

RACHEL SHEPHERD: MOTHER OF NONE
by
(Jay Elle and Marielle)

(Based on the forthcoming novel by
Jay Elle)

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RACHEL SHEPHERD: MOTHER OF NONE - TEASER

EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC - PRE-DAWN

SUPER: "Baffin Island, Northern Canada - Valentine's Day"

A DOGSLED slices across a vast, frozen landscape, fourteen CANADIAN INUIT DOGS pulling in tight formation.

RACHEL SHEPHERD (early 30s), athletic, striking, rides with quiet confidence.

The only sound: Rachel's voice, loud, off-key, joyful.

The song: "Tequila Kiss" by Jay Elle, plays loud in her wired earbuds.

RACHEL
(singing along)
... I'm leaning for the kiss and
it's just pure bliss, I finally get
to taste all the salt, all the salt
there on your lips, from your
tequila kiss, tequila kiss...

The sky is deep navy, stars freckle above. A silver halo of dawn climbs the horizon.

Suddenly, RADIO STATIC. Then:

RADIO: MAN VOICE (V.O.)
(urgent, crackling)
Dash here. I found it, Zaid!
Syringes- just like the intel said.
You were right... The Inuit lied...
(beat, rustling)
Most of these syringes are... old.
Like... Nazi-lab old... Sealed in
wax. And there are Japanese
markings too... I'm in the right
place... And some... new labels...
VE and numbers... Someone's been
back here... I'm sending you
coordinates now... Something's
moving...
(beat)
Wait-wait...

A deep GROWL cuts through the static.

Then: a ROAR. Massive. Inhuman.

A SCREAM begins - then STOPS.

Silence.

EXT. DOGSLED - CONTINUOUS

Rachel jerks upright. The radio's dead.

She yanks out her earbuds pulling on the wire.

The music fades out and dies.

She grabs the radio mic.

RACHEL

Hello? Are you okay? Where are you?

Nothing.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Puppy in a basket! What the hell was that?... Sorry, Jay Elle. Sing-along postponed...

(beat, murmuring)

Old Nazi lab... Syringes? Japanese markings?

Her eyes rake the horizon.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(dry)

What a way to start the day... I was thinking lips, real ones. Kissing at last... maybe even love... Should've known, just salt... again... always salt.

EXT. DOGSLED - CONTINUOUS

Rachel stands behind the dogs, tall, focused.

A body-worn camera sits on her chest.

Another on her helmet.

A TRANQ SIDEARM rests on her hip.

Her Arctic suit is sleek, custom-cut.

It's light. Reinforced. Ready for anything.

INT. KATE'S OFFICE - VASTAN SECURITY STATION - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

SUPER: "Previous Night - February 13th"

Rachel dressed in a bulky, down-filled, puffy, overbuilt, expedition-grade outfit.

KATE, Early 30s, short blond hair, sharp, teasing.

KATE

(laughing at Rachel's outfit)

You're not riding a dogsled in that thing. Not unless you want the dogs to die laughing.

RACHEL

I'm thinner than I've ever been. The fabric's not heavy. Just fluffy... It's technical gear. Rated for negative forty... You didn't give me much time to prepare... I was in the Amazon rainforest when you and your Vastan Energy execs started blowing up my phone, begging for me to come up to the Canadian Arctic and take shots for their PR campaign... I ordered from Amazon from **THE** Amazon, does that even count as a pun? Anyway, this was the only thing Prime could get to me in time.

KATE

I apologize for the rush. Vastan Energy operates like most corporations: they sit on their hands for weeks, then demand everything yesterday. The higher the stakes, the dumber the deadline. That's the Vastan way.
(a beat, suddenly softer)
Just... Don't end up resenting me for this trip, okay?

Kate gives Rachel a once-over, smiling.

KATE (CONT'D)

I'm sure your outfit is warm. That's not the issue...
(sizing her up)

(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)

You look like the Michelin Man and the Doughboy dancing cheek to cheek. Even if they were polite enough to look the other way, those poor dogs would still collapse trying to drag your overstuffed ass across the tundra. You'd catch every gust of wind in that get-up. You can't slow the dogs down, Rachel. Speed could save your life.

Rachel turns to the full-length mirror.

She blows out her cheeks, then tilts her head side to side.

RACHEL

Tell me again... what party did you go to where you saw the Michelin Man and the Doughboy dancing cheek to cheek?...

Rachel shimmies a little in place – a mock-sensual salsa move, boots squeaking faintly on the office floor. She winks at Kate through the mirror.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

What happens in the igloo stays in the igloo?

(sighs)

Alright then. What do you suggest?

Kate hands her a new outfit – sleek, black Arctic gear. Insulated but tailored. Reinforced. Nearly impervious. James Bond meets Q Branch. And it shows.

KATE

Here... Designed by James Bond and Q Branch while downing martinis mixed by Giorgio Armani.

Rachel peels off her outer layers. Underneath: red lace underwear. Elegant. Not standard-issue.

No longer hiding what the Army had left behind. Scars that ran like old roads. Tattoos that looked like they might still be speaking. New scars too...

Kate leans against a table, watching.

KATE (CONT'D)

I see you've ditched the tactical granny gear...

(grinning)

Tomorrow's Valentine's Day.

(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)

Did you manage to book one of the three eligible bachelors on Baffin Island for a date? Spill.

Rachel doesn't look up right away.

She unzips the Arctic suit, runs her fingers along the inside seams.

Then glances over her shoulder, smiling.

RACHEL

Kiss but don't tell. Wasn't that your motto? Who said it was only one of the three bachelors? Who said bachelors?

Rachel steps into the suit. The fabric hugs her frame like it has been tailored for her alone.

KATE

Now that's better. Arctic Emma Peel...

Kate smirks, tosses Rachel boots, low-profile, lace-free, with magnetic fasteners and clawed traction soles.

KATE (CONT'D)

For ice. And impact... expect lots of both out there.

RACHEL

Are you still referring to my Valentine's Day plans? Is that what passes for dating around here? I hope the ice is in a glass and the impact is when dancing cheek to cheek.

KATE

Let's discuss Arctic romance later... over a tequila. Still your favorite? It's hard to find up here, but I have a guy. SAMUK. He owns the sled rental place. He can get anything...

RACHEL

The one across from the inn? I almost killed one of his customers today. Nearly ran over a guy who forgot his receipt. Sorry, I'm not used to driving on ice. Your truck is fine.

Kate raised an eyebrow, half-amused.

KATE
I've got all sorts of insurance on
that truck. No worries.

She returns to handing over the new gear.

Gloves, touchscreen-compatible, reinforced knuckles, tight at the wrist, matte leather with a flicker of steel thread across the seams. Not built just for warmth. Built for control.

KATE (CONT'D)
Raise your arms.

Standing behind her, Kate wrapped a utility belt around Rachel's waist, a modular, magnetic-clip system holding a multi-tool, spare batteries, a flashlight, and a collapsible thermal blade.

Kate's hands falter. The belt slips from her fingers and clatters to the floor.

She crouches quickly, face suddenly level with Rachel's waist.

In the mirror, their eyes meet. Rachel arches an eyebrow.

RACHEL
Is Emma Peel making you nervous?

KATE
(rolling her eyes)
I've killed cuter.

Kate stands up and secures the belt around Rachel's waist, a little too tightly.

Finally, wraparound snow goggles with mirrored lenses and a comms patch on the side, more CIA than film maker.

Rachel stands in front of the full-length mirror, adjusting the fit of her new jacket. She removes the goggles and hands them back to Kate.

Kate steps back, sets the goggles on her desk, crosses her arms, admiring her handiwork for a few seconds.

Then Kate walks toward Rachel and comes up behind her, both of them facing the mirror now.

She adjusts the fabric over Rachel's shoulders, smoothing it down with practiced hands. Her fingers glide lower – pausing briefly at Rachel's hips – then return to the collar.

KATE (CONT'D)
Turn around for me.

Rachel turns, standing tall, at ease, reflexive, like a soldier on inspection.

RACHEL
How did you know this outfit would fit me so perfectly?

Kate fiddles with the collar. Straightens the sleeves.

KATE
I have a good memory. And I just saw you online in the Amazon... wearing very little, I might add... The Vastan execs got an eyeful. I figured the camera adds ten pounds. Did the math. Here we are.

Rachel smiles.

RACHEL
How is it possible that cameras still add ten pounds? With all the filters, avatars, and A.I. body swaps out there, you'd think someone would've invented a slimming camera by now... Then again, it would kill the body-tuning app market. This economy needs more apps, not less.

KATE
Please, look down for me Rachel... just for a sec.

Rachel tilts her chin down, eyes lowered. She doesn't see Kate's hand slide behind the collar, fingers slipping under the brand tag that reads: VASTAN.

Kate's fingers pause, just for a moment. A flicker of calculation behind her smile. Gone in a blink. Then she presses.

A soft, inaudible click like fabric shifting, nothing more.

Kate's fingers lingered. Then she stepped back, checking Rachel one more time.

Kate smiles. Playful. Innocent.

Rachel looks up.

RACHEL
Something wrong?

KATE
Not a thing... Now that's more like
it. Arctic Emma Peel... You look
like you're about to kick ass and
quote Oscar Wilde.

RACHEL
Let's hope it doesn't come to that.
I have no plans to get close enough
to a polar bear to kick its butt...
that's what zoom lenses are for...
(pause)
And I doubt the dogs want a lecture
on the human condition.
(smirks)
They might prefer: "The more I see
of men, the more I like dogs."
Was that Oscar Wilde? No... wait.
It was Germaine de Staël. The
French philosopher... I imagine
you've met a few French people
since you've been here?

Kate hands Rachel a handgun.

KATE
It's loaded with tranquilizer darts
soldier... in case your fancy
undies attract the wrong kind of
animals.

RACHEL
You don't mean French people?
(deadpan)
Les Français? Des animaux?

Rachel shrugs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Mais oui, les hommes, bien sûr.

Rachel delivers it with a perfect French accent, and a wicked
little smile.

KATE

Another conversation over tequila.
And I want to hear about the new
tattoos too... and the new scars...
and your meet-cute...

RACHEL

More like meet-crash...

Rachel's eyes open wide.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

That man was French! It's coming
back to me now. Monsieur Jacques.
That was what the rental shack
owner called him, Monsieur
Jacques... Do you know a Monsieur
Jacques Kate?

(thoughtful, looking up)

Tall, handsome. Smart eyes.

Kate returns to her desk. She glances discreetly at her
laptop.

A light blinks once. Then twice.

She looks up. Smiles warmly at Rachel. Just a half-second too
late.

KATE

Monsieur Jacques... Can't say that
I do.

(pause)

Nope.

Rachel smiles back.

RACHEL

I trust you with my life.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: "February 14th"

RACHEL

Leave it to Kate to dress me like
Emma Peel in the Arctic...

Rachel lifts the radio again.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Hello? Come in. You still there?

Silence.

Rachel steps off the sled and walks toward the front. The dogs sprawl out into the snow, stretching and relaxing.

She pulls off her helmet.

She unties her long dark hair, grown well past her shoulders since she'd left the Army five years ago. She shakes it loose, letting the cold air hit her scalp.

There is something effortlessly sensual about the motion.

A breeze stirs. The wind shifts direction, just slightly.

Somewhere far off, the faint groan of shifting ice. Low, hollow. Almost like a breath.

Rachel adjusts the camera mounted on her helmet, making sure it is still secure, and still recording.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(to the dogs)
There are more chips on this helmet
than in my army-grade laptop.

She rests her helmet on the sled.

She attempts one more time to reconnect with the mystery voice.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Hello? Hello? Where are you?

She tilts her head back, scanning the fading constellations filling the sky.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Valentine's Day. Of course. Even
the cosmos is showing off. Look at
them stars cuddling up in
constellations...

She groans, stretches, then—her boots slip.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Whoa! Puppy in a basket!

EXT. GROUND - CONTINUOUS

Rachel lands flat on her back, hitting the ice hard. Breath knocked out of her. The stars spin overhead.

RACHEL

Lying under the stars is not all
what it's cracked up to be...

(pause)

Happy Valentine's Day to me...
Just as soon as I can get back on
my feet.

(sighs)

As the saying goes, you've got to
sit before you can stand. Not as
easy as it seems around these
parts.

She squirms and slides, finally sitting up. Fourteen dogs stare at her.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Why are you laughing?!?
I wouldn't fall if I were on all
fours all the time!

She tilts her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Don't you even go there...

She winces and rubs her back.

A few of the dogs mirror her head tilt.

A distant creak echoes from the ice behind her.

She pauses. Listens.

Nothing. Just the dogs, watching.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Didn't realize my legs would be so
stiff from riding this long.

(to dogs)

Listen to me... I'm one of "those"
people now. Talking to dogs...

She shifts her legs, warming up. Stretches her arms forward, reaching for her feet.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

The nuns at the orphanage used to
talk to a dog named Pearly.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 She was left in a basket at the
 church door. The Church of Our Lady
 of Sorrows. Same as me.

