

Caught by the Roots

Written by

Danny King

Email: medannyking@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 This screenplay may not be used or reproduced for any purpose including educational purposes without the expressed written permission of the author.

FADE IN:

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

SUPER: OREGON

A rugged midsize pickup truck roars past, horn blasts, tires screech, weaves between lanes with speed and urgency.

INT./EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

MARTHA, 38, sweaty, in a military uniform, eyes fixed on the road, her grip tight, steers the wheel.

Her face is taut, neck rigid.

MARTHA
Move! C'mon!

She swerves, inches from the car in front. The horn blares again. Honk! Honk!

EXT. FREEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The other car finally shifts lanes.

The pickup truck speeds by, cuts through traffic.

INT./EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Martha's phone rings. Her eyes flicker to the glove box, then back to the road, no time.

She looks at the passenger seat, then eyes up, her breath quickens, panics.

MARTHA
(sharply)
Shit!

Another car. Too close. She swerves hard to the left.

EXT. FREEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The tires screech as the pickup truck jerks to another lane, narrowly avoids a collision.

INT./EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The phone stops ringing.

Martha sighs, tries to steady herself. Her knuckles, white on the wheel.

The phone rings again. Martha eyes the rear view mirror, spots the phone on the back seat.

Phone display: "Call - LAWYER TOM"

A swift motion, she stretches her hand back, fingers brushes against the leather, struggles, turns back, she finally snatches the phone, eyes back to the road. Safe.

She clicks the phone. Loud speaker.

MARTHA

Tom, I'm, I'm here. Hold on.

TOM (V.O.)

The judge isn't a babysitter,
Martha. Court isn't a damn
kindergarten school.

Martha's jaw clenches, her foot presses on the accelerator. Engine roars.

MARTHA

Just give me a few minutes! Punch
the damn time!

TOM (V.O.)

Don just walked in with his lawyer.
You want to see your kids again?
Get here now.

Martha's breath catches, her eyes dart between the road and the phone, panic mounts.

MARTHA

(surprised)

What, the kids?! Are they with him?

TOM (V.O.)

No, no. Just him. Oh boy, he's here
the judge is here.

Martha's face pales. Sweat on her brows.

MARTHA

Tom, please. Just stall. I'm on my
way, my shift just ended. The judge
will understand.

Tears well up in her eyes, slips down her cheeks. She wipes them away.

Martha's eyes widen.

TOM (V.O.)
Martha, if you're not here-

Martha gasps, hand jerks the wheel instinctively.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-soon I can't promise any--

BOOM. Crash.

EXT. FREEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The pickup truck slams into the back of a huge truck ahead, it spins wildly, tires screech against the pavement.

It rolls violently, tumbles sideways, smashes off the freeway.

A road sign blurs into the view, "EXIT 11 - PORTLAND COURTHOUSE/CITY CENTER."

EXT. FREEWAY OFF-ROAD - DAY

Silence. The pickup truck is upside down, smoke billows. Oil leaks.

The vehicle is mangled, dents, shards of glass glint on the road.

Inside, the airbag hangs deflated, brushing against Martha's slack face.

She dangles from the seatbelt, lifeless, blood pools at her brow, drops trace down her temple.

Her phone lies shattered on the ground outside, her belongings scattered across the wreckage.

Sound of tires rolling, the faint hiss of smoke. Darkness.

EXT. PORTLAND CITYSCAPE - DAY

SUPER: *10 Months Later...*

Cloudy orange sky as the sun sets. PEOPLE and cars drift through the streets.

SUPER: PORTLAND

A food truck idles near street art. Old brick buildings clash with sleek glass towers.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The café hums, spoons clink, muffled news murmurs from a wall-mounted TV.

A few CUSTOMERS sip lattes.

In a cozy corner, an ELDERLY COUPLE (70s) sits at a worn chessboard. Steam rises from their mugs.

The OLD MAN moves a black bishop, knocks off a white pawn. It rolls down to the floor.

OLD MAN
Always the pawns first.

The OLD WOMAN counters with a white rook, smashes a black pawn.

ON TV - A news broadcast, a MALE ANCHOR (40s) in a sleek studio.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
A strong storm system is sweeping across northwestern city and forest areas. Heavy rainfall is expected tonight.

ON TV - Satellite view. Swirling cloud masses creep over Metro.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
While cyclone Anita skirts east, urban flood alerts remain. No immediate danger, but residents are urged to stay indoors tonight.

DING. The café door opens.

A CUSTOMER exits. A gust of wind stirs loose chess pieces, a few tumble to the floor.

Close on: The chessboard.

White king on G2. White pawn on F6. Black knight on D3.

The old man lifts the black knight.

OLD WOMAN
Oh boy...

He grins. Gently places the knight on F4.

OLD MAN

Check.

The white king is threatened, not trapped, but exposed.

Close on: The white pawn. Still standing strong on F6. Two squares from promotion.

A louder gust rattles the door. Outside, dark clouds churn. Distant thunder rolls.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - DAY

Bright. Clinical. Pale walls and fluorescent lights overhead.

Martha, calm face, sits quietly. Glasses on. She stares at a blank wall, lost in thought.

Healed scars, line her forehead and hands. Her right leg ends below the knee, amputated.

DR. KAPOOR, 50s, Indian-American, warm and fatherly, kneeled, fits a sleek, well worn athletic blade prosthetic leg.

DR. KAPOOR

Next time, maybe aim lower. And fists do wonders too.

MARTHA

He was drunk. He deserved worse.

Dr. Kapoor, stares, just a quiet nod as he adjusts the prosthetic.

DR. KAPOOR

There. You're cleared to run, jump, dance... maybe fly, if you're into that.

A warmth in Martha's face.

MARTHA

My eyes?

DR. KAPOOR

One thing at a time. You're healing faster than most. Let's not rush the rest.

Martha rises. Offers a handshake with her right hand, thumb missing.

Dr. Kapoor takes it anyway, firm, without flinch.

DR. KAPOOR (CONT'D)
And Martha... maybe think about a
prosthetic thumb.

They share a quiet, knowing look.

Martha nods, smiles faintly, and exits.

EXT. SOUTHEAST PORTLAND - EVENING

Quiet residential street. Tall maples stretch shadows across cracked sidewalks. A porch light flickers on.

A KID pedals past, heading home.

EXT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Modest. Worn edges. An old truck in the driveway. A U.S. flag shifts in the wind.

Martha sprints up the path. Stops. Breathing hard. Damp with sweat.

She lingers before the door, something heavy in her, then steps inside.

INT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Warm lighting. Neat, intentional decor. A quiet, feminine calm.

Books. Military medals. Framed memories:

- Martha, 20, college graduation ceremony, a toddler in hand, laughing.
- Martha, 23, in full Marine gear.
- Afghanistan. Dust. Brothers in arms.
- Martha, 34, with a young girl and a child in her house.
- Martha, 37, with two toddlers, a teen girl standing behind.
- A newspaper clipping, creased and yellowing: "LOCAL WOMAN SURVIVES CAR CRASH - Loses Family Battle."

Martha enters from the kitchen, phone to ear, soda in hand.

MARTHA
(into phone)
I'll talk to Don... Custody kicks
in at ten, I know. I'll be early.

She drops onto the couch. Pops the can open.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(into phone, softer)
I'll pick you... Yeah... Jane, I'll
remember.
(pause)
Alright. Night.

She ends the call. The screen lights up.

A selfie: Martha, smiling wide, flanked by her son and
daughter. Laughing. Alive.

Thunder rumbles. Rain starts.

Martha stares at the photo. Her smile lingers, haunted at the
edges.

EXT. MARTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sunlight breaks through thinning clouds.

Rain beads on the ground, fresh and still. Puddles shimmer
across the driveway. Wet leaves stick to Martha's porch.

The front door swings open. Martha steps out, layered in
trekking gear. A large, rugged military backpack slung over
one shoulder.

She adjusts the chest strap, tightens it. Takes a slow,
grounding breath. A lone crow caws in the distance.

Silence stretches, peaceful, but weighted.

INT./EXT. MARTHA'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Martha at the wheel, windows cracked. The wind rushes in,
sharp, earthy.

She grins faintly, eyes ahead. One hand taps the steering
wheel.

EXT. POSH RESIDENTIAL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

A damp, empty road. The neighborhood hasn't quite woken up.

