

The Moose

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALASKAN WILDERNESS IN HEAVY SNOWFALL- AFTERNOON

CALEB HODGES (23), red-eyed, and tired tries starting his SUV 3 times and fails. A medical kit sits in the passenger seat.

He flips on the warning lights and exits the SUV. His hands pale and calloused from grueling work, and looks around for help.

A large, thin moose carcass sits in the bed of the truck.

Harsh Alaskan winter surrounds him in a white fog.

Faint yellow headlights of a Toyota 4Runner approach him from the opposite side of the road.

The 4Runner passes Caleb, turns around, and parks behind his truck.

Caleb walks to the 4Runner.

CALEB
Thanks for stopping.

WYATT O'NEIL (50) rolls down his window. An old man with a scruffy beard and weary eyes.

WYATT
What happened here?

CALEB
Not sure, I think the moose weighed
it down. It quit on me.

Wyatt looks at the rear of Caleb's SUV inches from the ground.

WYATT
Well how 'bout this.. I can tow
your truck and you can ride with
me.

CALEB
That's great. Thanks.

Wyatt attaches the hook to Caleb's SUV and they drive off.

INT./EXT. WYATT'S CAR ON ALASKAN ROAD

WYATT
Where're you headed?

CALEB
Palmer. I hope it's not too out of
your way.

WYATT
(chuckles)
Palmer? Haven't you seen the
weather report? There's a blizzard
on the way. There's no way you're
making it up to Palmer.

CALEB
Oh.. well how close can you get me
there? My family's waiting.

WYATT
I live not far from here. You can
stay and wait out the blizzard.

CALEB
Again. Thanks. I really appreciate
it.

WYATT
I'm Wyatt, by the way. Wyatt
O'Neil.

CALEB
Caleb Hodges.

The snow picks up, blue & red lights emerge through the fog.

Wyatt pulls over. The officers zoom past, Caleb shrinks
slightly in his seat.

WYATT
I hope everything's ok. Especially
in this weather.

CALEB
Everything is fine.

EXT. WYATT'S LODGE

Wyatt drives up to a small log cabin near the forest.

WYATT

Well.. here we are. Let me help you with your moose. We can air dry the meat in the back.

CALEB

No, it's alright. I can handle it.

WYATT

It's big animal. You sure?

CALEB

Yeah there's no meat. It's for taxidermy..y'know.

WYATT

Ah...I never liked it. Thought it was creepy. Dressing animals and mounting them on the walls, gives me the creeps

CALEB

Not for my mom.

They get out of the car as the blizzard picks up, making it hard to see.

Caleb walks to the moose.

CALEB (CONT'D)

(shouting)

I'll meet you inside. Let me get my stuff first.

The howling winds drown out their voices.

WYATT

(shouting)

Blizzard's getting too strong.
Let's head indoors.

Caleb reluctantly pushes the moose back into the truck, and heads to the cabin.

Wyatt stops and notices a small tear in the abdomen of the moose. A hand hanging outside of it.

INT. WYATT'S CABIN

A small fire crackled in the fireplace as they entered Wyatt's Cabin.

WYATT

I can take your jacket. Have a seat
anywhere, make yourself at home.

CALEB

Thanks.

Caleb sits on the couch across from the fireplace. Wyatt's home was cozy and a single staircase lead to a second floor for bedrooms. Rifles lay against the wall.

Wyatt walks to the kitchen.

WYATT (O.S.)

Would like something to eat? Might
be here awhile.

CALEB

Sure.

WYATT (O.S.)

So what were you doing out in this
weather anyway?

CALEB

I was visiting my dad.

WYATT

How's he doing?

CALEB

Sick. Huntington's Disease.

Wyatt walks in carrying two plates full of meat and vegetables.

WYATT

I'm sorry to hear about that. I
hope he's doing well. Did he teach
you how to hunt?

CALEB

Me and my siblings. My sisters are
hunters, but my brothers and I
couldn't stomach it for a while.

WYATT

Well, you took down a mighty moose
looking --

MORGAN

Grandpa!!!

MORGAN CONNORS(6) comes running down the stairs in Wyatt's arms.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
You didn't read me a story before leaving.

WYATT
I'm sorry sweetie. We have a visitor. His name is Caleb.

Morgan waves shyly.

WYATT (CONT'D)
Why don't you wait upstairs and I'll come by later. Ok?

Morgan nods and rushes back up.

WYATT (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about my granddaughter. She has me read to her a few pages every time before I go out like her parents used to do. Her father and mother- my daughter- would read with her every time.

Caleb doesn't speak, only occasionally glancing at Wyatt.

WYATT (CONT'D)
They went out one day into the forest for few days, I was here with Morgan. And when they didn't come back...Police later found their frozen bodies under feet of snow.

CALEB
I'm sorry.

WYATT
...Her husband was dying and he was in incredible pain. I tried talking her out of it else I'd arrest her, but.... I guess she didn't expect to get caught under nature's grasp.

CALEB
You'd arrest your own daughter?

WYATT
(uneasy)
It's my job.