BEGIN FLASHBACK - EXT. CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS - NEW
 YORK CITY LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT - 1991

SUPER: "New York City Lower East Side - 1991"

A weathered stone church looms in the moonlight. Wind gusts
 through empty city streets, carrying the scent of rain and
 old stones

A WICKER BASKET sits on the front steps. Inside: A NEWBORN
 BABY GIRL wrapped in a faded towel. No note. Just quiet
 whimpers. A muffled cry, not loud, enough to cut through the
 silence.

The heavy church doors creak open. A NUN, mid-60s, weathered
 and kind-eyed, in a black habit appears, startled. She bends,
 scoops up the baby, holds it gently to her chest.

From the open church door, a PART COLLIE PART AUSTRALIAN
 SHEPHERD PUPPY trots out of the church, tail wagging. It
 noses the empty basket. Then leaps in, settles, and stares up
 at the Nun, wide-eyed and panting.

The Nun looks from the baby to the puppy. Her expression is
 tender, confused, amused.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 I was left in front of that same
 door, in a basket too, or so the
 story goes.
 (pause)
 Different basket. That's how I got
 my last name: Shepherd. Pearly was
 part Australian Shepherd and part
 Collie.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC - CONTINUOUS

RACHEL
 Guess my mom and Pearly's mom had
 better things to do. And both owned
 baskets. I don't blame them. New
 York City. Lower East Side. 1991.
 The year Freddie Mercury died.

The dogs stay still, listening.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

The nuns said Pearly understood Bible quotes. She probably understood those better than I could. She certainly understood when I talked about my crushes. And she understood one word from the Bible for sure...

(smiles)

The Golden Rule. **Treat** others the way you want them to **treat** you.

All fourteen dogs perk up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Ah. "**Treat.**" Of course.

Rachel rolls onto her side, then pushes herself up onto all fours.

She lingers there a beat, grinning at the dogs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Told you! I'm good on all fours.

A low chorus of snorts and one perfectly timed sneeze ripple through the pack.

Rachel squints.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Don't even try to play innocent. That was sarcasm, and you know it... arctic sarcastic, times fourteen. Where were we? Ah... **treats.**

RACHEL (CONT'D)

I'm not your first Yankee girl. You've picked up some English.

She scratches one dog.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Still laughing at me?

They pant. She interprets it as laughter.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Pearly used to grin like that too...

(sighs)

All right. Who's going to help me up?

She laughs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Silly me. None of you are gentlemen.

She points to BLACK PAW, the lead dog.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You, Black Paw. I saw that wink.

BLACK PAW stares back. White coat, one black front paw. Leader.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You're the only name I remember. Thirteen to go. Not bad. Years and years of Catholic school and I can't name all the apostles either.

She stands, rubbing her backside.

She dusts snow from her pants.

She mimics a drill sergeant, finger pointed at the dogs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Go ahead.
(Emma Peel voice: crisp, arch, and unmistakably upper-class British)
Show me how long you can walk on two legs without falling on your fanny...
(Back to her regular accent)
Can you tell that I'm trying to be funny? Humor worked at boot camp... Wasn't that effective in the field... Real bullets coming at you have a way to turn a smile into a frown... That radio call we just received didn't sound like a drill...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Let me tell you doggies. You have it easy. The army, in the end, wasn't so different from the orphanage. Though the nuns didn't curse nearly as much as the soldiers. At least not in front of me.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What do you think guys? Should I
have become a nun? Care for
orphans?

She grumbles as she reaches for the bag of treats tucked in
the front of the sled, grimacing, still occasionally rubbing
her bruised backside.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(Emma Peel voice: crisp,
arch, and unmistakably
upper-class British)
Bloody ice... I'm afraid this Artic
mission is going to ruin my hair.

One of the lead dogs huffs, unimpressed. Clearly the treats
are not coming fast enough.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Emma would have done it all in
heels. And much faster. Without
tripping. Or spilling champagne.
Got it.

She feeds the dogs treats, one by one.

She stretches her back. Rubs it.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Forget ruining my hair. I'm going
to be bruised all over.

She addresses the dogs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
In my imagination, sledding meant
snuggling under fur blankets...
sipping champagne while someone
else did the hard work.
(lifts an imaginary glass
to the dogs. Emma Peel
accent)
If I must face danger, I'd rather
do it with bubbles.

She catches Black Paw staring.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I get it. I'm not impressing
anyone.

The rest of the pack appears equally unimpressed.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

You've all pulled worse. Cocky tourists, clueless influencers chasing likes, puffed-up hunters, couples trying to impress each other in sub-zero wind chill... That's soooo romantic. Bet half of them didn't last the day. Bet the couples didn't last the ride back. And me? Thirty-something. Still single... here on Valentine's Day... on a date with fourteen dogs... no champagne... And I'm the one **treating**... and bruising without any kisses to show for it...

The dogs? Still don't care.

She checks her GPS.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Fifty feet. That den should be close. Our pregnant mama polar bear should say hello any minute now... and maybe even some cubbies... I'd better get the equipment ready.

She looks to the snow-covered ridge.

A faint, wrong sound in the distance, like wind, with breath in it.

Black Paw perks up.

Then...

SUDDEN: A TERRIFYING, PRIMAL SCREAM.

The dogs snap to attention. Ears forward. Hackles up.

Rachel draws out her gun, pointing toward the sound.

CLOSE ON: RACHEL'S FACE

Her eyes go wide. A lifetime of instinct flashes across her features. Mouth dry. Breath fogs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Fried jelly fuck fish...

SMASH TO BLACK –
WITH THE
METALLIC SNAP OF
CLAWS ON ICE.

EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC – JUST AFTER THE SCREAM

A massive polar bear, foaming, blood-soaked as if something is leaking from inside it, charges Rachel and the pack.

It closes to within thirty feet, then abruptly rears onto its hind legs.

Another roar tears from its throat, raw, guttural, final.

Its mouth opens wide. Its eyes wild. A horrible stillness hangs.

A split second later, its chest detonates.

Blood bursts into the air like mist, then rains down over the mangled carcass, which crumples into the snow in a heap of shredded bone and muscle.

The dogs scatter in every direction, yelping, howling, kicking up snow.

BLACK PAW stands his ground. Silent. Ears forward. Watching the steaming remains.

His breath puffs slowly. No fear. Only focus.

Rachel has her gun raised pointed at the bear, but she hasn't fired.

RACHEL

Puppy in a basket! What the f...
was that?

Rachel glances at the gun in her hand, then at the dogs, stunned.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Wasn't me... I've got tranquilizer
darts in this puppy... gun I mean.
Not bullets... No bullets I know,
no barrage of them, could have done
that!

She stares at the steaming, shredded remains.

She looks at Black Paw.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You saw that coming, didn't you?
What are you, boy?

Black Paw doesn't move. Just stares – past her, toward something unseen.

She instinctively sniffs the air. No smoke. No chemical burn.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
It looks like a bomb went off
inside the poor thing... a silent
bomb. How's that possible? Manmade?
If it was, it wasn't made for
animals or humans to survive...

She holsters her gun.

She leaps onto the sled and snaps the reins. The dogs lunge forward.

She stops them at a safe distance from the bear's body. Rachel hops off.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
One treat is enough. Don't go near
the blood... I know it's
Valentine's Day. I hope you're
enjoying this date so far... Not
sure I am... But don't think you
can take advantage just because I'm
single.

She scans the dogs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You were laughing earlier. Don't
think I forgot. You're in the
doghouse. Wait here.

Body cam still rolling, she pulls out her phone and starts filming.

Her tone turns clinical, like a forensic pathologist.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
The head and paws say bear, but the
rest? Blood-soaked. Hardly any
white fur left. Almost like the
blood seeped through before the
blast.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Internal organs appear melted.
Liquefied.

Rachel kneels by the remains of the polar bear, filming and speaking into her phone and body cam.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
This almost looks like the bear was
wearing a suicide vest.

She continues documenting, professional but visibly disturbed.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
An extra-large vest...
(pause)
That's a lot of bear... Liquid...
bear.

Rachel squints at the steaming carcass. For a moment, she hears nothing but the ringing silence.

She looks around. Nothing.

Then...

BEGIN FLASHBACK - EXT. MARKETPLACE - NORTHEASTERN SYRIA - DAY
- 2015

SUPER: "North-Eastern Syria - 2015"

A crowded market, reduced to chaos. Smoke thick in the air. The remains of makeshift stalls smolder. Fruit and fabrics scattered through pools of blood.

Bodies lie twisted. SHREDDED LIMBS. FLAYED TORSOS. The aftermath of a bomb, fresh, brutal, silent now except for the distant wails.

RACHEL, in her mid-twenties at the time, stands in the center of it all, frozen in place. Her breath ragged. Smoke clings to her eyelashes. A tremor in her gloved hand as she stares at a burned child. She blinks back tears, trying to stay composed. The carnage overwhelms her.

A severed doll's arm lies nearby, coated in ash.

KATE, in her mid to late-twenties, Canadian flag on her uniform, surveys the scene with a cool detachment. A surgical calm. Her jaw clenched. Eyes scanning for movement. For threats. For something salvageable.

She doesn't cry.

Rachel and Kate's eyes meet across the wreckage.

Rachel: shaken. Open. Human. Raw. Barely holding it together.

Kate: unreadable. A wall. Granite. Already gone somewhere else.

Neither says a word.

They just stand there, two soldiers in the middle of a nightmare.

BACK TO SCENE

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC - CONTINUOUS

The wind whips sharply, jarring Rachel back.

Black Paw growls.

RACHEL
(murmuring)
Some things don't leave you... Do they? They just wait...
(back to narrating to the camera)
I'm moving in for a closer look.

She zooms in on the bear's head. Jaw slack. Frozen in a scream. Face contorted in agony.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Glass shard in the teeth. Rounded edge... looks like it came from a vial. Or maybe a syringe.

She steps back. She pauses her phone, but the body cam keeps rolling.

She pockets the phone.

The silence around her deepens.

A beat. The wind howls.

She glances at the dogs, ears flat, low whine.

None of them are moving.

Even Black Paw stays put.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Did I hear you guys say "You go
first Rachel"?
(murmuring)
What a surprise... When in doubt,
send the tourist...

Then she draws her gun and follows the blood trail toward the cave.

EXT. ARCTIC CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel moves slowly toward the cave, fog spilling from her breath. Every step is deliberate. Snow groans softly beneath her boots.

Near the entrance, she spots a single set of footprints. They descend from a ridge on the right, outside the cave entrance, uneven, like someone slid down partway before entering the cave.

Rachel continues her narration for her body-cam.

RACHEL
Someone came down this ridge and
entered the cave... before the bear
came out.

She glances at the dim horizon.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Sun's rising, but not doing much.
I'll need a flashlight.

She unhooks the flashlight from her belt, clicks it on and takes two careful steps past the entrance of the cave.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
The cave splits in two.

She scans the darkness inside the cave.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Right side's a narrow tunnel... It
ends in a tight cubbyhole.

She lowers her head slightly, gun aimed into the dark.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Left side opens into a larger
chamber.

She freezes, listening. Still close enough to shoot and bolt if she needs to.

A drip of melting ice echoes off the walls.

She doesn't move.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Let's hope this doesn't turn into a hand to claw fight... I should have prepared better.

Well... thanks for the gig, Kate. You forgot to mention a few things... like bear exploding... Is that what you meant when you said "Don't end up resenting me for this trip, okay?"... And tranq darts? Yeah, I'd feel better with real bullets right now... even if it means maiming the three Arctic's red-panty chasers you thought I might set a date with...

She shifts her weight. The snow pushed by the wind into the cave crunches loud beneath her boot in the silence.

Then, more to herself than the camera:

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(dry)

Vastan Energy wanted a wildlife filmmaker for their Arctic PR campaign. Hmmm...

"Make us look green," they said.

"Well... white," they laughed.

Cuddly bears. Moms and cubs...

INT. VASTAN ENERGY BRIEFING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A bright, sterile room. A wall screen shows satellite images of melting glaciers. Rachel sits stiffly at a conference table beside Kate, across from two VASTAN PR REPS in branded fleece.

The first REP is slick, rehearsed.

PR EXECUTIVE 1

We know that polar bears depend on a habitat that literally melts away as temperatures rise. They are perhaps the most vulnerable of any species given the changes that have been recorded lately.

PR EXECUTIVE 2

People should keep in mind that we don't want our installations and mines to be under water either. So, what's good for the bears is good for us... more or less.

PR EXECUTIVE 1

You see, even a one-degree rise in global temperature could raise sea levels by six or seven meters. That's twenty to twenty-three feet higher than today!

He beams.

PR EXECUTIVE 2

We're all in the same boat, so to speak.

Rachel's eyebrow lifts.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Mansplaining *and* metaphors. Impressive. A full-service briefing. I can't wait to see both of you guys in a row boat with a polar bear... A big one...