Martha's truck glides through, tires hisses softly over wet asphalt.

EXT. GATED COMMUNITY - ENTRANCE - DAY

The iron gate slides open.

Inside, symmetry. Wealth. Pristine stone driveways. Trimmed hedges. Clean and neat.

Martha's rugged truck pulls in, slightly out of sync with its surroundings.

EXT. LUXURY HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The truck stops in front of a sleek, glass and stone home.

Martha steps out. She takes a breath, eyes the house.

She walks up the path.

DING DONG.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

The door cracks open. ADAM (8), tousled hair, pajamas clinging, peers out.

Squints through sleep, then...

ADAM
(quiet joy)
Mom?

He leaps. Martha catches him, lifts him.

MARTHA
There you are.

They hold. A small moment.

Adam pulls back, beams.

ADAM
I'll wake up Zoe and Claire!

He bolts upstairs.

Martha lingers in the doorway, a woman both welcome and not.

INT. LUXURY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Modern. Pristine. Silent hum of appliances.

Martha seated, opposite to her, FIONA, late 20s, graceful even in pajamas. Ties her hair without glancing up.

Coffee steams between them.

FIONA

He's not gonna like this. And ten
A.M. is like three hours away.

MARTHA

I'll talk to him.

Footsteps. DON enters, 41, rugged handsome, in a bath robe, kisses Fiona.

DON

You can't just show up like this,
Martha. There's a schedule for a
reason.

Fiona's eyes flick to Martha, faint smirk on her face.

Don turns around presses the coffee machine.

Martha holds her gaze.

MARTHA

If we leave now, we'll hit the
summit by sunrise tomorrow.

Don freezes at the coffee machine.

DON

The summit?

MARTHA

Eagle Creek Trail. We are going on
a hike, the trail's safe. I checked
everything twice.

A tense pause.

Don finally turns. Squints.

DON

You don't get to make these calls.
Nope.

(to Fiona)

Baby, can you?...

Fiona rises, not confrontational, more performative.

FIONA
Martha, c'mon.

Martha bites her teeth.

MARTHA
It's my weekend. My kids. I'm not asking.

Don stares at her.

DON
You need to go.

Martha stands firm. Don, tense. Fiona sits, caught between.

MARTHA
I'm finally healing. I can run.
Dance. Live.
(to Fiona)
You know what I've been through.

Don, calm and cold.

DON
Martha, leave.

Fiona rests a hand on Don's wrist, calm, but tentative.

FIONA
Babe... it's her weekend. She looks good. The kids'll love it. We can have some time alone.

Don nods no, then--

Adam appears in full hiking gear. Behind him, ZOE, 4, smiles, missing teeth. Both bounce with excitement.

The room shifts.

Martha lights up. Fiona raises a brow. Don freezes, phone already in hand.

DON
I'm calling our lawyer.

MARTHA
I'm going with Jane, the trail is safe. I'm taking them anyway.

DON

No.

(to the kids)

Upstairs. Now.

Adam and Zoe run to Martha instead, hugs her leg tight.

Martha kisses Zoe's head, looks up at the empty hallway.

MARTHA

Where's Claire?

Don paces away, phone to his ear.

ZOE

She is sleeping.

ADAM

I told you are here, she is not getting up.

MARTHA

It's ok honey.

Don returns, his phone's on speaker.

LAWYER (V.O.)

She can take them wherever she sees fit.

Don stiffens.

LAWYER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's her weekend. Don, you signed the agreement. I can't override that.

Call ends. Silence. Don folds his arms. Stone.

DON

Court or not, this isn't okay.

Martha kneels, looks at her kids.

MARTHA

It's gonna be epic.

Adam and Zoe high-five her. Martha heads for the door.

FIONA

Well, we got Claire.

Don stares daggers at Martha.

EXT. GATED COMMUNITY - MARTHA'S TRUCK - DAY

Adam and Zoe giggle in the backseat, buckled in, toys clacking. The tension outside doesn't reach them.

Martha and Don load the last hiking bag into the truck bed.

CLAIRE, 19, walks up, hoodie half-on, backpack slung lazily. No hello. Just a blank stare.

Don meets her halfway, takes the bag, loads it in, shuts the tailgate.

CLAIRE
(flat)
You're really making me go?

DON
I've got two houses lined up. Sales and paperwork. It's just a weekend. For the little ones.

Claire doesn't respond. Just looks toward the truck, jaw tight.

CLAIRE
Send me with literally anyone else.

Martha from the truck.

MARTHA
You'll love it. Trails are beautiful this time of year.

Claire doesn't look at her. Eyes on Don.

DON
Hey. It's just a hike. In, out, done. Can you do that for your brother and sister?

Claire exhales through her nose. Silent rage simmering.

CLAIRE
Dad, you know what she did?... She didn't, she did nothing, she was never there, but now suddenly.

Don doesn't answer. Just opens the truck door for her.

DON
Take care of Adam and Zoe. Please. I love you.
(MORE)

DON (CONT'D)
And don't let her do any of her
spiritual voodoo stuffs on them.
Okay?

A long beat. Then Claire climbs in. Slams the door.

Don turns to Martha. Voice low.

DON (CONT'D)
Just... be careful, yeah?

Martha lifts her right hand for a thumbs up, but there's no thumb.

She raises her left instead. Thumbs up.

Don shrugs, shakes his head. Hands on hips, tense.

Martha climbs in.

The truck pulls away. Don stands, watches them go. A silent wave.

Don turns back toward the house. Fiona stands in the doorway, loose bathrobe, two fingers curling him in.

EXT. JANE'S HOUSE - DAY

A modest home. Faded siding. Porch light still burning.

An SUV leans crooked in the driveway, tires pressing into damp grass.

Martha walks up, no backpack now. More casual. She presses the doorbell.

Silence.

Presses it again.

Still nothing.

MARTHA
Jane?

She steps closer, squints through the window.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Janie?...

A pause. A faint sigh.

She tries the doorknob, it opens, surprises her for half a second.

INT. JANE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dim. Stale.

Crushed cans on the floor. The faint growl of snores.

On the couch, JANE, mid-30s, African-American woman, stout, mouth half-open, sleeping deep. TV flickers muted images.

Martha walks over. Looks down, amused.

Then leans close, switch flips in her voice.

MARTHA
(barking, mock authority)
On your feet, maggot!

Jane springs up, snorts, flails. A mug clatters off the table.

She blinks, tries to breathe, shakes off sleep, a wet sneeze, wipes her nose, breathes shallow.

Martha just grins.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Easy, tiger. Just checking if the
heart still works.

Jane glares. Fists balled.

JANE
I've punched you in the face more
times than I can count. Right now
your nose is a Picasso painting in
my head.

MARTHA
Yeah? I made a Picasso painting
yesterday with an artistic
prosthetic kick to the nose. Gosh,
the way he ran, wow...

Jane stares, then collapses back onto the couch, eyes open.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Get your gear. We roll. Kids are
waiting.

JANE
Can't.

MARTHA
What?

JANE
I'm not coming.

MARTHA
That's fine, I'll drag you out.

JANE
Martha?
(beat)
My grandma died.

Jane sneezes again. Martha eyes fixed. Silence.

MARTHA
Your grandma has died so many
times--

JANE
Two days ago.

Martha still. Jane sits up, eyes tired.

JANE (CONT'D)
Found out last night. Drove eighty
miles through the storm. Snuck past
the hospital guard. Got there right
before cremation... yeah... drove
back, to the couch.

Martha nods. Quiet. She sits beside Jane.

MARTHA
I'm sorry.

Jane pulls her into a hug, tight. Martha pats her back, then
pulls away, awkward.

JANE
And I'm sick.

Jane sneezes. Martha rises.

MARTHA
Hot soup? Hot water? Onions?

JANE
My aunt's coming. Go. Be with your
kids.

Jane glances at Martha's prosthetic, then up at her.

JANE (CONT'D)
You're a badass. A damn good
friend. I'll live. Go.

Martha nods no.

MARTHA
Thank you... for staying.

Jane grabs her again, one more hug, sneezes. Martha stiffens,
then lets it happen.

INT./EXT. MARTHA'S TRUCK - DAY

The door swings open. Adam and Zoe giggle in the backseat.