CALEB
You're an officer?

WYATT
State Marshall.

CALEB
Euthanasia falls under your
jurisdiction?

WYATT
Murder... falls under my
jurisdiction, especially out here.

Caleb listens, rocking as if nauseous.

CALEB
Can I use the restroom.

WYATT
Down the hall.

Wyatt points to the restroom down the hall.

A knock comes to the door. Wyatt opens the door.

Bathroom door closes in the back.

A Deputy Marshall, JIMMY (30), wrapped in Winter gear stands.

WYATT (CONT'D)
Hey Jimmy

JIMMY
Chief O'Neil, sorry to bother you
on your day off. But we received a
call about an SUV leaving a home
where an elderly man with
Huntington's is missing. His
hospice nurse called it in.

Jimmy points to the SUV outside.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
The SUV outside matches the
description given by the nurse. Do
you know anything about it?

Wyatt looks back, Caleb's still in the restroom.

WYATT
No. Just a friend visiting.. I
haven't heard of anything. I'll let
you know if I do. Thanks Jimmy.

JIMMY

Take care Chief. We'll be nearby.

Wyatt shuts the door and sits in his rocking chair, waiting for Caleb.

Caleb arrives in the living room.

CALEB

Listen.. thanks for your hospitality but I think I should get going.

WYATT

Now? Blizzard's heavy right now. I can't let you go out there. It's too dangerous. Sit and make yourself comfortable.

He reluctantly shrinks into the corner of the couch.

WYATT (CONT'D)

Are you a doctor? I saw a medical kit in your car earlier.

CALEB

Epidemiology.

WYATT

You work with many patients?

CALEB

No. I'm in the lab, but sometimes consult doctors with patients. I never make the final choice.

WYATT

Do you wish you could?

CALEB

What?

WYATT

My daughter decided to choose to kill her husband when her doctors didn't. If the doctors you worked with didn't, would you have killed the patient if they were painfully dying?

CALEB

I don't-- I don't know. I can't say.

WYATT

How'd you kill the moose? I thought you didn't have the stomach for it.

CALEB

I- I don't usually. But it was one last time for my dad. I went out looking for something small...a fawn or deer. Then I saw this moose...just lying there. Against a fallen log. Had two broken legs and was breathing slowly. I could see its ribs. When I got closer, it looked through me. We both knew it was time. So I put the muzzle to the head and...that was it.

WYATT

Couldn't have been easy to take that shot.

Caleb shook his head.

CALEB

Other moose were watch from a distance. They didn't stop me either.

The two of them sit in silence.

CALEB (CONT'D)

My dad had moments of serenity in the late stages of Huntington's disease. Often he'd phase in and out of consciousness. We knew he was in pain but he couldn't speak. Doctors kept him alive for as long as they could. We knew he wouldn't last.

WYATT

What happened to him?

CALEB

He passed away in a narcotic haze. Overdose on morphine. Didn't feel a thing.

WYATT

I'd have to arrest you if you are admitting to killing your father. It's against the law to intentionally kill a patient.

CALEB

Even in pain? You wouldn't want someone to end it for you if you were in that state? Or your daughter?

WYATT

People have a right to choose if they want to live or die. They choose, not have someone else make the choice for them. And if doctors decide to let patients die or facilitate their death when they find a terminal illness, we won't get cures for these illnesses.

CALEB

He was in pain. Unable to speak but we knew.

WYATT

You knew? It sounds like all you knew was that you wanted to avoid taking care of him any longer--

CALEB

That's not what happened.

WYATT

(over)

So you killed him.

CALEB

I would do the same all over again.

WYATT

You save lives. We save lives. That's our job.

CALEB

You never shot anyone?

WYATT

I have but it was either him or me.

Caleb stands.

CALEB

Thank you for your hospitality, but I need to go home.

WYATT

You walk out that door and you'll be met with a few Marshalls.

(MORE)

WYATT (CONT'D)

After that, you'll be charged with
the murder of your father.

Caleb stands silently.

WYATT (CONT'D)

Tell me that's not his body you
stuffed into the moose carcass.

CALB

I might go to jail, but I'm not a
hypocrite. I don't hide behind a
false sense of authority. I know
what I did and don't regret it.

Caleb opens the door and the marshals quickly apprehend him.

They throw him in the back of their cruiser and take the SUV.

Jimmy nods to Wyatt.

MORGAN (O.S.)

Grandpa...

Morgan was listening from upstairs.

WYATT

Morgan, sweetie I thought you were
asleep.

Morgan walks down in her pajamas and into Wyatt's arms.

MORGAN

I couldn't sleep. Is Caleb a bad
man?

WYATT

No...he's.. he's hurting right now.
Going through a difficult time.

MORGAN

What's Huntington's?

WYATT

It's... a very dangerous disease
that can really hurt you if you get
it.

MORGAN

Will I get it?

WYATT

No of course not.

MORGAN
Will you get it?

WYATT
No. No.

MORGAN
What if you get sick like Caleb's
dad and you won't be able to take
care of me anymore?

WYATT
That won't happen.