She glances at Kate, who looks like she's silently counting to ten.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Honestly impressed Kate hasn't strangled them with their own branded neck lanyards. IDs still attached for easy identification.

Kate gives Rachel a tight smile.

Rachel returns it. The room hums with tension wrapped in corporate politeness.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. ARCTIC CAVE - CONTINUOUS

RACHEL

So much for white and cuddly... I'm way off script...

Pause.

Blood smears the cave floor and walls, thick, glistening.
 Not even close to "cuddly."

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 (Aloud. To the camera. As
 if these might be her
 last words to Kate)
 Lotta red in here, Kate... lotta
 red.

Rachel peers deeper into the cave.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 In this situation, Sir David
 Attenborough would remind us that
 mother polar bears don't share
 dens. Except with their cubs.

She takes another slow, deliberate step.

She sniffs the air. Like a predator.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 No wolf pack wandered in carrying
 syringes. No yeti, either.

She follows the blood trail with her eyes.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 If there's something to fear...
 it's what's left of a very unlucky
 hunter.

She slips into a Lower East Side New York accent.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Not a creature was a stirring...

She grins.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Eeny, meeny, miny, moe... Follow
 the blood and... off you go.

Rachel drops to all fours and crawls silently into the left
 chamber.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 If only the dogs could see me
 now...
 (under breath)
 (MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
If anything, man or beast, comes
near the entrance... Heads-up,
boys. Treats for days.

INT. ARCTIC CAVE - LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Rachel straightens once inside.

She sweeps the chamber with her gun, quick, controlled,
automatic—just as the Army trained her.

But her breath is shallow. But too loud.

The bear. The scream. The blood trail.

They all press at the edges of her focus.

Her scan is textbook, until it isn't.

She moves too fast. Too distracted.

There's no one at her six.

And for once, she feels it. Still, she ignores the feeling.

She lowers her weapon slightly.

RACHEL
I'm used to carrying cameras now,
not guns... Even the tranq kind...
I document, that's all... And I
like it...

She exhales, trying to steady herself.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Becoming a soldier again isn't like
riding a bicycle. It's not a trail
by the beach. I might be in shape
to run... or to ride a sled,
barely... But survival? Am I ready
to kill again? Stay alive at all
cost? Different kind of fitness...

She pulls out her phone, activates the camera.

The flash flares, brief, harsh, just enough to illuminate the
cave.

The body cam catches it too.

She clips her flashlight back to her belt and begins
scanning.

She freezes.

A SEVERED HEAD lies next to a mangled body. The head partially wrapped in a balaclava and gas mask.

She looks.

She kneels, filming. She speaks for the record.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Severed head. Still partially wrapped in a balaclava and gas mask. Torn clean from the body beside it... Recently, from the look of it.

She moves closer, narrating clinically. Out loud, but mostly for the camera.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
White male. Blond beard. Mask torn in several spots... neck partially exposed.

She shines the light lower.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Torso and legs shredded. Claw pattern's consistent with... bear.

INT. ARCTIC CAVE - LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

She spots a broken syringe in the dead man's hand.

Carefully, she picks it up.

Inspects it. Turns it slowly under the phone's light beam.

Nearby—an open metal case.

Filled with identical syringes. Most sealed with wax. Etched with Japanese markings and swastikas.

Two newer ones stand out, unsealed, tagged, empty: "VE" followed by numbers.

RACHEL
Syringes. Filled with clear liquid. Looks like he removed one... deliberately... But not in self-defense.

She inspects the case more closely.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Most are sealed in wax. But two are
newer... tagged... "VE" followed by
numbers... empty.

She shifts her light, spots the corpse's outstretched arm.

Just beyond it: a machine gun.

A smashed radio-casing split like a dropped egg.

A broken flashlight, glass shattered.

Rachel exhales.

A beat.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Is this the man whose transmission
I picked up earlier?
(pause then soft,
personal)
Hello Dash...

She films with her phone. Eyes sharp. Movements precise.

She pans over the blood, claw marks, bear prints.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
This wasn't the plan...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
This gig was supposed to be a puff
piece. A glossy shoeshine for the
muddy boots of a mining consortium.
Caretakers of the Great North,
right?

She stands, scanning the wreckage with her phone and body cam
still recording.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Environmental responsibility.
Native partnerships. Cuddly polar
bears reclaiming ancestral dens...

She shakes her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Instead: dead bear. Dead man.
Blood... Lots of it... Syringes.
Broken radios.

She breathes in, trying to reset her nerves.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What's next? Becoming a soldier
again? Re-enlistment? Sure...
That'll go well.

Rachel continues to narrate for the camera.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Our headless man here opened the
container...and realized too late
the bear had him marked.

She glances toward the tunnel she entered earlier.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Bear either heard him... or smelled
him... From the next chamber
maybe...

She crouches again, thoughtful.

She frowns. Lowers her voice.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Or maybe mama bear came back from
an early breakfast... And he
thought the cave was empty?

Rachel slowly pans her phone camera from the cave entrance to
the shredded corpse.

INSERT - RACHEL'S VISUALIZATION (RACHEL'S POV -
VISUALIZATION/HYPOTHETICAL)

A MAN in white camo stumbles backward.

A SYRINGE clenched in his shaking hand.

A MASSIVE POLAR BEAR barrels toward him, mouth open, eyes
wild.

The man lunges. Jabs the syringe into the bear's mouth.

Too late.

The bear swipes, claws tear across his torso. Blood sprays.

The man's HEAD is ripped from his shoulders. It lands hard on the ground, balaclava and gas mask askew.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. ARCTIC CAVE - LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Rachel exhales, low, unsettled.

Her breath fogs in the cold air.

She squints at the carnage, voice quiet, almost incredulous.

RACHEL

But it wasn't enough. Not fast enough... Why would he think a syringe could stop a polar bear? Why didn't he go for the machine gun?

She stares at the severed head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Tore him apart... Ripped his head clean off.

She exhales, sardonic now.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Man with a tiny syringe versus polar bear. Call it a draw. Who would've thought....

(beat)

What kind of fried-jelly-fuck-fish cocktail was in that stinger?

She steps around the man's body, scanning the gear.

Her eyes fix on the white camo. The broken radio. The smashed light.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

White camo... But I don't think he was some lost hunter who just happened to stumble across a den.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Nope... he came for the syringes. A real hunter would've been way more careful.

She pauses.

The man's final words echo in her mind...

RADIO (V.O.)
...Syringes, just like the intel
said...

RACHEL
This man knew exactly what he was
looking for.

She moves deeper into the chamber, careful not to block her
body cam.

Her phone flashlight sweeps the cave.

Then...

THREE HUMAN FIGURES.

Seated, motionless.

Rachel jerks back.

Heart pounding. Breathing ragged.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Puppy in a basket!
(beat)
You scared the hell out of me...

She exhales, hands braced on her knees still holding the
phone.

Then straightens.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I told myself I was alone in here.
Dust, stone, silence...
Said it too fast. Too proud.

Beat.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I am definitely in need of
retraining...

INT. ARCTIC CAVE - LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Rachel takes a step closer to the figures.

Her phone light beam washes over the three seated figures.

She freezes.

CLOSE ON:

The limbs, stiff, unnatural. The skin, waxy, hollow, drawn tight over bones.

The eyes – long gone.

The mouths, open wide in what could be screams. Or gasps.

RACHEL

They didn't come in after me...
They've been here all along.

Her hand twitches toward her gun, but she doesn't draw.

She can't take her eyes off them.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(softly)

They're mummified... they've been
here a long, long time.

For a beat, everything stills. The cold feels deeper. The silence, older... ancient.

Rachel shifts, humbled. Slow. Reverent. A trespasser in a tomb.

A flicker of shame crosses her face.

She'd missed the figures earlier.

She had scanned the cave too fast. She was too loud. Too rattled.

She centers herself.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Get it together...

She raises her phone camera and focuses on the first mummy.

CLOSE ON: A MUMMIFIED WOMAN.

Knees bent, arms wrapped around a small bundle.

A BABY, swaddled tightly to her chest.

The woman's features are sunken, but traces of youth remain.

Asian heritage: soft cheekbones, a high forehead, and narrow, upturned eyes.

The child: heartbreakingly still. Shriveled. But whole.

Rachel swallows, then pans left.

A MAN sits opposite, slumped. One arm limp in his lap.

Skin like parchment.

Military-issue wool and leather cling to him in tatters.

Between the two:

FOUR LANTERNS, old-style, upright. Dust-choked but intact.

Barely any rust.

Frozen in time.

Rachel's face tightens. Breath catches. No words.

She lowers the light slowly, respectfully.

Then, returns to filming the man, woman, and baby.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Looks like syringe guy wasn't the
first to die in here. Not by a long
shot.

She turns away from the ancient bodies. Returns her focus to
the headless corpse behind her, Dash.

She pries the broken syringe from the man's hand and places
it back into the case.

She carefully places the two newer empty syringes marked VE
next to the other, older syringes.

She seals the case tight.

No markings on the case.

She checks the headless man's pockets. Empty.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

No ID. No paper. No money. No
phone... nothing.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Whatever's in these syringes, it's
nasty. Leaving them behind isn't an
option.

She sweeps the phone light across the shadows.

Two old backpacks. One's open. She crouches, opens it further.

Inside: another metal container. She lifts it out carefully.

Rachel opens the container. Inside: a row of syringes filled with dark fluid, sealed with wax. Same Japanese markings and swastikas. Her expression shifts, uncertain. Disturbed.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

More syringes. These ones filled with something darker... meaner-looking.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Judging by the wear, this pack probably belonged to the "bone" family, the couple with the baby.

She closes the container and tucks it back inside the bag, then puts the container Dash had taken out on top of it. Cinches the first backpack shut.

She opens the second backpack. A leather pouch on top. Another container beneath, also syringes. She slides it back in.

She hesitates before opening the pouch.

Old leather.

She opens it slowly, just documents. She unfolds a page.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Nazi cross. Japanese kanji. First paragraph's in German.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Not that I can translate much, but from my time in Frankfurt... yeah, it's German.

She flips another page.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

This one... might be Japanese.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Spent a few weeks in Japan filming around Fukushima. Picked up just enough to be polite. Hello. Goodbye. Thank you. My bow's decent... when my back cooperates.

She sets the documents aside.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Too many questions for now...
 Bedtime reading...
 (turning to the mummified
 man)
 Mind if I check your pockets?

She searches the pockets of the mummified man. Inside one of them she finds a wallet. Old cash. Canadian. American. Pre-war print. Coins. She rubs one clean: 1942.

She searches the Asian woman's pockets.

She squeezes the wallet in one of the backpacks.

She gathers the machine gun and the two backpacks.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 The mummies aren't going anywhere.
 Neither is the headless man...
 or his head.

Rachel switches on her flashlight and grips it between her teeth, wrapping her lips around it.

She tucks away her phone. Draws her sidearm.

INT. POLAR BEAR DEN - CAVE MOUTH - CONTINUOUS

Rachel crawls out of the left chamber.

She's dragging two backpacks behind her with one hand.

The machine gun is strapped across her back.

Her gun in her other hand.

RACHEL
 (muffled, through
 flashlight)
 What a day...

The flashlight in her mouth makes her sound like an amateur ventriloquist.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 (muffled)
 Short daylight hours up here... But
 damn, they're dense. Puts New York
 minutes to shame.

She stands.

She sets the backpacks down near the cave entrance.

Lays the machine gun beside them.

Removes the flashlight from her mouth.

She kneels. She stares into the right chamber.

She listens. Nothing. She exhales.

Then, back on all fours, she slips quietly into the chamber on the right.

INT. ARCTIC CAVE - RIGHT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Rachel crawls into the second chamber on all fours.

Once inside, she rises, shoulders lower, breath easier.

More at ease than she's been since entering the cave.

Gun in one hand. Flashlight in the other.

She scans the space with care.

Intimate. Her eyes sweep every shadowed corner.

RACHEL

Smaller chamber. Almost cozy. No
blood. No chaos. Just a few
mummified remains... A pair of
feet, boots still on, half-buried
in loose rock.

She pauses, sensing something subtle.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Little drafty in here...

She holsters her weapon.

She pulls out her phone. Turns on the camera light.

She clicks off the flashlight and clips it back to her belt.

She crouches beside the exposed boots, and takes a close-up video.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Strange... looks like the rest of
the body's buried under the rubble.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I'd guess this guy got crushed
around the same time the couple and
the baby died.

Her light sweeps wider. Something stirs.

She scans left.

A tuft of white fur twitches.

Rachel's hand darts to her gun.

Then halts.

Three tiny polar bear cubs, barely moving, eyes shut.
Sleeping.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(softly)
Well, hello there... cubs.

CLOSE ON:

Three tiny polar bear cubs, curled near the mummified booted
legs.

Fur like pale smoke. Breathing slow. Fragile. Alive.

Rachel's smile falters.

Replaced by something harder.