Martha climbs in. Claire peers outside, no sign of Jane.

The engine starts.

CLAIRE
Where's Jane?

MARTHA
She's sick. I didn't want you
getting infected.

The truck rolls forward.

CLAIRE
You said she was coming. I'm
calling Dad.

Claire grabs her phone. Brakes squeal. The truck jerks to a
stop.

MARTHA
Claire... Yes, I messed up. Hate me
all you want. I know I wasn't
there. But that's not who I am
anymore. No more deployments. I'm
here now. With you.

CLAIRE
You always say that.

MARTHA
Honey? I love you. Just you. And
them.

Martha nods to the kids in the rearview. Their smiles are small, uncertain.

CLAIRE
I don't trust you.

MARTHA
You don't have to. But for two days, let me try.

Beat. Adam leans forward.

ADAM
Can we go now?

Silence. Claire stares at her phone... then drops it.

MARTHA
Thank you.

Martha shifts into drive. The truck rolls down the road.

EXT. PORTLAND STREETS - DAY

Martha's truck cruises out.

City life rises around them. Glints of early sunlight flicker off wet pavement.

INT./EXT. MARTHA'S TRUCK - DAY

The city skyline fades in the rearview.

Towering Douglas firs and moss draped maples rise on either side.

EXT. HIGHWAY 84 EAST - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Martha's truck merges onto a highway. They pass Troutdale, "Gateway to the Gorge", the suburbs thin out, and wilderness begins.

EXT. COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Majestic cliffs rise on one side. The Columbia sprawls wide on the other.

Mist lingers like a ghost over the water. Waterfalls flash past.

They glide through narrow tunnels, carved into stone.

EXT. EAGLE CREEK TRAILHEAD - DAY

They pass a wooden sign: "LEFT - EAGLE CREEK TRAILHEAD."

Martha's truck keeps going. The main trailhead lot, empty.

INT./EXT. MARTHA'S TRUCK - DAY

Claire leans toward the windshield, squints.

CLAIRE
There. That was it.

Martha drives on, eyes ahead.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You missed it. God.

Martha glances in the rearview. Adam and Zoe press their faces to the windows, enchanted by the deep forest.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Parking was empty. Where are you going?

MARTHA
That's the public route.
(beat)
We've got a private one.

She steers off the paved road. Gravel crunches under the tires. Then dirt.

Trees thicken. Shadows deepen. Branches scrape the windshield like reaching fingers.

EXT. UNMARKED FOREST PATH - CONTINUOUS

Martha's truck turns off-road, eases into a narrow break in the trees.

No signage. Only a weathered totem stone, half-buried in moss.

A faint trail winds through ancient firs and thick ferns, barely visible.

INT./EXT. MARTHA'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Martha's eyes stay locked on the path ahead. Claire watches her, wary.

CLAIRE

You just make your own route now?
Problems on problems.

MARTHA

Jane told me, this was once part of
an old Native trail. Connects to
the ridge's base camp.

In the rearview mirror, Adam's reflection wide-eyed, curious,
glued to the trees.

BOOM. A sudden BLAST loud, metallic. The truck lurches hard.

SCREECH. Martha yanks the wheel, the truck swerves, kicks up
dirt, crunches, under low branches.

They slide beneath the overhang of a massive fir. Silence.
Only the ticking of the engine.

Claire breathes hard. Adam and Zoe stare forward, stunned.

EXT. UNMARKED FOREST PATH - DAY

Claire, Adam, and Zoe stand beside the truck, backpacks
slung, stares into the dense, overgrown forest. The air hangs
still.

Martha crouches at the front tire. A sharp wood sticking in,
flat. Checks the back, blown out.

She exhales, gives a wry smile.

MARTHA

Well... looks like the hike starts
early.

Claire stares. Nothing back.

CLAIRE

Always something with you, mom.
Problems on problems.

A beat.

They move. Martha and Adam lead, Claire and Zoe trail behind.
Towering firs rise around them. Ferns brush against their
legs.

The forest begins to swallow them whole.

MARTHA

Adam. How you feelin'?

ADAM (GRINNING)
Awesome. It's like we're in a
secret forest or something.
(beat)
Think there's treasure?

ZOE
Is there any fairy?

MARTHA
Maybe both. You never know in
places like this.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(gently)
Zoe? You like it?

ZOE
(nodding)
Yeah. I like the trees. They're
big.

ADAM
They're huge. Like, taller than our
whole house.

ZOE
Can we see horse? Unicorn? Bear?

CLAIRE
(tense)
Bear?! Oh my God--

MARTHA
No bear, no bear. I checked. The
storm pushed them to the other side
of the mountain. We're clear.

A sudden breeze whistles through the trees. Light filters
down like gold dust.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
How about you Claire? You like it?

Claire just keeps walking.

Martha notices a narrow break in the woods. A quiet, sunlit
clearing ahead.

Adam and Zoe pause in awe.

EXT. DEEP FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Sunlight pours through the canopy.

A weathered wooden cabin emerges, humble yet striking. Smoke curls from a chimney.

Wind chimes made of shells and bone, whisper in the breeze.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The cabin sits quietly, part lodge, part home. Old but alive, as if it breathes with the forest.

XOLO, a male German shepherd, maybe 8 years old, is leashed to a post. He barks once, alert but friendly.

ADAM
(grinning)
Hey buddy.

ZOE
Hi doggie!

Zoe waves. Dog barks, wags his tail.

A hand-carved wooden sign creaks overhead:

"Eluna Way - Trail Registry & Hotel (Reservation Only)
Respect the Land. Respect the Spirits."

INT. WOODEN CABIN - RECEPTION - DAY

Martha, Claire, and the kids step inside, backpacks still on.

The room is old but warm faded maps, mugs, polaroids, hiking gear, and dreamcatchers sway in the wind.

At the counter stands SANI (60s), a native elder, tall, grounded. His calm gaze meets Martha's, unreadable.

SANI
Jane?

MARTHA
(shakes her head)
No, I'm Martha. We booked
yesterday. Jane had to cancel last
minute, so... My kids.

Sani's eyes drift, kids, Claire, Martha's prosthetic.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Blew out both tires on the way up.
Pulled off under a tree.

SANI

It's safe there. I'll see what I
can do. Won't be cheap.

MARTHA

Fair enough. Appreciate it.

SANI

I'm Sani. I run this place.

He gestures toward a large open doorway at the back. Beyond it, a narrow trail, barely visible, marked with hand-carved totems.

SANI (CONT'D)

That's the old path. Few walk it.
Fewer understand it.

MARTHA

We'll catch the sunrise, be back
tomorrow morning. Noon at the
latest.

Sani nods.

SANI

Might have your car ready by then.

Sani reaches for a stack of paperwork.

SANI (CONT'D)

I'll need your ID.

Martha hands over her wallet. Sani scans it, gives it back with a nod.

SANI (CONT'D)

All set.

Then Sani rings a small brass bell. CLING.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - DINING ROOM - DAY

A rustic room. Wooden chairs and tables.

Martha, Claire, and the kids sit quietly, eyes scans the old decor animal hides, woven blankets.

From the kitchen steps PATEL, early 20s. Indian-American. Slim athletic, buzz cut, thick eyebrows.

He carries a wooden tray stacked with steaming plates of lunch, sets the tray down on the table.

(Patel has no tongue, his words come out from his throat, garbled, guttural, more sound than speech. Only those used to him understand. He use hand signs, but not sign language.)

PATEL
(gravelly, slurred)
Enjoy your lunch.

The sound is rough, words tangled like marbles in his mouth.

Claire blinks, uncertain. Martha gives a respectful nod. The kids stare, curious. Sani stands aside.

SANI
(quietly)
That's Patel, my cook, he says
enjoy your lunch... Poor boy, lost
his tongue in an accident. But
hears more than most ever say.

Patel grunts softly, points to the meal. The kids smile at him.

Patel smiles back, gives a brief nod, steps back in to the kitchen.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - BACK - DAY

Zoe and Adam chase Xolo, plays around a tree, Zoe giggles, throws a stick for the Dog.

On a tree stump. Claire and Patel pack food into their backpack, wraps, dried fruit, trail mix. Patel hums quietly, focused.

Martha stands nearby, gazes out at the tree covered mountains, pulls out her phone, checks, no bars. She tilts it, tries again. Still nothing.

