulky camping backpack.

CAITLIN LEE pops out of the house. She kisses Hayden while she cradles a BABY.

Chris pops the trunk. Hayden puts his bag inside, closes it, and enters the passenger door.

JULIAN
Hayden, my boy!

HAYDEN
Hey, dude. Long time, no see.

CHRIS
Sure. Long time.

HAYDEN
What's with the music?

CHRIS
Let's get going. We want to make it before dark.

JULIAN
Hold up, hold up. You two. Hug things out first.

A beat. Hayden and Chris look at one another. There's an uneasiness that refuses to leave.

JULIAN
Come on. We can't be havin' this energy 'round here.

Hayden and Chris turn away from each other. Hayden sighs.

HAYDEN
Let's get going then.

Chris starts the car. Julian looks between Chris and Hayden in disbelief.

JULIAN

Or not. Y'know, whatever. That's cool. Who needs to bond anyways?

Chris ignores him and drives off.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FOREST - DAY

Snow drifts onto the three hikers. White trees surround them. A light wind rustles their bristles, and somewhere a pair of courting birds sing a harmonic duet. It would be blissful, serene...

If not for the ROARING electronic music which echoes from a portable stereo tied to Chris's backpack.

The friends make their way up the mountain. Each of them hold heavy, overflowing bags.

HAYDEN

Do you need it so loud? I was kinda hoping to get away from loud, obnoxious noises.

JULIAN

Oh, shut up. I dig it.

CHRIS

Speaking of, how's the little kid doing?

HAYDEN

If you came by, you'd know she grows fast.

Chris stops in his tracks. Hayden reaches him and halts. Julian continues hiking in front of them.

HAYDEN

We miss seeing you.
(grips Chris's shoulder)
I miss seeing you.

Julian turns around, realizes he's all alone.

JULIAN

Hey! What'chu guys doin'?

CHRIS

Come on. We need to keep going.

Julian dances to the music above them. Hayden watches Chris trudge through the falling snow.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - DAY

The hikers reach a small clearing in the trees. It overlooks the valley behind them. The sun sets far in the horizon as the snow piles down.

The music keeps BLASTING from the stereo.

JULIAN

Hell yeah! We made it fellas!

HAYDEN

Man. Feels weird to be back.

CHRIS

Haven't been here since, huh?

HAYDEN

No. And it hasn't changed a bit.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - DAY

Chris takes out the tent supplies and lays it across the snow. Hayden comes to help him. Chris rips the supplies away.

HAYDEN

What?

CHRIS

You've never helped with set up, not during all those years. But, what? Now you're suddenly gonna help?

HAYDEN

Well who the fuck else is gonna help you?

Chris glances at Julian. Julian pees in the open while he admires the overlook.

JULIAN

Awe... good shit.

Chris shakes his head.

CHRIS

I'm sorry--

HAYDEN

It's whatever. Let's get to work.

They set up the tent.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

A fire blazes. Embers and snow mingle in the air.

The old friends sit around the fire, with the pitch black night surrounding them. They stare into the flames.

The music CLAMORS out of the stereo.

HAYDEN

Well, at least no animals will attack us.

Julian looks between his two friends.

JULIAN

You two need to lighten up. Let bygones be bygones and all that shit.

HAYDEN

It's getting cold.

CHRIS

There's liquor in my bag over there. That is, if you still drink.

HAYDEN

Please. I have a one-year-old, of course I drink.

JULIAN

Now you're talkin'.

Hayden crosses to the bags. He yanks it.

HAYDEN

Jesus. This is heavy.

CHRIS

Be careful! It's in there.

HAYDEN

Oh. In here?

Hayden gently places down the bag. He takes out a handle of tequila and walks back to the fire.

Hayden lifts the bottle- "cheers"- takes a swig. He hands it to Chris. Chris downs a shot.

Julian walks behind them and places his hands on their backs. Hayden seems unmoved by the maneuver.

JULIAN

Today's about coming together,
remember? No matter what, we'll
always be friends. Through kids and
all that bullshit.

(drinks tequila)

Now let's enjoy! Like ol' times!

Hayden and Chris look at one another... a beat... they smile.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

(Note: the EDM music picks up in volume here and crescendos throughout the montage until it reaches its climax. All the following scenes are in the same "secluded spot" location.)

1) All three friends douse down tequila.