Not fear. Not revulsion. Just... life.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Some creatures are born knowing how
to survive. Others get dragged
along... Until they don't.

She kneels. Stares. Quiet.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
And sometimes... the kindest thing
you can do is show mercy. The kind
God forbids. But I heard it,
once... whispered in the prayers of
a few nuns... Mercy killing...

She blinks.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Still haven't figured out how to
live with that idea. Or most
others.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Feels like I've downed half the
 tequila on Earth...
 (sarcastic tone)
 With the most brilliant minds you
 could meet in a bar... and still...
 life and love refuse to sleep in
 the same bed.

She glances up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Why can't I be like the nuns?
 Believe the same things forever.
 Settle down. Period.
 (sighs)
 No tequila today. What a shame.

She eyes the cubs again.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Should I smother you now? Mercy and
 all that... But I don't know you
 well enough to say I love you that
 much... Not yet.

She shakes her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Yeah. Didn't think so. Let's go,
 fur balls...

She begins unzipping the top of her outfit.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 I'm not here to be kind. Definitely
 not nun kind. Maybe soldier kind...

She gathers the cubs, gently pressing them against her chest.

One stirs. Lifts its head. Drowsy. Then burrows deeper into
 her warmth.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Imagine the execs at Vastan Energy
 if I tried to explain... "Eternal
 sleep was the ethical choice." Or
 maybe: "I left the bear cubs in a
 basket outside a church."
 (beat)
 Haven't seen a church since I've
 been here.

She chuckles, dark and dry.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Kate would be pissed.

She pulls her coat closed, sealing the cubs inside.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Whatever happened here, eighty
years ago or thirty minutes ago,
these cubs won't make it on their
own.

(beat)
I'll take them.

Rachel crouches, the cubs nestled in her coat.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Thanks to Sir David Attenborough...
I know just enough to keep you
alive guys... At least until we
find you a vet.

She adjusts the cubs gently.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Rule number one: stay away from a
mama bear and her newborns.
(beat)
But mama's not a problem anymore...
sadly...

CLOSE ON: RACHEL'S FACE

A flicker of pain.

ANGLE - HER CHEST

The cubs squirm faintly, fragile and warm.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Sorry, guys. Bad news... you don't
have a mom anymore.
(beat)
That makes you orphans. Just like
me.

She looks down at them, her voice softens.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Good news... you're gonna be TV
stars. Internet sensations! If I
don't suffocate you first...
Accidentally...

She turns her flashlight on.

Puts away her phone.
One hand on her gun
The other cradling the cubs.
She crawls out of the chamber...
Flashlight clenched between her teeth.

INT. CAVE MOUTH - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel rises to her feet.
Cold air rushes her face.
She clips the flashlight back to her belt, slings the machine
gun over her shoulder, hoists the backpacks, and steps into
the daylight.
Gun raised, just in case.

EXT. CANADIAN ARCTIC - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel emerges from the cave, squinting into the dim
daylight.
She walks to her sled.
The dogs snap to attention. Ears up. Noses twitching.
They sniff the air, then her chest.
Curious. Alert. Ears pricked.
They smell what she carries.
Rachel glances down.

RACHEL

Yeah. I know. You smell the change.
(beat)
We've got company now.

She unzips her suit, carefully. One by one, she eases the
cubs from the warmth against her chest.
Their tiny bodies stir in the cold.
Noses twitch. Paws flex.
She clears a space in the sled.

Lays a sleeping bag deep in the well between the gear.

Gently, she nestles the cubs inside, tucking them close together, wrapping the bag snugly around them, leaving just enough space for air, keeping warmth, but leaving no room to jostle free.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

No flying lessons today... you've survived this long. You're riding first-class all the way back... Still, the ride gets bumpy... hang tight.

She secures the gear, backpacks, machine gun, on the sled.

Rachel climbs aboard and gives a soft whistle.

The dogs respond, pulling the sled in a wide arc around the blood-slick remains of the mother bear, then past the cave entrance.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(soft, to the cubs and the dogs)

We're not done yet... We still need answers...

She guides the team up the ridge on the right side of the cave entrance.

Following the trail left by the decapitated man.

Boot prints, scuff marks, etched into the snow.

The sled crests the ridge.

Then glides down the far side.

EXT. LOWER SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

The trail ends at a SNOWMOBILE.

Rachel slows the sled.

She dismounts the sled and approaches.

Pauses.

She checks her body cam.

RACHEL
(for the body cam)
Found what's likely the headless
guy's snowmobile. Same model I saw
at Samuk's rental shack near
Vastan's headquarters.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. ARCTIC ROAD - THE PRIOR DAY (FEBRUARY 13TH)- DAY

Rachel drives a hulking, white Ford F-150 Raptor through the snowy haze. The Arctic landscape stretches endless and blinding.

She approaches a SNOWMOBILE RENTAL SHACK, on her left, and a ROADSIDE MOTEL, opposite, on her right.

A man rushes out of the rental shack, waving a pink sheet of paper.

SAMUK
(yelling)
Monsieur Jacques! Monsieur Jacques!

Rachel's eyes flick. She looks at the man waving the pink sheet.

She loses track of the icy roadside.

She overcorrects.

INT. FORD F-150 RAPTOR - CONTINUOUS

RACHEL
Whoa! Coming from the Amazon to
this... I was still seeing green
when everything turned white.
(under breath)
I'm tripping.

She SLAMS the brakes. YANKS the handbrake.

CRANKS the wheel.

The truck skids sideways with a mechanical shriek.

EXT. ARCTIC ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A MAN in a dark coat, JACQUES, leaps out of the way. Rolls. Stops, lying just short of the front left tire.

Rachel stumbles out of the truck, shaken.

Jacques stands. Calm. Brushing snow from his coat.

RACHEL

Puppy in a basket! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to...

They lock eyes. Jacques smiles.

Something flickers.

A beat.

JACQUES

Puppy in a what...

Before Jacques can finish, SAMUK arrives, out of breath.

He thrusts the pink sheet toward Jacques.

SAMUK

(smiling)

Your receipt, Monsieur Jacques.

Jacques takes the receipt silently, nods, then walks off.

Samuk turns to Rachel, wagging a finger.

SAMUK (CONT'D)

Absolutely the wrong way to brake on ice. You lock your wheels, you slide. Then you can't steer. Then you kill someone. Or... yourself... Not as bad if it's just yourself...

Rachel just stares at Samuk, wide-eyed.

She pinches her cheek.

SAMUK (CONT'D)

You come rent from me lady... I'll give you a dog sled. Dogs do the braking. You don't kill anyone. You might still kill yourself... What is your name?

Rachel blinks.

RACHEL

Rachel...

She looks for Jacques all around. He's gone.

INT. FORD F-150 - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel climbs back in.

She glances once more at Samuk.

He waves with a smile.

SAMUK (O.S.)

See you soon Rachel! Come rent from
me!

Rachel forces a polite smile.

Waves back.

A beat. The engine hums. The white world ahead beckons.

She drives away. Slow and steady.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. SNOWMOBILE - CONTINUOUS

Back in the present.

Black Paw yawns a little loud.

RACHEL

(looking at Black Paw)

I wish we could all take a nippy...
not just yet.

Rachel studies the snowmobile as if seeing it anew.

She exhales.

Rachel begins a methodical search.

She opens the rear compartment.

Inside: a weatherproof black backpack.

She unzips it.

Inside: a walkie-talkie, a cell phone, a satellite phone, a small drone, a handgun, and ammunition for both the handgun and the machine gun the man had brought into the cave.

She checks another pocket. A clear plastic bag, passport and credit card inside.

INSERT - PASSPORT: The name reads "WOLF DASH."

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(smirking)
Wolf Dash... Great name... What's
your story, Wolf Dash? Or, Dash as
you used to call yourself...

She opens a side pouch and pulls out a folded map and metal compass.

She unfolds the map, studying it.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Old school. But considering how
flaky my GPS has been... not a bad
idea.

CLOSE ON - MAP

Detailed view of Baffin Island. Inset: Angna Mountain region. A red mark circles a point labeled in faded ink.

Rachel's nose crinkles.

She lifts the map closer. It's crowded with spidery handwriting in unfamiliar characters.

The paper is yellowed, frayed, edges soft with time.

It smells of old fuel and wet leather.

She begins to refold it.

VROOM.

A low mechanical hum in the distance.

The dogs perk up. Alert. Ears forward. Sniffing the air.

Rachel reacts quickly.

She grabs everything that looks useful from the snowmobile, several bags packed with supplies, including the man's pack she'd just searched.

Moving quickly and efficiently, she straps the cargo to her sled with brisk, practiced hands.

She brings a gloved finger to her lips, locking eyes with the team.

The dogs freeze. Silent. Still as stone.

Rachel listens.

Eyes locked on the ridge.

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING CAVE - DAY

Rachel climbs the ridge cautiously, staying low.

She reaches the top and flattens against the ice-crusting ground, scanning the horizon.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - ABOUT ONE HUNDRED FEET FROM CAVE - DAY

Eight snowmobiles carve across the snowy landscape.

They slow as they near the cave and stop roughly eighty feet out.

The lead RIDER lifts binoculars, surveying the terrain.

All riders wear white camouflage—identical to the headless man's gear.

Machine guns slung over shoulders.

Balaclavas. Gas masks. Ominous. Anonymous.

The LEADER points toward the cave entrance, just below Rachel.

BACK TO RACHEL

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING CAVE - DAY

Rachel is still as stone.

She doesn't flinch. Doesn't breathe.

Calculating.

RACHEL
(murmuring)
Puppy in a basket!
(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
That's a lot of firepower... Can I
keep you doggies and cubs hidden...
safe?

A beat.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Friend or foe? You don't shoot at
friends... usually... And not at
enemies unless you're sure you'll
walk away.

She watches the riders with hard eyes.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
But this isn't just about me.

FLASHES IN HER MIND:

The cubs, warm against her chest.

Her dogs, alert, loyal.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
If I go down, no one feeds you
treats doggies... you might even
eat the cubs... I'm it.

A grim smile never quite reaches her lips.

She steadies herself. Tightens her grip.

Gaze locked. Focus absolute.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
Whatever's coming... I have to
survive it.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - ABOUT EIGHTY FEET FROM CAVE - DAY

Two snowmobiles break from the group and head toward the
cave, engines low and deliberate.

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING CAVE - DAY

Rachel inches back from the ledge, body pressed to the ice,
staying hidden.

EXT. CAVE AREA - CONTINUOUS

The two snowmobiles slow near the body of the mother bear, engines humming. They veer around it without pause.

They stop just short of the cave entrance.

Two RIDERS dismount.

One of the riders, a woman JUJU, pulls off her gas mask and peels away her balaclava.

JUJU, Asian, late twenties, early thirties.

Sharp cheekbones. Jagged scars slicing across her forehead.

Head shaved smooth, revealing intricate tattoos that spiral over her scalp like fragments of a secret map.

JUJU
(shouting into the cave)
Dash?! It's Juju. Are you in there?

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING CAVE - DAY

Rachel's eyes narrow. The accent clicks. A quiet recognition.

RACHEL (V.O.)
Japanese... hmm.

EXT. CAVE AREA - CONTINUOUS

JUJU
Dash? We got your message... But you got cut off... You found the cave! That's great. Where are you? Did you find the stuff?

JUJU turns to the second rider, gesturing sharply with her weapon.

JUJU (CONT'D)
Go in. Go in. He probably can't hear anything in there.

The second rider nods and steps inside the cave, weapon drawn.

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING CAVE - DAY

Rachel watches Juju shout into the cave.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Cut off!... Oh, you're in for a treat, geisha lady... Dash poked... The bear sliced... And you? You brought gas masks and guns... Hope you packed scrubbing brushes and bath towels from the bath house... Though you don't strike me as the loofah and lavender bath salts type... I'd say I'm looking at foes. No doubt about it.

Rachel watches, jaw tight.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Time to go...

Rachel eases back from the ridge, slow and silent.

Ghosting away from the edge.

EXT. SNOWY SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

Rachel slides silently down the ridge toward her sled and cargo waiting below. Her breath rasps in the cold as she reaches the sled and climbs aboard, movements tight with urgency.

She pulls on her helmet.

The dogs, already sensing her intent, launch forward in sync, gliding across the icy terrain with effortless power.

RACHEL

(addressing the pack)

Let's try to circle wide... stay invisible, yeah?

A beat.

She glances down at the bundled sleeping bag nestled in the sled. A soft shuffle. A twitch of fur.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(addressing the cubs)

Hang in there, fur balls...

Eyes back on the trail. Focus razor sharp. No hesitation.

She guides the team along the mountain's curve, aiming to vanish behind the ridge.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Once geisha lady finds out Dash is
dead, she'll head for his ride...
same as I did.

INT. CAVE ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

JUJU steps inside, boots crunching faintly on bloodied snow.
Her breath clouds the cold air.

The cave is dim, sunlight barely filtering in.

JUJU
Where are you guys?