Sani steps out from a side shed. On a flat rock, he sets down a shallow wooden bowl, a small bundle of dried sage, a feather fan, and a rolled dry tree root.

His movements are steady, respectful. Claire notices, nods toward him.

CLAIRE
What's he doing?

Patel zips the pack shut, glances over.

PATEL
(soft, slurred)
His ancestry ritual. For protection
and guidance.

Claire puzzled, nods yes.

Martha watches as Sani kneels, arranges the items, not rushing.

Adam reaches Martha, pauses, peeks over at Sani.

ADAM
Is he making a magic spell?

Martha smiles faintly but says nothing. The moment feels sacred.

Zoe runs up to Martha, laughing.

ZOE
Xolo's fast!

Xolo bounds in, drops a stick at Zoe's feet, pants hard. Martha kneels, gives him a pat.

MARTHA
Good boy.

From a distance...

SANI
Martha!

Martha looks up, nods, starts walking with the kids toward Sani.

Claire watches, then reluctantly follows.

The family gathers near Sani.

SANI (CONT'D)
Let's begin this hike with a small
ritual, for safety and protection.

CLAIRE
No. We won't be doing that. We have
different beliefs. Thank you, Mr.
Sani.

Sani stays quiet, eyes on Martha. Martha looks at Claire, softly...

MARTHA
Claire, let him.
(To Sani)
Please, go ahead--

CLAIRE
No. Kids, come.

MARTHA
It's just a ritual.

CLAIRE
Not for us. I'll pray for them
myself.

Sani shifts his gaze to Adam. Adam meets his eyes.

Patel, from aside.

PATEL
The smoke will cleanse all the evil
spirits attached.

All just stares. Sani nods.

SANI
It's a simple blessing. Nothing
forced. Just guidance from my
ancestors for the path ahead.

CLAIRE
We appreciate your efforts, Mr.
Sani. Thank you. But we'll do
things our own way.

Claire takes the kids by their hands, walks them off. Martha lingers, guilt in her eyes. Sani calls out...

SANI
Wait.

Claire stops. Turns. Sani approaches Adam, kneels. Claire tenses.

CLAIRE
What are you doing? I said--

Sani without a word, ties the loose right shoe lace, then unties the left.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

That one's fine.

Sani ignores, ties the shoelace, tightens it, firm. He stands, lays a gentle hand on Adam's head. Smiles.

ADAM

Thank you, Mr. Sani.

ZOE

Can you do magic?

Sani smiles, pulls a feather from his hair, hands it to Zoe, she beams.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Thank you!

She tucks it into her tiny backpack.

Sani returns to Martha, his steps measured, his gaze steady.

SANI

The cyclone knocked out all the cell towers. No signal, no radio, nothing. You're the only group on this route today. A few others will be coming tomorrow, but I'd advise caution. Don't venture too deep. Xolo sniffed both your kids, but there's no cause for concern. I'll handle the ritual alone. You can start your hike whenever you're ready.

Martha nods, slight hesitation.

MARTHA

Hey? Can you... Do the ritual on me?

Sani glances briefly at Claire and the kids, then back to Martha. His expression softens for a moment, he nods.

SANI

Yes.

Martha stands still. Sani kneels by the flat stone, the items he arranged. Sani lights a bundle of sage in a stone bowl, smoke curls up.

He circles Martha, fans the smoke with a feather. A rattle shakes once, low, dry.

Adam and Zoe watch from a few steps away, silent, wide eyed.

Sani mutters something under breath. Smoke drifts over Martha's chest, head, shoulders. Martha eyes shut, exhales.

Sani finishes, rests a hand on Martha's shoulder.

SANI (CONT'D)

The spirits walk with you.

Martha nods, quiet. Grounded. Sani pushes a dry leaf in her chest pocket.

Adam grips Zoe's hand, whispers...

ADAM

That was cool.

Martha reaches Adam and Zoe. Claire, eyes her, smirk.

CLAIRE

So what? Got your super powers back?

Martha meets her eyes.

ZOE

Mom has super powers?

MARTHA

I'm amazing mom.

Zoe jumps, happy, grabs Martha's hand, her face shrinks.

ZOE

Eww...

Adam sniffs.

ADAM

What is that smell?

MARTHA

My super powers.

Adam laughs. Claire sighs.

Patel stares, lifts the phone. Click. Martha, Adam, Claire, Zoe, Xolo and Sani freeze mid smile in the frame.

Patel reaches them, steps forward, turns the camera, flashes a grin wide and toothy. Click. A selfie joins the memory.

A beat.

Martha and family, walks towards a narrow bushy trail, with a stick, there is a totem, Adam and Zoe, eyes wide as they pass.

Sani stands still, watches them disappear into the trail, he kneels by the stone bowl.

The sage bundle burns low. The smoke curls, then spirals downward. Sani's eyes narrow.

Xolo, pauses, ears perk, uneasy growl toward the woods, then backs away with a soft whimper.

A gust of wind, heavy creak from the forest canopy. Snap. Thick branch crashes down in the distance. THUD.

EXT. FOREST - UNMARKED TRAIL - CONTINUOUS

The family walks single file through the narrow path.

Martha leads, map in hand. Adam trails close behind Martha.

Zoe walks in the middle, grips her small backpack. Claire follows at the rear, scans the woods, suspicious.

CLAIRE

(tense)

What was that sound?

MARTHA

Just an old tree falling. Happens here all the time.

The path widens. Birds chirp, wings flutter overhead. Green slopes stretch out, sunlight cuts through the trees.

Suddenly, a snake darts across the path, swift. Adam stumbles back, gasps. Claire pulls Zoe close, shields her. Martha keeps going. Others freeze.

They see a hard rope tied to a branch, Adam and Martha gaze at each other, smirks.

Zoe grips the rope. Martha gives her a gentle push. She swings out with a squeal, giggles.

Adam takes his turn, laughs as Martha sends him off.

Claire watches from a distance, unmoved.

Martha grabs the rope, steps back, grins at the kids. A short run, then leap. The rope tenses, branches creak.

Adam and Zoe look up, breath held.

Martha swings wide fast, high. She nears the ground, a jerk, braces, digs her heels in land, legs skid through leaves, stops.

Adam and Zoe, laughs. Martha grins, adjusts her prosthetic leg.

Martha gestures Claire, but she turns her back, shakes her head.

They all walking ahead, cross a river, in single file, Martha up front, Adam close behind.

They are back on trail.

A fallen tree trunk bridging the trail.

Martha hoists Adam up. Zoe struggles, Claire gives her a boost, then climbs after.

Together, they snap a selfie. They carefully climb back down.

EXT. TUNNEL FALLS - DAY

The trail narrows along a basalt cliff, leads to a 130 foot waterfall plunging into a pool below.

A tunnel, carved into the rock face, they all pass directly behind the curtain of water.

Martha pulls her phone out, takes a snap of her kids. Martha and her kids pose for a selfie, Claire uninterested.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - SLIPPERY SLOPE TOP - DAY

They face a narrow, a long moss slick path of slanted stone. Wet. Glimmering with fungus.

Dense bushes flank both sides, no other way through.

Martha tests the slope with her prosthetic leg. It slips.

MARTHA

Okay, follow my path. It's slick.
Kids? Grip those sticks tight.

Martha steps forward, nearly loses balance. Her hips shift, catches herself. She slides a bit.

ZOE

Don't fall, mommy!

Claire watches, arms crossed, eyes fixed on Martha's struggle.

Martha regains balance, plants her stick, then suddenly slides again, THUD, falls face first.

ADAM

Mom!

ZOE

Mommy!

Claire straight face, arms folded, little hesitant.

ADAM

Mom, are you ok? Claire?

Claire, silence.

MARTHA

I'm ok honey. I'm alright.

Martha struggles up, slips again. Her prosthetic leg detaches, clatters down the slope.

Adam takes a step toward it. Claire snaps her arm out.

CLAIRE

No, Adam. Stay back. You'll slip too.

ZOE

Mommy! Get up!

Martha exhales hard, rolls to her side, mud streaked on her shirt. Claire bites her teeth.

MARTHA

I got a better idea.

Still on the ground, Martha unclips her backpack, gives it a shove, it slides, bounces, hits the runaway prosthetic, stops it near the bottom.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Kids? Watch and learn.