2) Hayden and Chris head-bang to the music. Julian dances opposite the fire of them. His moves: electric.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

They all hold out a beer can.

CHRIS

One, two, three!

They burst open the side of the can- shotgun the beer. Julian finishes first; Hayden second; Chris slams his beer on the ground.

CHRIS

Damnit!

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Hayden sits on the ground in the snow, far from the fire. Tears stream from his eyes. Chris and Julian kneel next to him. They rub his back, consoling him. The moonlight shimmers off the snowflakes on them.

HAYDEN

She's just so beautiful, y'know?

The first time I held her...

(mimics holding a baby)

(MORE)

HAYDEN (CONT'D)

I knew she was beautiful. And I'm scared I won't be able to support her always.

CHRIS

Oh, hey now. Ye're the man. Ye'll kill anyone whom hurts her.

JULIAN

Yeah, dude. Ye're a fuckin' animal.

HAYDEN

You'se right. I'm a killer.

JULIAN

Damn straight. The best killer.

3) Hayden uses the empty handle of tequila as a microphone. He sings into it. His voice reverberates inside the glass and expels outwards.

Chris and Julian make snow angels next to him, because... why not?

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Hayden and Julian sit next to each other. They look into the flames.

CHRIS (O.S.)

'Ey, looks what I brought!

Chris pulls a golf club out of the tent-pole bag.

HAYDEN

Oh fuck yea.

Chris and Hayden tee up a ball. They overlook the entire valley. The moon perfectly silhouettes them.

Hayden swings back the club and strikes the ball. It flies through the snow into the valley before them.

4) The stereo bounces on top of a tree trunk. It BLASTS the music LOUDER.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Chris lines up the clubface with the ball. He swings back-strikes the ball. It zips straight right and smashes into Hayden's thigh.

Hayden screams and collapses to the ground. Julian runs over to him. Chris glances at them, confused.

CHRIS
What? Did I do it?

Hayden squirms in pain.

5) The three friends pee together over a ledge. Julian and Chris laugh uncontrollably at something Hayden says. Chris falls over sideways onto Julian, which pushes Julian over as he pees.

6) Chris lines up the club with the golf ball again. He hits it.

Julian and Hayden hide beside a tree. The ball bounces off the trunk next to them, breaking multiple branches. They dive for cover.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Chris and Hayden lay next to the fire. They stare up at the sky. Snowflakes fall from the heavens. The stars shine bright when the clouds momentarily disperse.

HAYDEN
Chris? Y'knows I miss ya, man? I
know it's been hard for ya. It's
been hard for me too.

Chris looks at him. He smiles.

CHRIS
I know. I'm sorry. I fuckin' love
ya, man. Ye're my brother.

HAYDEN
I love ya too.

They hug. Julian walks in from around the tent. He stops when he sees them.

JULIAN
I know ye fuckers ain'ts huggin'
without me.

He jumps on them. Chris grunts under his force. They lay there hugging.

7) The stereo bounces towards the edge of the stump. THE MUSIC CAN'T POSSIBLY GET ANY LOUDER...

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Chris licks his lips, determined. He lowers the golf club, lines up the shot.

This time Hayden and Julian are nowhere to be seen.

Chris brings back the club- strikes the ball. It blasts through the air straight towards the moon. Success!

CHRIS

YEAH!

Chris raises the club in adulation. Hayden and Julian appear around two separate trees. They raise their hands in victory as well. They join Chris in his dance of exaltation.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - NIGHT

Chris shotguns a beer. Hayden holds an empty can above his mouth as he tries to get every last drop. Julian throws away a can, the force of which topples him over into the snow.

Chris and Hayden laug--

The stereo dies.

For the first time, there is complete silence.

JULIAN

Where's the music?

CHRIS

Shit.

(picks up speaker)

It died.

HAYDEN

The speaker died?

Julian leans up. Chris rushes to his backpack and shuffles through it.

CHRIS

Damn, damn, damn. I didn't bring batteries.

HAYDEN

Chill. It's just music.

CHRIS

Fuck off.

Chris hurls the speaker at him. Hayden blocks his head. The speaker bounces off his arm.

JULIAN

Hey!

HAYDEN

What's ye'r problem?

CHRIS

My problem? I jus' wanted to listen
to *his* fuckin' music. But
apparently ya can'st even help me
with that.

JULIAN

Chris, it's fine.

HAYDEN

Ya think I don't miss him either?
Ya think I don't miss him every
day?