No answer. Just the moan of wind beyond the rocks.

She flicks on the shoulder-mounted flashlight, its beam
slicing through shadow.

She crouches low, muscles tight, preparing to crawl into the
left chamber.

Suddenly.

SECOND RIDER
(blurred in motion)
He's dead!

The SECOND RIDER barrels out of the dark, nearly colliding
with Juju. Panic in his voice.

SECOND RIDER (CONT'D)
Dash is dead!
(beat)
Decapitated.

JUJU jolts back, absorbing the words like a slap. Her
expression hardens.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The SECOND RIDER stumbles out into the open. He yanks off his
gas mask and balaclava.

Drops to his knees...

and vomits violently into the snow.

INT. CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

JUJU stands motionless. Still. Letting the silence settle.
The retching outside echoes faintly. Then stops.
She doesn't blink.

JUJU
(muttering, almost amused)
Dash headless...
(slight beat)
Well. I've got to see that for
myself.

She crouches and disappears into the left chamber.

INT. LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

JUJU ducks into the chamber, eyes adjusting to the dim.
She spots what's left of DASH, his headless body sprawled
awkwardly on the ground.
A raw stump where his neck used to be.
Blood, dark and clotted, crusts the ice.
She steps closer. Stares.
No shock. No grief.
She never liked Dash. Barely knew him. Enough to dislike him.
An outsider. A footnote.

JUJU
(softly, dry)
Guess you did get cut off... I
always liked you better quiet
anyway.

She backs out of the chamber, jaw tight. Eyes calculating.
She glances quickly at the entrance of the right chamber.
Listens. Nothing.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

JUJU steps out into the frigid light.

She taps her comm, switches channels with a flick of her glove.

JUJU
(into comm, flat)
Zaid, this is Juju. Dash is dead.
Decapitated. No sign of the cargo.
Cave's clear. You can move in.

A beat of static.

Then a low, cold voice replies:

ZAID (O.S.)
Coming over.

In the distance—ENGINES REV.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - CONTINUOUS

ZAID guns his machine forward.

The others fall in line, roaring over the ice toward the cave like a white swarm of wasps.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - BEAR REMAINS APPROACH - MOMENTS LATER

A snowmobile glides to a silent stop near a wide patch of blood-soaked snow.

The others idle behind in formation, engines humming low.

ZAID (40s, severe, controlled) removes his gas mask and balaclava.

He doesn't dismount.

From his seat, he studies the massive, torn carcass of the mother bear.

His face betrays no shock. Only recognition.

As if this outcome had always been part of the plan.

A beat.

Then—he nods.

Not horror. Not grief.

Maybe... respect.

Or something colder.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - FLASHBACK MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A BRIEFCASE changes hands. Zaid receives it from a faceless intermediary, gloved and anonymous.

A BURNER PHONE screen lights up: *HECTOR THE VECTOR - INCOMING CALL.*

ZAID seated at a table in the back meeting room of the inn, just across from Samuk's rental shack near the Vastan Energy headquarter. Maps, Nazi documents, and vintage military photos are spread before him.

WIDER ANGLE reveals the full team of RIDERS seated around the table, silent. A moment of eerie stillness.

ZAID addresses the group with quiet gravity.

ZAID

We've been hired by a man known as Hector the Vector. No questions. No backstory. Just orders. He thinks the last vials of a Nazi-Japanese bioweapon are buried around here on Baffin Island.

Pause.

ZAID (CONT'D)

The pay is generous. The reward for successful delivery? Even better. If local folks get curious, just say that we're hunters. Dismiss.

JUJU raises her hand.

Zaid looks at her, nodding.

JUJU

That's it?

ZAID

That's it.

ZAID calls out DASH.

He hands a GPS unit to DASH.

ZAID (CONT'D)
(addressing DASH
separately)

You are the best scout for this terrain. Be careful. What we are looking for is volatile. Dangerous. Don't touch anything. Report back when you find something.

DASH nods, zips the GPS into his parka.

DASH
Should I start where the Inuit told us to go? You think he was lying to us, don't you? You want me to go west instead, right?

ZAID
The Inuit is lying. Stick to the ridge as planned. But trust your instincts. If anything looks unnatural, it probably is.

DASH exits the room.

EXT. INN PARKING LOT - DASH mounts a snowmobile.

DASH throttles the engine and rides away.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. BEAR REMAINS SITE

Zaid sits astride his snowmobile, gazing at the blood-soaked remains of the polar bear.

ZAID
(murmuring)
Dash found it...

He restarts his engine. Leads the team toward the cave.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE

They arrive.

One by one, the other snowmobiles fall silent. A hush settles over the ice.

Zaid stays seated. Still. Eyes closed.

Not meditating. Not praying.

Thinking.

Planning.

And everyone knows – when Zaid closes his eyes, you wait. You don't speak. You don't move.

BEAT.

What they don't know is what's playing behind those closed lids.

INT. BASEMENT CELLAR – NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A dim, claustrophobic space. Stone walls stained with time and blood.

A SINGLE LIGHT BULB swings from the ceiling. Its flicker casts long, shifting shadows.

A MAN, mid-30s, bruised, bound to a metal chair. Gagged. Blood crusts the side of his head.

ZAID stands in front of him. Calm. Clean. No rush. A cloth rolled neatly beside a tray of tools.

He gently peels the gag from the man's mouth. The man gasps for air, trembling.

ZAID

I've always admired the ingenuity humans bring to killing. But I prefer quiet methods to loud ones. Death comes for everyone, my friend. Why make so much noise delivering it?

He circles the man, slow and measured.

ZAID (CONT'D)

Peace and quiet... those are luxuries. Few get to experience them. Fewer still get to hold onto them. One should at least pursue silence whenever possible.

He crouches down, eye-level now.

ZAID (CONT'D)

Fuck peace... Kill them all. But kill them quietly, so you can hear them scream.

He plucks a small blade from the tray.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 There's something about final
 sounds, animal or human, that stirs
 me. You feel it too? I bet you
 do...

He holds the blade delicately, like a violinist adjusting a
 bow.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 Dying has its own music. Not the
 racket of killing machines, but the
 real sound: a soul tearing loose. A
 one-time aria. Always unique.
 Always... beautiful.

The man whimpers. Zaid smiles.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 Men. Women. Children. Animals.
 Doesn't matter what language they
 grew up speaking. When death
 catches their breath, their voices
 carry weight... If they don't cheat
 and die quietly in their sleep.

He tilts his head.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 Or before I'm finished.

He sets down the blade. Picks up a small recorder.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 Sometimes I imagine modern pop
 divas gasping out their last
 notes... Breathy, broken
 crescendos. Something operatic.
 Something primal... My personal
 compositions... Or, collaborations?
 Like Captain and Tennille? That's
 not modern... Lady Gaga and Bruno
 Mars?

He hits play. A soft pop song begins. A woman's voice sings
 about heartbreak.

Zaid grimaces.

ZAID (CONT'D)
 Three-minute therapy sessions.
 Throat fry and teary-eyed
 (MORE)

ZAID (CONT'D)
affectations... Diary
confessions... Do you keep a diary?

He turns the recorder off.

ZAID (CONT'D)
I don't believe in conspiracy
theories. I am the conspiracist,
and never theoretically. I write
them. In blood, not ink.

The man moans softly.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Still... no matter what playlist I
make, the algorithm feeds me
this same sorrow. Over and over.
Confessions meant for private
rooms, not broadcasts. Ever wonder
why that is? Something in my online
profile?

He leans close.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Don't die on me just yet, my
friend.

Zaid presses a vial against the man's cheek. Cold. Glass.

ZAID (CONT'D)
I want to hear the last screams of
pop stars, politicians, preachers,
algorithm programmers, and all
their followers... One vial. One
rupture. Everyone singing the same
song... Maybe one day...

He steps back.

ZAID (CONT'D)
And I *cannot wait* to hear it.

He picks up the blade again.

ZAID (CONT'D)
But first... let me hear *you*.

The man screams.

SMASH TO BLACK

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE

ZAID
(softly, to himself)
Maybe one day... Indeed.

JUJU steps into frame behind him, watching.
She keeps her distance. Uneasy. Reading him.
A beat.

Zaid opens his eyes slowly.
It's safe for Juju to talk.

JUJU
Maybe one day what?

A beat.

ZAID
Some voices deserve to be
silenced...
(beat)
After one long... last scream.
(beat)
If what we are looking for is real,
if Hector the Vector is right, then
lots of voices will let out their
last screams... very soon.

His face gives nothing. A dead ringer for Omar Sharif,
mustache and all, but without the romance.

Shark eyes. Still. Empty.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE

Zaid Exhales.

JUJU
Well... Dash is definitely quiet
now. Don't know if he screamed...
But his radio got smashed...

ZAID
Then we're making progress...
(Beat)
Tell me more.

JUJU

Dash Is inside. Decapitated. No bags, no containers.

(beat)

We heard him talk about syringes on the radio. Didn't see any.

Zaid and Juju walk over to the bear's mangled body.

JUJU (CONT'D)

Dash fed the bear whatever was in the syringe and some glass too. You can see glass in the bear's jaw.

(Juju points to the bear's jaw)

Dash was taken by surprised. Didn't use his machine gun or handgun. I didn't see any weapons in the cave. Just the broken radio.

EXT. BEAR REMAINS SITE - CONTINUOUS

Zaid and Juju stand over what's left of the bear, jaws cracked, throat torn.

Zaid kneels beside the carcass. Calm. Curious.

ZAID

Powerful weapon... Bravo Hector...

He pulls a plastic evidence bag from his coat.

Juju, uneasy, removes the syringe shard from between the bear's teeth. Hands it to him.

Zaid inspects the shard like a museum artifact. His eyes flick from bloodied snow to the bear's remains.

ZAID (CONT'D)

(delighted whispering)

The bear fought back. Beautiful.

JUJU

(muted, disturbed)

Yeah... beautiful.

Zaid keys his radio.

ZAID

(to radio, flat)

Someone bring me a jerry can. And a flare.

He stands.

Moments later, a RIDER arrives with the supplies. Zaid takes the can without a word.

He steps toward the grotesque remains of the bear, half-melted, bones jutting through what's left of the skin.

He empties the gasoline without hesitation. The stench thickens.

ZAID (CONT'D)
There should be no trace... We'll
have more chances to test the
weapon again soon.

Zaid pulls the flare, strikes it.

FLASH.

The flare ignites. He tosses it onto the pile.

WHOOMPF.

A wall of flame bursts upward. Snow melts around it, sizzling.

Zaid watches, expression unreadable. Face blank.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Let's hope fire is enough... At
least what destroyed the bear is
not airborne... Or we would all be
lying dead on the snow making our
own bloody puddles.

A beat.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Hector doesn't tolerate loose ends.

Flames dance in Zaid's eyes. The fire roars.

He turns away, leaves it burning.

He looks around.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Where is Dash's snowmobile?

Juju freezes.

She hadn't thought to check.

She turns slowly, scanning the snowfield.

Realization sinks in.

EXT. CAVE - NEAR RIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Zaid and Juju move back toward the cave.

The rest of the team waiting for their orders, their boots and snowmobiles have churned the ground into slush.

Any clear tracks are long gone.

ZAID

(firm)

Too many prints... Where did you park your ride Dash?

He pivots, eyes scanning the terrain.

Zaid strides toward the ridge flanking the cave. He stops, crouches.

ANGLE - THE SNOW

TRACKS IN THE SNOW - one set of large boot prints heading down.

A second, smaller pair, going up... and down.

Beside them, the distinct twin grooves of a dogsled trail.

Around it: paw prints, still sharp in the snow.

Zaid's eyes flick over the trail, calculating.

ZAID (CONT'D)

(reading the ground)

At least ten dogs. That team's got speed.

JUJU

Whoever it is... They're not hanging around.

Zaid leans in. Squints at the boot impressions.

ZAID

(squinting at the prints)

Small feet. Light, but precise. A woman... Trained. Not a tourist. Not a fool.

He straightens slowly.

His eyes follow the sled trail up the ridge.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Who are you, lady? Where are you
going?

He smiles—cold, deliberate.

ZAID (CONT'D)
I think you took something that
belongs to us.
Hector won't like it.
I bet you'll sound great when I
send you off.
(beat)
Even better than a pop diva
would...

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE CAVE - DAY

Zaid climbs the ridge, scanning as he ascends.

At the top, he halts, eyes locking on something below.

DASH'S SNOWMOBILE.

He lifts his BINOCULARS.

THROUGH BINOCULARS - A barren, windswept landscape. Empty.

Wind rises, whispering across the ridge.

Zaid pans the horizon. Methodical. Precise.

In the far distance clouds gather. The sky darkens.

A BLIZZARD is forming. Still hours out. But coming fast.

ZAID
I've seen sand storms end lives in
deserts...
(pause)
But snow? Snow's a different kind
of killer.

He narrows his gaze.