Martha plants her hands, pushes off. Her body glides down the slick rock like a sled.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Woooo!

Adam and Zoe gape, wide-eyed, thrilled and laughter.

ZOE
Go mommy!

ADAM
That was awesome!

Claire stares, unimpressed.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha skids to a stop, panting. She flips over, mud smeared, looks up, grins.

MARTHA
Adam, let's go!

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - TOP - CONTINUOUS

Adam lights up, throws his backpack, it slides away. Claire grabs his arm.

CLAIRE
Absolutely not--

WOOSH. Zoe zips past them, squeals.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Zoe!

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha's eyes go wide, she lunges forward just in time to catch Zoe. She crashes into her arms, both laughs breathlessly.

MARTHA
Hoooo!

ZOE
I like it! Can I go again?

Claire from up the hill.

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Zoe?! Are you okay?

Zoe turns back.

ZOE
I'm ok!

She giggles with Martha.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - TOP - CONTINUOUS

Adam bounces with excitement. Claire stands stiff, watches from above, caught between nerves and hesitation.

ADAM
Can I go? Please?

Claire exhales, forces a smile. She kneels beside him, places a hand on his back.

But Adam slips free, launches himself down the slope.

CLAIRE
Adam!

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha dusts off Zoe, then looks up, sees Adam barrels down.

MARTHA
Heads up!

Adam zooms in, skids to a stop near them, laughs.

ADAM
That was awesome! Claire, you gotta try!

Martha reattaches her prosthetic.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - TOP - CONTINUOUS

Claire watches from above, tight lipped. She gestures a cross sign on herself.

CLAIRE
(Muttering)
I hate this.

She shuts her eyes, and pushes off.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha sees Claire sliding down, quickly ushers the kids aside.

Claire spins on her descent, barely keeping control. She screams as she tumbles straight into a patch of thick bushes.

Silence.

ZOE

Claire?

The bushes rustle. Claire pops up, covered in leaves.

CLAIRE

I'm fine! Just, fine.

She gets up, brushes herself off.

MARTHA

Someone's enjoying this..

Claire sighs. Zoe tugs at Martha's sleeve.

ZOE

Can we do it again?

Martha winks at Zoe.

MARTHA

When we come back tomorrow. Okay?

Zoe giggles. Claire walks away. Adam runs to catch up. They all move forward, deeper into the trail.

EXT. FOREST - WIDE PATH - DAY

The trail opens up. Claire leads with Zoe, a beat behind, Martha walks beside Adam, protective hand near him.

The sound of a waterfall grows louder as they ascend a slope.

Martha hoists Zoe up with ease, then Adam climbs up, then offers her hand to Claire.

Claire eyes it, but grabs an exposed root instead, pulls herself up.

MARTHA

Wow, now you see, a single moment changes everything. The us. I'm happy you are here.

Claire steps past her, stops.

CLAIRE

If something happens, it's on you.

Martha exhales, climbs without another word.

EXT. WATERFALL POND - CONTINUOUS

A pristine cascade spills into a crystal clear pond. Fishes flicker beneath the surface. The kids pause, awestruck.

Martha unlatches Zoe's backpack, scoops her up, tosses her into the pond. SPLASH!

Claire jolts.

CLAIRE
Are you insane?!

Martha nods no. Zoe resurfaces, squeals.

ZOE
It's freezing!

Zoe laughs, splashes water at them.

Martha looks at Adam, points to the pond.

Adam lights up, drops off his backpack. Claire grips his arm.

CLAIRE
You're not doing this. She threw her.

MARTHA
Better now than smelling like trail mix all night. Trust me, mosquitoes will eat you alive. Adam, now!

Claire turns, too late. Adam slips free, jumps. Another splash.

Claire frowns, lips tight. Zoe and Adam laugh, splashes wildly.

Martha watches, quiet pride on her face.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Claire? Come on, be human. Jump!

Claire picks her phone, no signal.

Martha just grins.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
I just want you to enjoy, be you, be happy. Take a plunge.

CLAIRE
I'm gonna call dad, I swear.

Martha backs up, dives sideways into the pond, a splash. She swims toward the kids.

Laughter fills the air.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(shouting)
We need to be at the top before
dark!

No one replies. They're lost in the moment. Claire exhales.

A beat.

Claire sits on a rock, towel dries Adam's hair. Her movements are brisk, lips tight.

A few feet away, Martha dries her hair, then tousles Zoe's hair with a gentler touch.

MARTHA
Whew. One freezing plunge, worth
it.
(To Claire)
You're gonna regret it.

Claire eyes Martha, no words.

ADAM
I like it here.

ZOE
Can we stay?

MARTHA
We'll camp at the top. It's safe.
We'll play games there too, yeah?

Claire bends to undo Adam's shoe lace. The knot won't budge. She tugs harder.

CLAIRE
(Grumbling)
That old man can't even tie a knot
right, what spell did he use?

Martha walks over with Zoe, crouches beside Adam. Tries the knot. It's tight, her fingers wince at the tension.

MARTHA
He probably did it to keep leeches
out. Smart move.

Martha looks at Adam.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Let's check it out properly once
we're up there. Sound good?

Adam nods. Claire sighs.

Martha gives the falls one last glance. They gather their gear, head back toward the trail.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - VALLEY - DAY

A vast valley nestled between two looming mountains. The view stuns. Windy.

They sit in a small tree shade, finishes lunch. Martha finishes her bite, lets out a small burp, swigs water.

Opposite to Martha, Adam and Zoe head spin around, gazes at the view, still chewing.

Claire wipes her hands, eyes on the trail ahead.

MARTHA
Easy, troops. We're not racing the
mountain. Chew like it matters.

Claire gives the kids a look. They keep munching, grinning. She then pulls the map, studies it.

CLAIRE
We cross the valley, then detour
right up to base camp.

Martha takes the map from her. Scans it. Shakes her head.

MARTHA
We're not circling. We're going up.

Martha gestures toward a slope cutting up the right side of the valley.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Shortcut. We'll hit base camp
before sunset.

Claire's jaw locks. She yanks the map from her hand.

CLAIRE
Great. You go. We'll take the safe
way.

Martha gets up, eyes at the kids.

MARTHA
(shrugs)
See you at the top. Bye, monkeys.

ZOE
Mommy, wait.

Zoe jumps up, Claire pulls Zoe down.

CLAIRE
Zoe, it's not safe.

Zoe sits down. Martha walks past them, heads toward a mud slope aside.

Adam swallows, glances back at Claire.

ADAM
Can't we go with mom?

Claire, eyes focused on the map.

CLAIRE
Too steep. Not for your sister. Or me.

ZOE
But I want mommy...

A loud guttural growl behind them.

MARTHA (O.S.)
Arghhh!

Everyone flinches. Claire spins.

CLAIRE
Jesus!

ADAM
Mom!

Martha steps out, laughing.

MARTHA
Gotcha. I'm not leaving you anywhere.

Zoe jumps up, slaps Martha's leg with her little palms, half-laughing, half-scolding.

ZOE
Mean!

MARTHA

Okay, okay! Valley it is.

Claire exhales through her teeth.

CLAIRE

Do that again, I'll call him.

MARTHA

Come on. We're just having fun.
When you're all old you'll remember
this moment.

CLAIRE

I won't.

MARTHA

Ok. Not again. We good?

Claire sighs, gets up. Martha winks at Adam, secret pact.
Adam, a stern face but cracks a smile.

Martha pats his head. Zoe stands arms crossed, unimpressed.

The kids drink their water. Snack wrappers are tucked away.
Claire takes their hands, begin across the valley, Martha
trails behind.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - ASCEND TO BASE CAMP - DAY

A very tall mountain waits.

They enter the trail head, Claire leads with Zoe, Adam in the
middle, Martha at last.

The forest is silent.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - DAY

Bright sun. Great height. They all enter a narrow dirt path.

On their right- a steep cliffside drop. On their left- moss
covered rock walls and tangled ferns.

The drop to the forest floor is sharp, unforgiving. Dense
pine trees stretch out across the valley below. Quiet,
remote, risky.

Martha inches to the edge. Wind whispers past her ears.

Martha's POV: Below, tree roots claw from the cliff face,
twisted and dry. Farther down, jagged boulders scatter the
forest floor, trees look like toys.

