

THE SILENCE

Written by

Estella Luo

SCREEN BLACK

A knock at the door.

After a brief pause, there is a sound of the hurried footsteps, followed by a squeaky sound of a hinge.

FADE IN:

1 I/E. DOOR - COTTAGE - DAY

1

EVE opens the wrecked wooden door. NOLAN stands outside, looking weary with his eyes bloodshot. He did his best to give a smile to his sister EVE.

2 INT. LIVING ROOM - COTTAGE - DAY

2

The wind is howling outside. Eve hurries Nolan in. She puts Nolan's suitcase on a rack besides the door, and looks Nolan up and down. Nolan is 6'2, dressed in a wrinkled shirt, his hair disheveled.

NOLAN

Haven't seen you in so many years.

EVE

Seven years.

NOLAN

God knows how many.

Nolan opens his arms in a gesture to give Eve a hug. Eve shies away, wiping her hands awkwardly on her stained apron.

EVE

I was... I have't scrubbed all of the suds off my hands yet. Your nephews just went to school. You haven't met them in person, right?

NOLAN

Yeah. Has your husband taught them how to ride?

Eve shrugs, looking at the vast steppe through the window.

EVE

We no longer do grazing. The pastures are all privatized. We couldn't afford the price.

Nolan takes off his shoes. He pulls out a chair and sits down.

NOLAN

Why wasn't I informed? Having to work elsewhere doesn't mean I should be excluded from the family. You could've messaged me.

3 INT. BATHROOM - DAY

3

Eve goes to the bathroom to retrieve the washing basin.

Eve passes Nolan, without giving him a glance.

4 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

4

Eve turns back to the living room, putting the washing basin on the cement ground. Some water spills out onto the floor. Eve does not wipe it off. She sits down on a plastic stool, starting to wash the cloths.

No one speaks.

EVE

(pauses for a few seconds,  
and takes a deep breath)

Nolan...We thought you ain't coming back home, and we didn't expect you to. At that time, you were preparing for an interview. You said it was important so Dad and I didn't want you to get distracted.

Eve takes a look at the window.

EVE (CONT'D)

After all, none of us could've afforded that pasture, not even you with your fancy engineering job. Forget about it. Your brother-in-law is doing repairs now, he's able to support the four of us.

Nolan walks towards the window, staring at the grasslands and hills, standing still.

A long silence.

NOLAN

Can we still go see the crooked-neck tree over that hill?

EVE

No. That area is fenced off.

Eve stands up and walks next to Nolan. Her calloused fingers points to the truck on the other side of the cracked windowpanes.

EVE (CONT'D)

You still remember that truck? Dad used to take us to the crooked-neck tree by that.

NOLAN

But why is it all covered up? It looks like a yurt now.

EVE

It's way outdated. Its engines are damaged and not even your brother-in-law can fix that.

NOLAN

(shrugs)

At least it's not broken into pieces--Hey, I think I can turn it into a slide!

Eve is about to speak, Nolan interrupts her.

NOLAN (CONT'D)

Well, stop! Don't say no to me, it won't cost me much time. Counts it as a makeup gift for my little nephews' birthdays.

Eve weavers for a moment.

EVE

We've just sold it. It's a good deal, and with that money we can replace it with a new one and...

NOLAN

(interjects abruptly)

So what now? I was away, indeed. But we were only one call away. Couldn't you simply called and ask my opinion on this? All our childhood memories associated with it... Let alone that's Dad's most cherished thing. For god's sake, that truck is the one and only car he had for his whole life.

(MORE)

NOLAN (CONT'D)

I've never, ever had a single thought of selling it.

EVE

(emotionless)

So teach me. Teach me how to buy a car that's able to carry tons of repairing equipments without the engines turned off, to drive two kids to a school that's two-hundred kilometers away without crashing half way. How on earth can I buy a functional, normal car when we barely have any food to put on the table?!

Nolan murmurs something in a volume that Eve cannot hear clearly.

EVE (CONT'D)

You don't get to say--about the pasture, about the truck, about my life, my decision. I've never asked you for help because I didn't want to burden you. Dad once told me that you are the bird and we are the cattle. So I accepted that from a young age, as I accept all the other arbitrariness in this world. Selling the truck was the only option, I simply don't have other choices. The dealer will come here to tow the car before dusk.

5

EXT. THE STEPPE - DUSK

5

Outside the cottage, the pastures stays still, and the truck stays still. The golden hues of the evening sky stretch across half of the horizon. Far away, a trailer approaches the cottage along an unpaved road.