QUARTER MILE OUT - MOVEMENT. Subtle. Blurred by snow.

DOGS. Low and fast, charging over a rise.

A SLED follows. Slashing across the tundra.

Straight into the teeth of the storm.

 ZAID (V.O.)
 Ballsy move...
 (pause)
 Lady.

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE CAVE - DAY

Zaid spins and charges down the ridge, urgency tightening every step.

 ZAID
 (shouting)
 Juju! Dash's snowmobile is on the
 other side of the ridge. It's
 probably been cleaned out... Check
 it anyway. Bring it into the cave.
 Strip the GPS. Sweep the cave
 again. Thoroughly.
 (beat)
 Then seal the cave. Explosives. No
 one gets back in. Ever.
 (beat)
 Catch up with us after.

He turns to the rest of the squad.

 ZAID (CONT'D)
 The rest of you, with me.
 (beat)
 We're going hunting.

Zaid mounts his snowmobile - flicks the throttle.

The machine ROARS.

The rest of the team follows, snowmobiles roaring to life.

They ride standing - knees bent, bodies swaying with each rise and fall of the terrain.

The machines growl like a pack of steel-jawed wolves, surging after their prey.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - DAY

Rachel's sled crests a new hill, moments from vanishing down the far side.

Behind her, ROARING ENGINES.

She throws a quick glance over her shoulder. The riders have spotted her.

RACHEL
(shouting to the dogs)
Okay, doggies! Lots of treats if
you get us far away from here...
fast. Some mean people are on our
tail.

She glances down at the three cubs, tucked into one tight, trembling ball of fur.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(softly, to the cubs)
Don't worry, cubbies. You'll be
just fine.

One cub, the littlest, the one that barely opened its eyes back in the cave, lifts its head. It blinks at her... then burrows back between its siblings' legs.

Rachel looks forward toward the swelling white cloud on the horizon.

She doesn't know if she's steering into the storm, or if the dogs are leading her there.

Either way...

It's the only option.

She crouches low, bracing for the CRACK of gunfire.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SYRIAN VILLAGE - TWILIGHT (YEARS EARLIER)

A war-torn landscape. Sand and smoke drift across a scorched village. Explosions echo in the distance.

RACHEL (mid 20s, combat fatigues, rifle slung over her shoulder) stands frozen amid crumbling ruins. Her face streaked with dust and sweat.

A blast. Screams. Chaos.

A RADIO CRACKLES.

COMMANDER (V.O.)
Fall back. Evacuate the team.
Civilians are non-priority.

Just ahead – a shattered doorway. Inside, a mother clutches her two children, eyes wide with terror.

Rachel's grip tightens on her weapon. Her jaw clenches. Her boots stay rooted.

Another burst of gunfire. ISIS fighters advance in the distance.

COMMANDER (V.O.)
(harder now)
That's an order, Sergeant. Move.

A beat.

Rachel turns. Walks away. She doesn't look back.

CUT TO:

INT. BARE ROOM – NIGHT – TWO YEARS LATER

Rachel sits alone. Her back to us. A bottle of tequila on the floor beside her. Empty glasses. Silent ghosts.

RACHEL (V.O.)
I obeyed... And I regret it. Every
day.

CUT TO:

INT. MILITARY TRANSPORT – IN MOTION – NIGHT

Rachel stares out a small window into blackness. Her reflection fractured across the glass.

RACHEL (V.O.)
Some days, it hits like shrapnel.
Other days, it just sits there.
A stone I can't cough up. Or
swallow.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY – DAY

A military burial in progress. Rachel stands apart from the group. Her expression unreadable. Inside, chaos.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 They say it's for the greater good.
 The many. The few.
 Orders. Strategy. Noble ideals.

CUT TO:

INT. EMPTY CHURCH - NIGHT

Rachel sits alone in the pews. Fingers wrapped around a flask. Bible open in front of her. Not reading.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 Each soul is a universe.
 But isn't it easier to live by
 orders? No questions. No doubt.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLAR WASTELAND - BACK TO PRESENT

Rachel crouches low on the sled, eyes fixed forward, breath fogging in the frigid air. The distant storm front looms, growing closer.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 I followed orders.
 And now I live with the ghosts.

She clutches the sled's handlebar tighter. Her jaw locks with quiet fury.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 Not this time... The woman and her
 child were mine to save... It
 didn't happen... The cubs and dogs
 are mine to protect.

She pulls her radio from inside her coat. Keys the mic.

RACHEL
 (into radio)
 Mayday, mayday... This is Rachel
 Shepherd. Traveling southwest from
 polar bear den... I'm in serious
 danger. Being pursued by multiple
 armed riders... Repeat... mayday...
 Does anyone copy?

Only STATIC. No voice answers. Just wind.

She lowers the radio slowly. Eyes rise to the storm.

A beat.

She leans forward on the sled. Whispers, almost to herself...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
OK, let's do it my way...

They ride. Into the white.

EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The wind HOWLS, sharper now—cutting through Rachel's goggles like icy blades.

She squints into the gusts, steering blind.

CRACK—GUNFIRE.

A staccato burst rips through the storm.

Rachel ducks by instinct, but doesn't flinch.

She's been here before.

RACHEL
(to the cubs and dogs)
Ignore that sound... I've lived
under it... I've sent it back.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - SAME TIME

Zaid rides hard, flanked by his men—snowmobiles tearing across the white wasteland.

ZAID (V.O.)
Odds of hitting her? Low.
But pressure makes people hesitate.
(to the riders over the
radio)
Keep shooting guys...

RAT-TAT-TAT.

Machine guns rattle, intimidation, not precision.

AHEAD — Rachel keeps moving. No flinch. No fear. Just forward.

ZAID (V.O.)
She's not hesitating...

Zaid yells into the wind.

ZAID
(shouting over the radio)
Flank her! Two right! Two left! The
rest on me!

The riders split, cutting fast, carving separate paths through the drifts. A choreographed hunt.

INT. ZAID'S MIND - INTERCUT FLASHES

THE STORM FRONT BUILDING

Clouds thickening, folding like curtains drawn across the sky.

ZAID'S EYES squinting through the light. Measuring distance. Misjudging time.

ZAID (V.O.)
Miscalculated... What looked like
hours is collapsing into minutes.

EXT. SNOWFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Zaid twists his throttle harder.

ZAID
(to the team)
Faster guys! She'll vanish if the
storm swallows her first!

EXT. STORM FRONT - CONTINUOUS

The BLIZZARD charges in, wide as a mountain, roaring like a living thing. A wall of white, swallowing land and sky.

ZAID (V.O.)
And the only one who knew Arctic
weather? Dash Wolf... Now in two
frozen pieces. Maybe... Just
maybe... Juju found something worth
salvaging.

INT. CAVE MOUTH - CONTINUOUS

Juju drags DASH'S SNOWMOBILE into the cave entrance.

She clips on her shoulder flashlight, flips it on.

With a thud, she smashes the snowmobile's GPS using the butt of her machine gun.

She digs through the compartments. Rough. Focused.

JUJU
(frustrated)
Nothing...

She gets down on all fours and crawls into the left chamber.

INT. CAVE LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Juju crouches beside DASH'S decapitated body.

She rifles through his pockets.

JUJU
(mutters to Dash)
Nothing... Nothing left in your snowmobile... Nothing on you... You got robbed blind... Dash.
(beat)
By a woman too... I don't know what's most embarrassing? Getting your head torn off by a bear twice your size... or getting robbed blind by a woman?
(she pauses thoughtful)
If it's any consolation, Zaid's after her... You know Zaid... He won't stop until she's tied to a chair listening to one of his tirades... Right before she screams her lungs out...

She stands, sweeping the flashlight across the chamber.

Her beam lands on something in the shadows.

MUMMIFIED BODIES. Ancient. Curled. Undisturbed.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(to the mummies)
Well... Hello there...
Kon'nichiwa...

She steps closer. Calm. Mildly amused.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(addressing the mummies)
I didn't see you when I came in
here to visit Dash the first
time... Seeing him in pieces got me
distracted... I was looking for
syringes, bags, containers... You
wouldn't know where I could find
such things?

She smiles, tilts her head, observing them, as if weighing a
joke she decides not to say aloud.

She steps closer to the woman's corpse, studying the
features.

JUJU (CONT'D)
Japanese... maybe... Hello,
sister...

She kneels beside the woman. Gently, almost reverently, she
begins checking the woman's pockets, then shifts to the
man's. Same process.

Suddenly, she freezes. Her eyes rest on the bundle in the
woman's arms.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(murmurs)
What are you carrying?

She leans in.

A beat. Then a faint smirk.

JUJU (CONT'D)
If you were my kid, you'd be useful
at your age.

She starts unwrapping the mummified infant, slowly, without
hesitation.

Tucked deep in the folds of the ancient cloth, she finds a
small, tarnished bracelet.

She turns it over in her palm.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Kato... maybe.

She flips it.

A string of engraved numbers.

Juju pockets the bracelet, expression unreadable.

She stands up and faces Dash's body.

She raises a middle finger while staring at Dash's severed head.

JUJU (CONT'D)
Goodbye, Dash... You're in good
company.

She glances around once more.

She crawls out of the left chamber.

She enters the right chamber.

INT. CAVE - RIGHT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

At first glance, nothing.

Then Juju spots something: mummified feet, boots just visible beneath a pile of rocks.

She kneels.

She begins clearing debris, legs, hips, torso. Cautious.
Experienced.

A small landslide rattles loose. She freezes. Listens.
Silence.

She exhales, then continues.

A corner of a metal BRIEFCASE emerges. Her pulse quickens.
She clears more and finds a partially buried BACKPACK.

Checks the mummy's pockets, nothing.

She glances up. The cave's ceiling looks unstable now. No
time to dig more.

Juju backs out into the main chamber, carrying both the
briefcase and backpack. She sets them down.

Part of the right chamber's ceiling collapses. A cloud of
dust comes out of the right chamber into the cave entrance.

JUJU
(to the dust)
Following me?

INT. CAVE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Juju grabs a SATCHEL OF EXPLOSIVES from beside Dash's snowmobile.

With practiced precision, she lines the cave walls - detcord weaving through cracks like a spiderweb, tight and efficient.

She pulls out her phone, syncs the detonator. Final check.

She keys her radio.

JUJU
(into radio)

Zaid, this is Juju. Getting ready
to blow this pop stand.

A short burst of static. Then...

ZAID (V.O.)
(over radio)
Hold off. Big storm inbound. We're
still in pursuit, but if we get
buried out here, you might be the
one doing the rescuing. Stand by.

Juju looks disappointed.

Juju exhales. She eyes the metal briefcase and backpack she laid out earlier. The chance to redeem herself... delayed.

She mutters to herself.

JUJU
(quietly)
I should've thought of searching
for Dash's sled... Zaid's gonna
think I'm losing it...

She crouches beside the items, tapping a finger against the case.

JUJU (CONT'D)
Dangerous to disappoint Zaid...
Never ends well... Though
sometimes...

FLASHBACK - INT. SYRIAN SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

A dim, windowless room - more dungeon than clinic. Blood stains the floor. Bare lightbulb overhead swings slightly.

A WOMAN – mid-20s, BOUND TO A CHAIR. Her face is barely recognizable: swollen, bruised, eyes nearly shut.

ZAID stands before her, calm, focused. He carves a slow symbol into yet another one of the most sensitive places on her body, meticulous, surgical.

JUJU watches silently from the corner. Unflinching.

The woman gasps, barely audible – a whisper in Zaid's ear.

Zaid pauses. Long beat. Then... he wipes his blade clean.

He turns to Juju.

ZAID
 (addressing Juju)
 See that she lives. Close the
 wounds.
 (addressing the woman)
 You're in my debt. Never forget.

Zaid exits. Juju steps forward. She kneels beside the woman, begins untying her.

JUJU
 (soft, almost playful)
 I'm surprised you're still alive.
 I'm only a good nurse when patients
 are really, really nice to me.
 (beat)
 Will you be nice to me?

The blond woman nods weakly.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CAVE – ENTRANCE – CONTINUOUS

JUJU crouches over the detonator. Still. Eyes unfocused, caught in memory.

She exhales, low. Then...

JUJU
 (softly, to herself)
 You always remember the ones that
 get away... Not too hard when so
 few ever do...

A beat.

She steadies her hand. The moment passes.

She reaches for her radio again.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(into radio)
You got it Zaid... Holding off on
blowing the pop stand.

EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - WHITEOUT - CONTINUOUS

The storm is no longer distant, it's here.

A wall of airborne snow, an avalanche without terrain,
swallowing the world in blinding white.

ZAID stands braced on his snowmobile, visor down, radio
pressed to his ear.

Static hisses and cracks.

LEFT FLANK (RADIO)
Do you see the dogsled? We've lost
visual!

RIGHT FLANK (RADIO)
Same here. Total whiteout.

Zaid peers into the chaos – the spot where Rachel had been
only moments ago.

Gone. Swallowed whole by snow and silence.