Martha's eyes widen. The roots sway slightly. One bad step, death.

Martha looks up, sun dips, casting long shadows.

ADAM (O.S.)

Mom!

Martha turns, jolted. She masks her concern with a smile, walks back to the group, checks Zoe.

MARTHA

You see that view, Zoe? Whole world down there.

Claire gently pulls Zoe behind her.

CLAIRE

No lifting. She has eyes, she can see.

Martha sighs, raises her hands, truce.

MARTHA

I know where we are. I'm not lifting her.

(To Zoe)

Look there Zoe, do you see it.

Zoe eyes widen, excited and scared.

Martha takes a pull from her water tube, scans the valley.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Let's take five. Then we push.

CLAIRE

No, we keep moving. Light's fading.

Adam slows, breathes heavy.

ADAM

Can we just sit... one minute?

Claire studies him, softens. She kneels beside him.

CLAIRE

Alright.

She sits with Zoe. Martha rests down, Adam drops his pack, slumps into Martha's side.

Martha pulls out sealed glucose pouches, hands them around.

MARTHA

No caffeine. Just trees and sugar.

They all sip, quietly taking in the view high above the world, alone but together. For a moment, peace.

CLAIRE

Wish Fiona was here, miss her jokes.

Martha, silent. Claire pulls out her phone.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Ugh. No bars. No WiFi. No electricity. Nature, right?

Martha smirks, eyes still on the horizon.

MARTHA

No distractions. More strength, more memory, more dopamine. Real adrenaline. Fresh air. Nature.

Claire raises an eyebrow.

Martha lifts her phone.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Picture?

Martha gets up, slowly stands, moves aside the descent. Claire and the kids pose. Click.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You won't forget this day.

Martha stretches, bends back, vertebrae crack.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Oh, spicy gravy.

Adam grins, his eyes land on a violet flower behind Martha. He glances at Zoe, then...

ADAM

Mom? That purple one, can you grab it?

Martha squints around, eyes rolls.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Behind you, the flower.

Claire dusts off her hands.

CLAIRE
 Alright, let's move.

She ruffles Adam's hair, gets up, starts walking with Zoe.

Martha turns around, she limps, stops, adjusts her prosthetic leg, now fixed, looks around, spots the flower, crouches.

Martha's fingers brush the stem. A small, victorious grin.

Behind Martha, Adam slings on his backpack. A tug. A stumble. WHOOSH. Backpack's weight pulls Adam back, he drops over the cliffside edge, soundlessly, vanishes.

Martha tucks the flower into her jacket. Stands. Smiles. Turns.

Empty space. Her grin fades. Eyes scan. No Adam. Claire and Zoe walking, unaware.

SILENCE. Then, THUD. Martha flinches. Distant. Heavy. Echoes.

Martha, breath caught in her throat. Eyes frozen.

Claire stops.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 Trees just keeps falling? Nature?

No answer. Claire turns. Sees Martha. Pale. Trembling. Eyes locked on the void. She looks down the path. No Adam. A beat. She gasps.

Claire stares at Martha. Freezes. Her breath shortens, knees buckle, she knee drops. THUD.

Zoe stands, small fingers fidgeting. Her head tilts, eyes scan the emptiness.

ZOE
 Adam?

Silence answers.

Claire lowers her head. A sob bubbles from her throat.

CLAIRE
 No... no...

Martha takes a shaky step, then another. A limp in her stride. Her face drained, as if blood itself abandoned her.

She sees Zoe. Still. Confused. Then Claire, collapsed. Weeps.

MARTHA

Claire...

Claire explodes.

CLAIRE

You! You! I told you! What did you
DO?!

Martha's lip quivers. A tear rolls down, slow.

She drops to her knees, stares at the cliff's edge, pulls
herself back. Another tear. Then another.

ZOE

Mommy?!

Claire turns, pulls Zoe into her arms. Her cries deepen raw,
animal, almost wordless.

CLAIRE

(to Martha)

I told you! I TOLD YOU!... You
loser!... Adam!

Zoe begins to cry too. Smaller. Fragile.

ZOE

Mommy! I'm scared.

Martha leans back against the moss covered wall, sits.
Hollow. Breath shallow. Soul gone.

Claire pushes up, trembling. She rips off her backpack, hurls
it at Martha. WHUMP. It hits Martha, barely flinches.

Zoe stands off to the side, watches Claire storm at Martha.

CLAIRE

Adam is GONE! You here me! Your son
Adam is gone...

Claire breaks, falls against her, sobs. Zoe inches forward,
places a hand on Claire's back.

Martha lifts her head, eyes glossy. Watches Zoe turn toward
the cliff, takes one step. Then bends forward.

MARTHA

Zoe, no. Come here.

Claire spins swiftly, grabs Zoe's little backpack, pulls her
close. But Zoe squirms, eyes locked on the edge.

ZOE
Adam's calling me...

Claire freezes. Martha looks up. Alarm sharp in her eyes.

A faint, distant voice carries on the wind.

ADAM (O.S.)
Zoe?... Mom?... Claire?

Martha gasps, throws herself flat, crawls fast to the edge like a soldier in a warzone. Peeks down.

A dizzying drop. Far far below, debris scattered like broken toys, Adam's backpack torn open, pieces of trail mix glinting in the sun.

Too far. Too quiet. Martha's breath catches. Then movement. Something stirs. Subtle. Almost missed.

A hand. Emerging from the cliff wall, entangled in a mess of roots.

ADAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Mom?...

Martha blinks hard, leans forward. Squints.

Just behind the twisted roots, a head. Mud smeared. Barely visible. Still. But alive.

MARTHA
Adam?! Oh my god. I'm here! I see you! Mommy's here!

Claire stumbles to the edge, one hand grips the ground. She peers down, her breath stolen from her lungs.

CLAIRE
Adam?! Oh my God...

She covers her mouth. Eyes wide, locks at Adam's barely visible head. She can't look away.

Martha stays frozen, afraid to move.

MARTHA
Adam?! Don't make any move? Are you okay?!

ADAM (O.S.)
(Faint voice)
My leg...

MARTHA
Your leg?!

CLAIRE
Oh my god...

MARTHA
Does it hurt?!

ADAM (O.S.)
(Faint voice)
Yes...

MARTHA
Don't worry, I see you! I'll get
you up! Don't move!

Martha staggers upright, breath ragged.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(urgent, to Claire)
Stay with Zoe. I'm going down. He's
okay. I saw him.

Claire just stares down at Adam, breath held.

Martha gently taps Zoe's shoulder.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Stay close to the wall, don't move
okay?

Zoe clings to the wall. Martha turns, limps off forward,
ascent, then breaks into a run, despite the pain.

Claire watches Martha ascending up.

CLAIRE
Route's down this way!

Martha ignores, runs fast.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - SHORTCUT DESCENT - DAY

Martha reaches a steep decline of loose dirt, sand, thorny
brush. No time to think, she leaps, runs through the descent,
at speed.

Gravity takes her. She slips, tumbles, slides, ricochets off
rocks like a pinball, slamming into mud, twisting, flailing.

She finally skids to a stop. Covered in earth. Groans.

Martha pushes up, pants. Her prosthetic leg is twisted. With shaking hands, she straightens it. Keeps moving.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - DAY

Claire never blinks.

CLAIRE

Adam... I'm here, okay? We're gonna
get you out.

She presses a kiss into Zoe's hair. Zoe kneels beside her.

ZOE

Adam! Mommy's coming!

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - SHORTCUT DESCENT - MOMENTS LATER

Martha scrambles downward, slips again, her prosthetic snaps loose.

She crashes face first into the dirt. A beat of stillness.

Face to the ground. No sound but her breath.

She rolls over, gasps, eyes scans. No glasses.

She paws through the muck, finds the glasses, shaky hands
push them on. Blurry.

She stares at the sky a moment. Lost. Then wipes the lenses.

She spots the leg, a few meters ahead. Retrieves it. Locks it
in.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - VALLEY - DAY

Martha trudges through wild growth, mud streaked across her
face.

MARTHA

Adam!!

Faint. From above, a voice.

ADAM (O.S.)

Mom?...

Martha rips off her glasses, wipes again, looks up. Eyes
widen.