CHRIS

No.

HAYDEN

I had to move on. I have a family,
Chris, a life--

JULIAN

Hayden, come on.

CHRIS

The fuck's that suppose to mean?

HAYDEN

Listen! You hear that?
(a quiet beat)
Exactly. Get use to it. I had to.

CHRIS

Maybe I could if you would of
helped. If ya called, just once.

HAYDEN

Oh, God. I'm sorry. Okay, Chris?
I'm fuckin' sorry. But I had a wife
and a newborn--

CHRIS

That's all very convenient for ya, isn't it. While I'm all alone and single and had to deal with it on my own, right?

JULIAN

Guys, stop it.

HAYDEN

You were my best friend! My best friend who never, not once, came over to see my daughter. My daughter! Because of you're own self-pity--

CHRIS

So it's my fault?

HAYDEN

Y'know, fuck this. Fuck you. I don't need this.

JULIAN

Chris, no!

Chris punches Hayden across the face. Hayden tumbles backwards against a tree. He rushes forward- slams into Chris.

Julian pries back Chris. Chris shakes him off.

Chris swings at Hayden- misses. Hayden counters with his elbow- connects with Chris's diaphragm. Chris gasps for air.

JULIAN

Stop it!

Chris and Hayden both swing.

Both connect to the head.

Both collapse into the snow.

All goes black.

EXT. SECLUDED SPOT - DAY

Chris gingerly opens his eyes. His vision blurs. He's on the ground. A small layer of snow covers him. The forest is impossibly still. Unbearably silent.

Julian leans down in front of Chris. He smiles at him. Chris reaches for his friend, but his strength betrays him.

CHRIS
Why is this so hard?

JULIAN
Why are you handling it alone?

Julian nods towards Hayden, who lies motionless on the ground across from them.

CHRIS
I'm sorry.

JULIAN
For what? You'll get through this.
Take care of one another.

Julian closes his eyes and tilts his head up towards the falling snow. Chris smiles as tears flow down his cheek.

Chris closes his own eyes, embracing the stillness of the earth with Julian. After a long, painful beat, Chris opens his eyes.

Julian is gone. Forever.

Chris rubs his eyes. He takes a deep breath. His frozen tears shine like crystals on his skin. His vision now clear, Chris looks around him:

The sky is gray. Snowfall showers down. A light wind rustles the snow-caped trees. It is completely and utterly silent.

Hayden moans. He slowly leans up- swipes snow off him. His eye and lips are swollen. Hayden rubs his body warm.

Chris and Hayden make eye contact.

They hold it for a long while.

No words are needed.

They remain on the ground as the snow builds up around them. Finally, Chris lets out a smile. Hayden smiles back.

An understanding.

Chris and Hayden laboriously stand. The snow crunches under their feet. They walk towards Chris's backpack.

Chris brings out a large tin box from the bag. Him and Hayden glance at one another.

They walk to the overlook. Chris opens the box. Hayden and Chris each grab one side of it.

They sprinkle out ashes. They drift over the edge of the overlook, intermingle with the falling snow, and disperse into the forest far below, disappearing forever.

Hayden hugs his arm around Chris's shoulder. Together they listen to the quiet world.

Mourning. Remembering.

EXT. HAYDEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Chris pulls up next to the house. He shuts off the engine. Hayden sits in the passenger seat. They are the only two in the car. No music plays.

CHRIS
I can't tell if I'm hungover from
the drinks or from you.

HAYDEN
Me neither.

A quiet beat.

HAYDEN
You think Julian would be proud?
Or, at least, would have had fun?

CHRIS
You know him. Even dead, he
wouldn't miss a chance to make bad
decisions with us.

Another long beat.

HAYDEN
I'm sorry, Chris. I should've
reached out after his funeral.

CHRIS
It's okay.

HAYDEN
Death is anything but silent.

Chris chuckles in agreement.

HAYDEN
Don't be a stranger to me and Cait.
I want you to be a part of our
life. And I want you to meet my
daughter.

CHRIS
I do too.

Chris and Hayden hug, each sharing a moment they'll never forget, before Hayden exits the vehicle with his backpack.

HAYDEN
See you around.

Hayden shuts the door. He crosses to his house and enters it.

Chris takes a deep breath. He looks into his rear-view mirror and checks the backseat.

It's empty.

He shakes his head, knowing it's time.

Chris starts the car and drives off.

THE END.