He waits. Calculates.

Then keys his mic. Lots of crackling and interruptions.

ZAID (RADIO)
She's still out there. And she's
got what we came for.
No package, no pay. No bonus.

A long pause.

The wind screams, wrapping around him like a live wire.

He exhales, controlled, cold.

ZAID (RADIO) (CONT'D)
Dig in and wait. No one moves till
I say. She's out there somewhere...
Buried in this blizzard like the
rest of us. When it breaks... we
hunt.

His gaze sharpens, fixed on the endless white, like a predator who knows the storm's not the end... just the pause before the kill.

BACK TO RACHEL

EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - DOGSLED IN WHITEOUT - DAY

A blizzard screams across the frozen expanse.

WHITE-OUT CONDITIONS. Snow slashes across the frame, erasing the horizon. The world is wind and ice and motion.

RACHEL hunches low, gripping the sled. Her goggles are crusted with frost.

Her DOGS push forward-driven, powerful, led by BLACK PAW, who barrels through drifts like he's running home.

Rachel leans into the sled, senses sharpened. She can't see what's behind her.

Just white.

Just wind.

RACHEL (V.O.)

Kate warned me this might happen.
"The weather can turn fast up here.
Be careful."

She lowers her head and urges the dogs forward, disappearing into the storm.

FLASHBACK - INT. SECURITY OUTPOST - NIGHT

A dim, cold room, its walls reinforced. A desk lamp glows softly, casting shadows over RACHEL and KATE as they lean over a topographical MAP glowing on Kate's tablet.

KATE

(gesturing)

You know this used to be all fur territory? Inuit communities trading pelts, mostly fox and seal, with whalers and European settlers.

FLASH INSERT - 1920s:

A sled pulled by dogs glides across the tundra. Fur bundles exchanged by gloved hands. Smoke curls from a seal-skin tent.

RACHEL

(nods)

Right. Pre-mining days.

KATE

Fur trade died out after World War II. Too many animals driven off.

Too many people moving in.

(pause)

Mining took over. Zinc, silver... even uranium.

FLASH INSERT - 1960s:

Helicopters drop equipment. Massive drills churn rock. A silver mine pulses with machinery. A caribou herd scatters.

KATE (CONT'D)

By the sixties, the machines were bigger, the drills louder. Families moved into prefab housing. Dogsleds gave way to snowmobiles. All in the name of progress.

FLASH INSERT - 1970s:

Aerial view of a prefab settlement. Bright snowmobiles parked outside metal trailers. Smoke stacks rise. Kids in parkas play between fuel drums.

RACHEL

And the wildlife?

KATE

Gone. Migration routes collapsed. Caribou vanished. Bears started denning farther north.

RACHEL

So much for untouched wilderness.

KATE

Not even close. This land's been picked at since the forties.

Kate looks up from the screen. Rachel meets her eyes.

A long beat.

Silent recognition. Years ago: Syria. Dust. Heat. Dawn patrols. Gear checks. Unspoken trust in the dark.

RACHEL
 (slight smile, wistful)
 Just like the old days. You and me
 prepping a patrol.

Kate nods, then swipes across the map, a line of faded dots
 across the Arctic.

KATE
 No kidding. From sand dunes to
 snowdrifts.
 (pause)
 Then came the Cold War. NATO built
 a chain of radar stations across
 the Arctic, coast to coast. They
 called it the DEW Line.

RACHEL
 DEW?

KATE
 Distant Early Warning. A nervous
 system for the West. Steel nerves
 stretched across frozen
 nothingness, watching for Soviet
 bombers flying over the North Pole.

FLASH INSERT - 1950s DEW STATION:

Radar dishes spin under aurora-lit skies. Soldiers in parkas
 sip coffee in a snow-buried command bunker. An oscilloscope
 pulses. A TYPEWRITER clacks.

Rachel traces the dots across Baffin Island.

RACHEL
 So there were stations out here? On
 Baffin?

KATE
 Still are. Most are abandoned, but
 they're standing. Antennas,
 bunkers, collapsed towers, frozen
 in time. Some repurposed.

RACHEL
 Repurposed how?

Kate hesitates. Looks up.

KATE
 A few are used by researchers,
 climate teams, even survival
 schools. But some?

(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Hard to say.

Rachel studies the map. The dots now feel like secrets.

RACHEL
 You think someone's using them?

KATE
 I think if you needed to hide something... Equipment, people, records, it's easier when everyone assumes the place is dead.

Rachel studies the digital map glowing on the screen.

Kate taps a point near the Arctic coast.

KATE (CONT'D)
 Oh! Almost forgot. That one's being turned into an Arctic zoo, believe it or not.

RACHEL
 (an eyebrow lifts)
 A zoo?

KATE
 Some billionaire thought a luxury resort in sub-zero temps would appeal to the extreme sports crowd. Construction started, but in winter? Total standstill. Skeleton crew's up there, just holding down the fort.

Rachel squints, dry amusement creeping in.

RACHEL
 Extreme sports? You mean some hedge fund cowboys trying not to freeze to death teeing off on a tundra golf course? Or is it Safari on Ice, shooting at polar bears from heated igloos? Billionaire's bullseye?

Kate glances up. Dry. Deadpan.

KATE
 (dry)
 Doubt you'll need to go that far for your bear footage.

(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)
Unless you want shots of bored
animals pacing behind plexiglass.
Not exactly what Vastan wants for
their wilderness rebrand.

RACHEL
(smirking)
At the rate the ice is melting,
that place might be competing with
a Mediterranean Club Med by summer.

The dogs lie nearby, bored, already familiar with the
terrain.

Black Paw yawns.

Kate chuckles softly. Then Rachel's tone shifts.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You've explored the region?

KATE
Some. I didn't bang on cave walls
waking up bears, but I've done
patrols. Part of keeping the mining
sites secure.

She turns the screen so Rachel can see the mapped terrain.

KATE (CONT'D)
But the dogs I picked for you?
They've been everywhere. With me,
with their master, Samuk, and loads
of visitors. They're weirdly good
at finding smelly dens.

Rachel listens, engaged now.

KATE (CONT'D)
I figured you'd want a sled team.
Quieter than a snowmobile. Green.
More dependable, too. If you get
caught in a blizzard and your GPS
craps out... trust the dogs.
They'll find shelter.

She pauses, remembering.

KATE (CONT'D)
They've got a thing for the old fur
trading outposts. Somehow they
always find 'em. What's left of 'em
anyway.

FLASH INSERT - MODERN DOGSLED:

Black Paw sniffing the ground beside crumbled stone ruins. A rusted trade scale. A faded fox pelt tangled in driftwood.

BACK TO:

RACHEL
(staring at the map)
I hope they're as good as you say.

KATE
They are. But trust your gut, too.
Out there, instinct's the only
thing that doesn't freeze.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - WHITEOUT CONDITIONS - DAY

The sled carves forward, swallowed by the storm.

RACHEL (V.O.)
Kate was right. I'm not steering.
Black Paw is.

Wind shrieks. Snow blasts sideways. Rachel can barely see past the front of her sled. It's a full-body assault.

BLACK PAW charges ahead, head low, nose slicing the wind. He moves with certainty, every step deliberate, every muscle alive with instinct.

Suddenly, the sled slows... and stops.

Rachel peers into the swirling white. Hesitant. Squinting.

RACHEL (V.O.)
What's the plan guys?...If I step
down and you take off on me, I'll
never catch up.

Through the haze, BLACK PAW loops back. The other dogs follow, forming a precise U-turn, almost choreographed.

Black Paw presses against Rachel's legs, WHIMPERING. He meets her eyes.

RACHEL
You want me to follow you?

She unhooks his harness. Steps off the sled, boots sinking into the drift. She looks around... Nothing but white.

She checks behind her. Looks around.

BLACK PAW trots forward, then stops, turns his head to make sure she's coming.

Rachel follows.

A few feet ahead—something buried.

She brushes snow away, revealing the top edge of a wooden door. Rough handle. Weather-worn.

She grips it. Shoves her shoulder against it.

THUNK.

THUNK.

CREAK.

The door groans open. Darkness inside.

RACHEL (V.O.)
Shelter. Thank you, boy.

Black Paw waits beside her, still, calm.

RACHEL
Let's go and bring everybody in
before the storm eats us alive.

INT. ABANDONED MINE - ENTRANCE - DAY

The wooden door CREAKS open wider. Snow spills across a stone floor.

Rachel steps in, helmet light sweeping across the space.

A wide corridor extends forward into shadow. Rail tracks peek through patches of snow.

RACHEL
(softly)
Not a cabin... A mine.

Rachel backs out looking at Black Paw walking at her side.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(still to Black Paw)
You are way more loyal than the
past lovers I still remember Black
Paw... Don't get too clingy.

(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I wouldn't want to break your
heart...

Black Paw tilts his head.

Rachel smirks. Just a little. Then turns serious again as the wind wails behind her.

EXT. MINE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Rachel and BLACK PAW emerge back into the storm.

She guides the sled dogs forward into the shelter.

INT. ABANDONED MINE - MOMENTS LATER

The dogs, still harnessed, pull the sled into the mine.

Rachel wrestles the heavy door closed. She braces it with broken wooden beams.

RACHEL
Time for treats, everyone!

The dogs perk up. Tails wag. They crowd around her.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Double rations.

She watches them eat, a quiet moment of earned calm. Then she turns to the sled where the bear cubs still sleep.

Rachel removes her helmet.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What do bear cubs eat? Not dog
treats, that's for sure.
(beat)
Milk? Maybe... condensed milk?

She rummages through supplies. Finds a small carton, squints at the label.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
No bottle. No teat.

The cubs stir slightly in their bundle, three fuzzy lumps wrapped tight in a sleeping bag.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You don't look like it's dinner
time anyway.

She gently lifts the cubs from the sled and lays them on a padded bed of cloth. They nestle deeper into the warmth, still asleep.

Rachel grabs the satchel and the stack of documents from the sled.

She sits cross-legged on a folded sleeping bag, placing the cubs on her lap.

One by one, the dogs curl around her, creating a ring of warmth.

Black Paw settles by the door, vigilant.

Rachel opens the satchel and begins to read.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Time to read...

Her flashlight fades a little. She shakes it. The full light comes back.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - WHITEOUT APPROACHING - DAY

Juju stands just inside the cave's entrance, eyes locked on the roiling blizzard devouring the horizon.

The wind rises. The world begins to vanish.

She brings her snowmobile inside the mouth of the cave, parks it next to Dash's. She pulls a tarp from her snowmobile.

She steps back, slowly, retreating into the shadows, carrying the tarp and the metal briefcase she found in the right chamber with her.

INT. CAVE - LEFT CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

Juju kneels beside Dash's remains. She covers the body, head and all with the tarp.

Dust floats down around her in the still air.

She turns to the mummified corpses, then sits beside them.

She opens the metal case she had found in the right chamber earlier.

She flips through the contents, yellowed paper, brittle with age. German text. Diagrams.

A page flashes the unmistakable swastika.

JUJU
(quietly, to herself)
Definitely Nazi.

She digs deeper—pulling out another cluster of documents.

Her fingers pause.

KANJI CHARACTERS. Japanese.

She freezes, eyes narrowing.

A flicker of recognition.

JUJU (CONT'D)
(softly)
No way...

She separates the Japanese pages, spreading them carefully.

A faint RUMBLE echoes from deeper in the chamber.

She looks up. Listens.

Nothing.

Just her breath. And the silence of the dead sitting next to her.

She glances toward the mummified infant, swaddled in decay.

A long beat.

Then, quietly, she begins to read.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE TUNDRA - DAY - WHITEOUT

A sea of white chaos.

Snow slashes sideways. Wind howls. Nothing is visible. The world is noise and ice.

INT. ZAID'S TENT - DAY

The tent shudders violently, fabric flapping like sails caught in a storm.

Inside, ZAID sits cross-legged, back straight. Still. Unshaken.

Cold LED light casts sharp shadows across his face.

The radio CRACKLES—just static.

ZAID
(into radio, calm)
Juju. Come in.

Only STATIC answers him, a long, serpentine hiss.

ZAID (CONT'D)
(smiling slightly)
Haven't heard a cobra in a while.
Almost wish it was nearby.
I'm ready for hot sand.

FLASH IMAGE - DESERT MEMORY

A cobra slithers over golden dunes. Heat haze ripples in the distance.

The world is sunburned and dry.

BACK TO ZAID - INT. TENT

A moment of remembered warmth.

A faint smirk flickers, then vanishes.

He glances toward the tent flap. His men are sheltered elsewhere, resting.

He reaches into his jacket and pulls out a folded MAP wrapped in waxed canvas.

Unfolds it carefully. Spreads it across his lap.

His gloved finger traces a ridge line, slow, deliberate.

ZAID
How did you get here, lady?

He tracks the route northward. He follows a ridge line, eyes narrowing.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Where would you go next?

He sits in stillness. Thinking.