Martha's POV: Far above, Adam dangles upside down, cradled in roots. His left foot tangled in a thick snarl. Arms clutching a branch. Barely hanging on.

One bad root away from falling.

MARTHA

I see you! Try to keep your head
up! And don't move your leg! I am
coming.

EXT. MOUNTAIN BASE - CONTINUOUS

Martha rushes forward, scrambles up boulders until her hands slap the base of the cliff wall.

She looks up, almost vertical, smooth in places, jagged in others. No ledges. No grip. Just a drop.

Adam is so far. Just a silhouette swaying.

Martha glances down, jagged rocks, the shredded backpack, smashed water bottle, head pillows, rolled rubber mats.

She tries to climb, jumps. The cliff face crumbles in her hands, too steep. Too slick. Too tall.

Above Adam: Mid-level roots. Above that: Small branches.
Above that: Rocks, cliff edge. Above that: The cliffside trail, where Claire and Zoe wait.

Martha wipes her face, breathes. Then backs up, scans the mountain. Calculating.

MARTHA

Stay calm, Adam! I'm coming!

She spins around and sprints toward the shortcut.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - SHORTCUT ASCENT - DAY

Martha climbs, not fast, but steady. Breathes hard. Mud clings to her legs.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - DAY

Claire sits frozen, eyes locked on Adam. Footsteps. Zoe turns, Martha appears, panting.

Claire looks at her, desperate, angry.

CLAIRE
I want him back. I want Adam back
safe!

Martha, quiet, drops to her knees, rips open her backpack.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm talking to you!

Martha ignores her. Zoe runs to Martha throws her arms around her.

MARTHA
Hey, sweetie. I'm gonna save your
brother. Then we're getting ice
cream. Deal?

CLAIRE
Zoe? Get away from her.

Zoe stays, clings tighter. Martha looks up at Claire, her eyes red, raw.

MARTHA
Claire, you need to calm down. I've
got an idea.

CLAIRE
Fuck your ideas! This was your
idea! Dragging us into this death
trap!

MARTHA
I love Adam. I love Zoe. I love
you. I'm not leaving anyone.

Claire bites her lip, trembles with rage.

CLAIRE
Zoe...

MARTHA
Sit here, baby.

Zoe settles beside the mossy rock wall.

Martha dumps the backpack. No rope. Shit. She glances at the fading sun, time's running out.

She picks a hard military flashlight. Three headlamps.

She straps one headlamp on Zoe, one on herself, tosses one to Claire. She catches it.

Glow sticks. She grabs a handful, stuffs some into Zoe's mini pack.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
When mommy asks, hand these to me,
okay?

Zoe nods, eyes watery.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Hey... Adam's gonna be fine.

Martha approaches Claire, hands her a flashlight and a few glow sticks.

Without a word, she unclips her backpack and walks back to Zoe.

Claire watches her, tears cutting silent tracks down her cheeks.

CLAIRE
(hoarse)
Bring him back.

Martha nods, eyes fixed downward, avoids Claire's.

MARTHA
The cliff's near vertical. No
footholds, nothing to grip. We
can't climb. Only way is pulling
him up.

She dumps Claire's backpack out, fingers working fast.

Martha slices off the shoulder and waist straps with her knife. Then she turns to her own military pack, same treatment.

She yanks a solid wooden rod from the frame. She pauses, glances at her boot, then at Claire's.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Toss me your shoes.

Claire wipes her face, exhales shakily. She slips off her shoes, tosses them to Martha. Claire's eyes flick back to Adam's distant, dangling shape.

Martha quickly strips both her laces, then her own. She braids them together tightly, reinforces the knots.

Zoe silently begins to remove her shoes.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
No, sweetie. I got it.

She grabs a spare pair of jeans from her gear, ties the straps and laces to the pant legs like a makeshift rope. She tugs solid.

One end gets tied to the heavy backpack, the other to the wooden rod. She yanks again. It holds.

Martha lies flat on the cliff's edge, presses the rod down with her weight, and lowers the backpack into the abyss.

Claire kneels beside her, watches closely.

The backpack jerks mid air snagged.

CLAIRE
Pull it up a bit. Swing and drop.

Martha follows her lead. She swings the pack, lets it fall again, this time it clears.

MARTHA
Adam! Do you see my pack?! Can you grab it?

Silence.

CLAIRE
Adam?!

ADAM (O.S.)
(faint)
No...

Claire leans over the edge, peers down.

CLAIRE
It's too short. He can't reach it.

Martha begins reels it in, but it gets caught in branches. Claire takes over, her hands deft.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Swing wide. Watch the limbs.

Martha steadies herself.

MARTHA
Adam! Just hold on! Are you okay?

Nothing. Then...

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Show me a thumbs up.

Below, a tiny hand lifts. Thumb up.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
That's my boy! Stay strong, we're
here!

Claire hauls the rope back.

Martha stands, barefoot, unbuckles her prosthetic leg. She strips off her hiking pants, reveals rugged shorts.

She ties one end of the pants to the prosthetic, the other to the backpack.

Tug. Secure. She nods, jaw tight.

Claire eases the rope down, hands steady but trembles.

The prosthetic leg dangles at the end, sways like a pendulum.

CLAIRE
Adam?! That's for you, grab it and
hang tight!

Both Martha and Claire lie flat on the narrow trail, faces inches from the edge, watches.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - CONTINUOUS

The makeshift rope snakes downward, bounces off sharp rocks, brushing branches, scraps against jagged bark.

The prosthetic leg bumps, twists, catches, then drops again.

Deeper down. Adam dangles upside down, tangled in a web of thick roots.

His left foot is wedged tight, pinned between gnarled roots. His right leg kicks freely, searching for balance.

One arm clings to a thick root, muscles tremble. Dirt streaks his face. Blood mats his hair.

He lifts his head, just barely, sees it. The prosthetic leg swings toward him.

It hits his shin, rebounds, sways again. Adam grits his teeth, breath sharp and shallow.

The prosthetic leg swings back closer this time, it brushes against his stomach and pauses.

With a grunt, Adam loosens his right hand from the root, reaches. His fingers tremble, stretch.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - DAY

Martha and Claire lie flat on their stomachs, peers over the ledge.

MARTHA
(calling down)
You've got this, Adam! Nice and
slow, just hold it!

Dirt coats their faces. Martha holds on the wooden rod.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - CONTINUOUS

Adam dangles upside down. His right arm stretches up, shakes.

He sees the prosthetic leg swings just inches above him.

With a grunt, he pulls on a root with his left hand, his body arches, strains his right hand just brushes the prosthetic foot.

It slips away. He tries again. Pulls harder.

This time, his fingers graze the metal edge, slip, then hook. Clutch. He's got it.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - CONTINUOUS

Martha feels the sudden tug through the wooden rod. She digs her elbows in, anchors herself.

MARTHA
(urgent, steady)
I've got you, buddy. You're good.
Hold tight.

Claire edges forward, just enough to catch a glimpse of Adam's face, mud caked, eyes wild but alive.

CLAIRE
Oh God, Adam! That's it, boy! Hang
on! Just hang on!

MARTHA

Don't rush! Keep that leg locked in. Use the rope to lift, not your foot, don't move that leg! You hear me?

CLAIRE

Adam! Use the rope to lift! Don't move that leg?!

EXT. CLIFF FACE - CONTINUOUS

Adam manages a shaky thumbs up.

He clutches the root with his left hand, the prosthetic leg with his right. He draws in a breath, tight, burning. Then he pulls.

Dirt rains down. His body lifts inch by inch, shaky, off balance, but rises.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - CONTINUOUS

Martha grunts, strains as she pulls the makeshift rope.

Zoe watches wide eyed from behind, frozen.

Claire leans out dangerously, eyes locked on the drop.

CLAIRE

(breathless)

He's got it... I can see him! Good job buddy!

Martha braces, kneels, heaves.

SNAP. The rope jerks violently.

Martha stumbles backward, crashes onto the path. Claire screams, eyes down at the edge.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Adam?! Adam?!

No answer. Martha scrambles to her feet, limps closer.

MARTHA

Adam! Talk to me!

Silence. Claire clutches the dirt, sobs.

CLAIRE

No, no, please, God, no...

Martha scans the cliffside, squints, then sees it. A hand slowly rises, trembling.

A thumbs up.

