WRETCHED CONVALESCENCE

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TRAM STATION - DAY

The sun pokes through thin clouds and shines on a small station, somewhat crowded with PEOPLE waiting for the tram's arrival. RORY SUTHERLAND (40s) stands, holding his leather briefcase in a faded grey suit, weary.

He stares at the tracks below him. Contemplates for a moment. Then, the SCREECHING of the approaching tram breaks his stupor, blaring as it grinds to its halt at the station.

INT. TRAM - CONTINUOUS

The doors open. The People rush in, and Rory follows. He goes to an available seat, and sits, obliviously taking it from an OLD WOMAN carrying heavy paper bags, who grumbles and shrugs. A YOUNG MAN WITH PIERCINGS sits on his right, and notices.

As the tram moves out, Rory opens his briefcase with a numb look. Inside, there are only three objects: a steak wrapped in paper, a restaurant menu, and a yellow child's bracelet.

INT. BACK OF BUTCHER'S SHOP - DAY - PAST

An animal's liver is CHOPPED IN TWO by a cleaver. The meat is then carried by the APPRENTICE BUTCHER (20s) to a steel sink, where it is washed. Rory enters in his suit.

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
Oi boss. Didn't expect to see you today.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Feeling better. How's things been running?

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
Not too bad, couple customers. Oh, this guy dropped off his application for you to check out.

RORY SUTHERLAND
That's new. How'd he look?

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
Uh, not bad. Lots of piercings, seemed swell.

Apprentice Butcher moves to an adjacent rack, where larger pieces of meat are hung on hooks. He takes one off, and dices it.

RORY SUTHERLAND
I'll check it out later. Listen, I've got a dinner planned for tonight and I just came for one of the tenderloins.

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
Only the best, eh? Think I can help you out with that.

He moves to a refrigerated glass display, grabbing a wooden plate on which a steak sits, leaking some juice.

APPRENTICE BUTCHER (CONT'D)
You havin' dinner with Jen again?

He wraps the steak in the butcher's paper, tying it with a string knot. The meat inside SQUELCHES.

RORY SUTHERLAND
You've always liked working here, right?

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
Yeah, I don't mind it, boss.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Then do me a favor and stay out of my business.

Apprentice Butcher stops, and turns, looking concerned.

APPRENTICE BUTCHER
I didn't mean anything by it. But, seriously boss, don't take any offense, but everyone's worried about you. You're still not quite yourself, and that's okay, it's only been a few months --

Rory's face twitches, suddenly changing. A shadow appears in the corner of his eye and mouth, and he LASHES OUT, PUSHING Apprentice Butcher into the display. He falls over, his back landing on the steaks and staining red.

Rory wordlessly grabs the wrapped meat and leaves.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT - PAST

Rory sits across from a woman, JEN (40s) at a table. Their meals have just arrived - a salad for her, a steak for him. Violin music plays.

JEN
Looks good!

RORY SUTHERLAND
Yes, it does. The steak would look even better if it was from my shop.

She laughs. Rory hesitates, and pulls out a third chair at the table.

RORY SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
Let's just give her a second to order.

Jen is puzzled, and looks at the third chair.

JEN
There's no one there.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Oh, I'm sorry. It's just a little tradition I have these days. I wait for Judy to order, and then we start.

Jen puts down her knife and fork, closing her eyes.

JEN
Rory, we have to talk about this at some point. If we're going to go ahead with us, you need to move on from some things. I know you'll always be in pain, and that's normal and I'm fine with it, but --

Rory's expression shows him shutting off. He's not listening. Jen sees this, and starts eating in silence.

EXT. TRAM STATION - DAY - PAST

A happier Rory stands at the same station on a bright sunny day, long past. Near him is a little girl, JUDY (7) in a yellow raincoat, playing imaginary hopscotch.

RORY SUTHERLAND
What ice cream are you going to get?

JUDY
Umm, double chocolate with sprinkles.

RORY SUTHERLAND
With sprinkles? Jeez, that's quite the order.

JUDY
Please, daddy!

RORY SUTHERLAND
Ok, sprinkles you shall have.

The SCREECH of the tram approaching. Judy jumps and plays merrily, a little too close to the edge. On her wrist is the yellow bracelet. She takes it off, flinging it in the air and jumping to catch it...

Beside her and Rory, the Man with Piercings rushes up, in an aggravated hurry...

And accidentally BUMPS JUDY.

The girl falls forward. The tram is close. Rory's face turns, and as his body moves slightly to react, WE CUT TO:

INT. TRAM - DAY - PRESENT

Rory sits with his briefcase. He takes out the bracelet, examining it with dead eyes. The SCREECH of the tram arriving at terminus breaks his daze. He sees something in the midst of the crowd of passengers - a GIRL IN A YELLOW RAINCOAT.

The crowd of People all rush to get out at once as the doors open, including The Girl. Rory sits up abruptly, quickly closing his case and moving to pursue her as she is lost in the hurry. He drops the bracelet without noticing.

INT. TERMINUS - CONTINUOUS

Rory walks out into the terminus hub, searching for The Girl he saw. He soon stops, realizing he has forgotten something, hitting him like a gut punch. He turns back in desperation, but the tram is already gone.

MAN WITH PIERCINGS
Did you drop something?

The Man with Piercings stands there, holding the bracelet. He is smiling, a faint light at the corners of his mouth.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Oh, yes, thank you.

He takes it, slipping it over his own wrist. A pause as they both regard each other.

RORY SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
Do I know you?

MAN WITH PIERCINGS
No, I don't think so. But we've both taken the same tram.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Right...are you sure I don't know you?

MAN WITH PIERCINGS
Now I remember. We were both at the station a few months ago, but we didn't end up taking that tram. We took today's, though.

The Man with Piercings leaves. Rory is bewildered, frightened. On cue, he sees The Girl again, jumping a distance away from him in the busy terminal.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Wait!

He rushes after her...she continues jumping and running away, GIGGLING, down an adjacent terminal. Rory tries to keep up, but there are too many People to push past - their words are a jumbled murmuring, with unclear faces.

Around the corner of the terminal, she continues running through the masses down a flight of stairs. Rory tries to keep up, twenty feet behind.

Down the stairs, she rushes out into the daylight, giggling louder. Rory pursues.

EXT. BACK OF TERMINUS - DAY

The Girl is nowhere to be seen. Rory looks around, shielding his eyes against the harsh light, breathing heavy. Garbage is strewn on the ground around him. There are no more People outside. Violin music plays.

Rory steps over the garbage as he searches for where she went. His foot bumps something, and he looks down - a bloodstained yellow raincoat in the midst of all the trash.

Reaching down, he tries to grab it, only for a force to knock him to his knees.

Screaming, Rory touches his ankles, where his Achilles tendon has been SLIT OPEN. The Girl looms over him, her hair now a ghastly white. Her lips are black, her eyes bulge from her head in a freakish stare. Her right arm hangs limp at her dislocated shoulder.

RORY SUTHERLAND
Judy?

RORY'S POV: His gaze lowers from her unblinking face, down her arm. And in her hand, the hook for meat.

A final SCREAM.

FADE OUT.