ZAID (CONT'D)
You didn't just run. You're heading
somewhere... Into a storm.

The wind SCREAMS outside, battering the tent.

FLASH IMAGE - ROOFTOP MEMORY

A man leaps off a rooftop, silhouetted against muzzle
flashes.

Gunfire erupts. He vanishes into the dark.

BACK TO ZAID

His voice lowers.

ZAID
People jump off rooftops... Rather
than let me catch them.

A pause. His eyes sharpen.

ZAID (CONT'D)
Is it possible... you know who I
am?

His gaze hardens. Focused. Predatory.

Calculating.

SMASH TO:

EXT. ARCTIC RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The storm rages on, consuming everything.

INT. ABANDONED MINE - DAY

RACHEL lifts her head slowly. The three BEAR CUBS are bundled
against her, fast asleep.

Around them, thirteen SLED DOGS lie curled in a protective
circle. Black and white fur, twitching ears, low whimpers in
the dark.

She looks to the mine entrance.

Black Paw remains standing, still and silent, a sentinel in
the shadows.

RACHEL blinks. Rubs her eyes. Refocuses and goes back to reading.

Dim light flickers from Rachel's phone as she sits cross-legged, poring over a stack of German documents. Her breath is visible in the cold air.

Her breath puffs visibly in the frigid air.

She reads aloud addressing her entourage.

RACHEL

I recognize a lot of the words
guys. Enough to get the gist. But
the rest... chemical formulas...
dense jargon... way beyond me.

Rachel flips through the documents. The paper is yellowed, brittle.

Some photos are faded, others disturbingly clear. Emaciated prisoners, bodies twisted in agony.

FLASH IMAGES - RACHEL'S POV (INTERCUT):

A HUMAN FACE, hollow-eyed, mouth open in a silent scream.

BARBED WIRE fencing in the snow. Snow is falling.

SURGICAL TOOLS laid out on a tray.

A DOGTAG with faded initials.

A SYRINGE, half full of dark liquid.

Her OWN REFLECTION in her phone screen, pale and ghostlike.

BACK TO SCENE:

Rachel swallows hard. Her fingers hesitate on the next page.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Human beings can do that... to each
other. That's the world we live
in...

She pauses, her eyes fixing on a phrase in German underlined in red: "ultimative Ergebnisse."

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(reading in German)
ultimative Ergebnisse.
(back to English)
(MORE)

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Ultimate results... Whatever that
 means.

She glances at her pack, remembering something.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 The syringes, half clear liquid,
 half dark... Of course, the new
 ones, no wax, empty, tagged...

FLASH INSERT - THE SYRINGES IN THE CAVE. TWO MARKED "VE."

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 These papers talk about three
 components. A third liquid?

She frowns. Skims the dense text.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 If only I could access the
 internet...

Another underscored phrase in German catches her eye:
 "Zerstörung der Blutzellen."

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 (in German)
 Zerstörung der Blutzellen.
 (back to English)
 Destruction of blood cells...

She finds a DIAGRAM of the human body, faded red arrows
 pointing at organs, cellular structures.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 One compound melts organs from the
 inside... targets cell linings,
 bypasses the body's defenses.

She turns the page. Flinches at PHOTOS, decayed flesh,
 necrotic tissue.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Just like the bear.
 (looking down at the cubs)
 Sorry guys... good thing you're
 asleep.

Next page: notes on the darker liquid, transmissible through
 water.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

The second doesn't even need to be injected. Just a trace in water supplies...

FLASH IMAGE — A glass of water on a lab bench. A drop of dark liquid diffuses slowly.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Why syringes then? Smuggled the liquid in a body? And then passing it on like a cold?

She skims a page full of warnings. BOLD text.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Alone, not airborne. But together... they become aerosolized. Under the right conditions.

She leans back. The shadows feel heavier. She stares into the dark.

The silence presses in.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

And what about the two new syringes tagged VE? What does that mean? What do the numbers mean? Why are they empty? There is no mention of them in the documents... they looked brand new anyway...

Rachel rubs her eyes. The screen of her phone glows dimly in the dark. Her posture is stiff. She exhales, weary.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Enough for now guys. More than enough. Those men out there aren't going to stop. Not until they find us.

She looks toward the entrance.

BLACK PAW doesn't move. Still watching. Still waiting.

INT. MINE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

BLACK PAW sits motionless beside the door — alert, silent, a sentinel carved from shadow.

The WIND HOWLS outside.

The door SHUDDERS on its hinges.

Snow BLASTS through the cracks in short, violent gusts.

Rachel stands up and walks toward Black Paw, her movements quiet and deliberate.

RACHEL
(softly)
Thank you Black Paw.

She kneels beside him and runs a gloved hand over his head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
As long as the wind keeps howling
through that door... we're safe.
(pause)
But not for long, I fear.

The wind falters.

The rattling ceases.

Stillness settles like a held breath.

Rachel turns her head, instinct rising.

Even Black Paw tenses, ears up, body rigid.

INT. MINE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Rachel CRACKS the door open.

A BLINDING WHITENESS greets her – silent, wind-swept, still.
A wall of snow leans against the entrance, heavy but holding.

Above it, just enough space for a clear view of the horizon.

Rachel scans the vast, frozen silence.

RACHEL
(low, to herself)
The worst is over.

She glances down at BLACK PAW, now standing beside her, ears forward, watchful.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What do you think?

Black Paw snorts softly.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
They're gonna be back on our tail
soon.
(smirks)
No pun intended...

Her eyes linger on the blank horizon just a moment longer.
She eases the door shut.

INT. MINE - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel kneels beside her sled, checking the dogs' harnesses.
She strokes one gently, focused. Thoughtful.

RACHEL
(in a low murmur)
In between deciphering chemical
death recipes... I've concluded
that we have the following options.

She tightens the straps on a supply pack.
Her hands move with calm precision.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Our hunters aren't locals. Kate
said there were few local folks up
here. But maybe... they've got a
guide.

She glances toward the tunnel, dark, then toward the outside.
The sun is coming out through the fading storm clouds.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
No trails survived the blizzard...
But as soon as the sky clears,
they'll be scanning the ridges. I'd
be a black dot behind fourteen
black and white dogs.

She glances down at her own gear, entirely black. She
mutters:

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Thanks, Kate...

She mutters to herself, a flicker of dry wit under the
stress.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Did Emma Peel ever wear a white catsuit?

(beat)

Wonder if Amazon Prime delivers this far north... I can't wait for drone deliveries to become a serious option... in all weather conditions... that's gonna be some drones...

She smirks faintly, almost laughs, but doesn't.

Back to work. Tension simmering just beneath the surface.

INT. MINE ENTRANCE - DOOR OPEN - CONTINUOUS

A bitter stillness. Muted light drifting in.

RACHEL holds her phone just above the snowpack, arm stretched out.

She watches the signal bar flicker... blink... then vanish.

She lowers the phone. Sighs.

RACHEL

(to Black Paw)

No luck reaching Kate again. The storm scrambles everything.

She tries again, raising the phone, shifting angles. Nothing.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Nothing. Not the security station. Not Kate's sat phone.

She glances down - LOW BATTERY WARNING pulses red.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Good thing you and the pack don't run on batteries...

(pauses, dry smile)

Yes. On treats! Got it.

BLACK PAW stands still near the entrance, alert, a statue with fur.

Rachel looks down at the mine rails, then into the yawning darkness.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Where do these rails go, huh?

She turns back to the sled. Gently tucks the sleeping cubs into a tighter cocoon of blankets.

Around them, the dogs lie curled, deep in post-storm sleep.

Rachel looks up again at Black Paw.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Keep guarding the door.

INT. MINE - RAIL TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

RACHEL walks cautiously, her flashlight slicing through the darkness in a narrow beam.

The steel rails glint faintly beneath her boots. Shadows stretch and warp with every step.

RACHEL
(soft, to herself)
Didn't Kate say the Vastan mining consortium took over some of the radar stations? Storage, she said. Extended rail lines underground...

She pauses, squinting down the tunnel. Takes another step.

A flicker of dry amusement.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
And one of those stations... getting turned into a zoo. A billionaire's snowbound vacation fantasy... Wild animals. In cages. In the Arctic.

She shakes her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Whatever happens to a brain once it realizes it has sled-loads of money?

She keeps walking. Deeper into the dark.

INT. MINE - DEEPER TUNNEL - LATER

Rachel trudges through the tunnel, her flashlight beam carving a narrow path through the dark.

She halts. The light catches the outline of a low, flat rail cart resting on the tracks.

She steps closer, runs a gloved hand along its edge.

RACHEL
Supply cart. Still on the rails.
Huh...

She runs a hand along the side of the cart, testing its sturdiness.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You look like you could handle a sled.

She crouches by the wheels.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Not bad... no rust. Let's see how you roll, chéri. Darling.

She gives it a solid push.

The cart glides forward, wheels humming with a low metallic rumble.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(murmuring)
Bet Black Paw and the doggies could pull this thing...

She walks beside it, watching the smooth roll.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
But what if the tunnel's blocked?
Or unstable? No one's been down here in a while.

She stops.

FLASHLIGHT BEAM reveals dust hanging still in the air—thick, undisturbed.

A silence like a tomb.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
If this turns into a dead end... no radio. No food. No way out.

She glances into the darkness ahead. Then back the way she came.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What would I feed the dogs? The cubs?

She closes her eyes. Breathes.

Calculating.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Outside? Try outrunning snowmobiles
over open ridges... with machine
guns rattling behind us?

A beat.

She opens her eyes.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
No way back the way we came.
Security station's on the other
side of the mountain.

Decision made, she turns.

Grabs the cart. Pushes it toward the entrance where the dogs
are waiting. Determined.

INT. MINE - ENTRANCE AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel works fast, gathering old planks scattered near the
rail tracks. She props them against the side of the cart,
forming a rough ramp.

She grits her teeth and heaves the sled up, muscles
straining.

THUD. The sled lands on the cart.

She secures it quickly with rope, then fastens the dogs'
harnesses to the cart frame, tight, even, efficient.

BLACK PAW steps forward, silent and steady. He takes the lead
position, eyes on the dark tunnel ahead.

RACHEL
(softly, to Black Paw)
How are you at seeing in the dark?

She casts a glance down the tunnel, pure black, the kind of
dark that swallows light.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Let's hope we end up out in the
sunshine soon.

She walks to the heavy wooden entrance.

Grips the handle.

CRACKS the door open.

A beam of cold white light slices into the gloom.

Outside: snow glinting under a thinning sky.

Still. Waiting.

EXT. MINE ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The blizzard has died down completely.

Rachel surveys the scene from inside.

There's nothing out in front of the entrance. No prints. No sled tracks.

Just an endless sheet of white, pristine and merciless.

The storm erased every sign of her arrival.

She exhales. A shallow, wary breath.

Then, quietly, she lifts a gloved hand in a soft wave to the horizon, a silent goodbye to the open world, to light, to any sense of direction.

She steps back inside.

THUNK.

The heavy wooden door closes.

Inside, she braces it with planks, driving them into place with quick, practiced movements.

Darkness swells again.

INT. MINE - MOMENTS LATER

She scans the area where she, the cubs and the dogs rested.

She checks the ground. The sled. The gear.

Nothing left behind.

RACHEL

No gear. No signs. No prints. Not a trace. We were never here...

The dogs wait patiently. The cubs are tucked safely in the sled. Rachel tugs the ropes, adjusts a blanket – a final check.

She exhales sharply. A breath to steel herself.

Then, under her breath...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Time to disappear... Wait!

She suddenly pauses. Frowns.

Bends over the sled. Digs through the bags she took from Dash's snowmobile.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I almost forgot about these!

She pulls out a folded map and a compass, tucked inside a weathered pouch.

She studies them. Frowns.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Dash was prepared. Old-school, too.

FLASHBACK - INT. MINE SECURITY STATION - PREVIOUS NIGHT

Kate gestures to a printer.

Rachel waves it off, holding up her phone.

RACHEL (FLASHBACK)
Just send it to my phone. Save the trees.

BACK TO SCENE - INT. MINE

Rachel compares Dash's map to her faint memory of Kate's route.

Frustrated, she squints at the compass.

RACHEL
You're not helping, Dash.

She searches deeper. Unzips another bag.

Finds FOOD... then FLASHLIGHTS, BATTERIES... GLOW STICKS.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(New York City Lower East
Side accent)
Oh. Look at what we got here...

She cracks a green glow stick. It blooms with an eerie light.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Hey, doggies! We're not going to be
blind after all.

She straps glow sticks to the dogs' harnesses.

BLACK PAW gets the first, his coat glows faint green in the
darkness.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Much better.

She places a gloved hand on the sled. Calm. Steady.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Time to head into the abyss.

A beat.

Then she whispers...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Slow and steady, guys.

The dogs lean into their harnesses. The sled glides forward.

Faint green halos pulse in the dark.

They vanish into the tunnel.

FADE OUT.

TO BE CONTINUED

END OF PILOT