Claire spots, exhales like she's been underwater.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Oh my God. Thank you.
(shouts)
Are you hurt, Adam?!

Adam gives a weak wave.

MARTHA
(grinning, relief)
That's a no.
(yells down)
You're doing amazing, Adam! Stay
with us, we're bringing you up! And
hold your head up!

Martha reels in the rope, what's left of it. The end dangles limp and frayed. Her prosthetic leg, her pants and backpack, gone.

She stares at it. Grits her teeth.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Fuck!

Claire turns to her, alarmed.

CLAIRE
What?--

Before she could answer. Martha loses her footing, her good leg slips off the edge.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Mom!

Claire lunges, grabs Martha's jacket just in time, she hangs on the edge.

ZOE
Mommy!

Zoe rushes in, grabs a fistful of jacket. The fabric stretches.

CLAIRE
Push with your leg! Come on, mom!
Help us!

Martha swings an arm up, grabs a rock. Her other arm claws at the dirt.

With a fierce growl, she pulls herself back onto the path. She collapses on her back, panting.

All lay down. Silent. Just wind and breath. Martha, no time, scrambles to her feet, grabs her hiking sticks. Snatches Claire's.

Drops to one knee, she puts the sticks together. Rolls them with the last strip of cloth, wraps them tight. Pulls hard. Knots it. Again.

It's solid now, sturdier. A makeshift staff for balance and reach.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Please don't do something stupid.

Martha looks up, eyes clear, burning.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I want him safe.

MARTHA
So do I. I'm heading to the cabin.
Sani might be able to help, get
medics, firemen, whatever he can
get.
(beat)
Adam's foot is stuck tight. He just
has to hold on. Keep him talking.
Keep him awake. This spot is safe.
If anything, use this rod.

Martha hands over the wooden rod. Claire nods, silent. Martha turns to Zoe. Sun slowly disappears.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Zoe?

Martha extends her hand, palm open. Zoe places the glow sticks into it, her fingers tremble.

She cracks one snap, a surge of green light pulses to life. It reflects off Zoe's wide eyes.

Martha cracks a couple more, shakes them hard, then crawls toward the edge. She leans over, eyes scans the drop.

With careful aim, she tosses the first glow stick.

It bounces off a branch, spins, and catches between a tangle of roots, a soft, eerie glow now marks Adam's outline in the dark. Then throws the remaining sticks.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
(To Claire)
Keep eyes open. If he moves, throw more.

Claire nods.

Martha clicks on her headlamp. The beam cuts through the shadows.

She glances at Zoe, turns on her head lamp, winks.

Martha plants the makeshift staff into the dirt. It holds.

She places the staff to her armpits, shifts her weight onto it, steadies herself up.

Martha takes the flashlight from Claire, angles it toward the moss covered wall, wedges it into a crevice. Click.

The beam floods the narrow path, illuminates Claire and Zoe.

Martha watches it for a second, making sure it holds. Then she switches it off.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Only use it if you need to.

Without looking back, she starts to walk, the threaded sticks braces her weight.

Claire watches her go, her face tight with fear and hope.

Zoe clutches on a few remaining glow stick, eyes fixed on her mother as she disappears into the fading light.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - SHORTCUT DESCENT - NIGHT

Martha removes her headlamp, tucks them into her jacket, her glasses into a small box. Exhales. Covers her head. She jumps.

She slides. Rolls. Bounces. Fast free fall.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - NIGHT

Cabin lights on. Sani opens the door, reaches his battered old truck.

SANI
Patel? The bag.

Patel steps out, tosses a duffel into the truck bed. Sani climbs in. The engine growls to life, leaves.

Xolo, the dog, barks and circles Patel, nose to the dirt.

EXT. MOUNTAIN BASE - NIGHT

Martha's headlamp beam slices through the dark, sweeps across scattered gear. A snake slithers off into the brush.

The light catches Martha's prosthetic leg, still tied to a shredded pair of hiking pants.

Martha reaches, kneels, yanks the knot loose. The beam glints off the metal blade, bent, warped. Useless.

She looks up, the faint glow of green light marks Adam's silhouette above.

MARTHA
(under breath)
Hang on, kid. I'm coming.

She straps on the busted prosthetic leg anyway. Winces.

Grips her makeshift staff tight, she limps forward, low to the ground, fast and steady.

EXT. WATERFALL POND - NIGHT

Martha staggers, soaked, chest heaves. Her headlamp cuts through mist and spray.

The world is pitch black, no moon, just the roar of the falls and her own breath.

She looks up. Only darkness.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

A halo of green glow sticks faintly illuminates the trail.

Zoe sits, clutches her knees.

Claire kneels near the edge, two glow sticks by her side, eyes locked downward.

CLAIRE
(shouting, trembling)
Adam?! Mom's gone for help! They're
coming, baby, just hang on! I'm
here, you hear me? Keep your head
up!

She flicks on her headlamp. Eyes narrow, searching, a movement.

Adam's hand, still gripping the root.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(whispers)
You're holding on... Good boy.

Thunder cracks. Claire jerks, eyes wide. Rain pours.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - NIGHT

Martha pushes forward, hat soaked, limps hard but fast. Rain lashes down.

Her foot slips, she crashes to a knee, grits her teeth, pushes up. Keeps going.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - NIGHT

Martha's light slices through the sheet of water rushing down the mossy slope.

Martha stops. Stares up. Breath ragged. She plants a hand. Slippery. No grip.

Then she throws herself forward, grunts, claws at moss, slides backward. Catches herself. Gasps.

Plants her makeshift staff. Uses it for leverage. She pulls herself upward, inch by inch.

Rain soaks her. Mud clings. Halfway up. THUD. SLIP. She falls, slides fast, slams the staff into a rock, stops hard. Hangs there, frozen. Soaked.

Her prosthetic leg, pops off, skids to the base.

Martha watches it slide away. Stares up again. Breathes.

She tightens both hands on the staff. Stands up. One leg.

Martha balances, trembles. Pulls the staff free. Slips. Drops to a knee. Stays there, tight.

On one knee, soaking wet, she pushes forward with the staff.
Crawls. Climbs. Cautious.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - TOP - NIGHT

Martha grabs a branch, yanks herself over the edge. Flops
onto the path. Lays there. Breathing. Alive.

MARTHA
Just please stop. Please.

Thunder, rain still pours.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Thunder growls. Rain lashes down.

Glow sticks cast a sickly green hue. Zoe huddles under a rain
poncho, shivers.

Claire, soaked to the bone, crouches at the edge, headlamp
cuts through the dark.

CLAIRE
(shouting down)
Adam! Tuck your nose, lift your
chin, stay with me, boy!

She peers into the void. Adam's hand slips from the root. She
gasps. The hand clamps back.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(strained)
You're strong, Adam. Just hold on.
Hold on!

The rain softens. A beat. Silence.

Claire drops her head in the mud.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(quiet, breaking)
Thank you... thank you God...

She exhales, peels off her soaked jacket, now just a t-shirt
and shorts clinging to her skin.

EXT. FOREST - UNMARKED TRAIL - NIGHT

Rain continues. Martha limps, braced on her makeshift staff.
Every step is a grunt. A drag. A breathless battle.

She pushes past a bush, loses balance, tumbles sideways down a slope, hard rolls to a stop.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Martha scrambles upright, dazed. The trail gone. Nothing but trees. Shadows. Rain.

Her beam sweeps the dark. A rope dangles in the distance, swaying, familiar.

She stumbles toward it, grabs it, pulls hard. Branches above groan, resist. She yells. Pulls harder. Nothing.

She tries to climb. Hands slip, she crashes down to her knees. Martha, roars to the sky.

MARTHA
Why?! Why always me?!

INT. WOODEN CABIN - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rain hammers the roof. Patel hums, flips an egg into a pan, steam hisses, face momentarily lost in the rising smoke.

Xolo barks from the corner. Patel grabs the pan, turns toward the door.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Patel, holds up the pan. Xolo barks again, growls. He reaches the huge back door.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - BACK - NIGHT

Warm light spills from the windows. Patel steps out with the pan in hand. He pauses.

Martha emerges from the dark, mud-caked, drenched, limping hard on her makeshift staff.

Xolo darts out, barks joyfully. Circles Martha. Tail wagging. Tongue out.

Patel drops the pan.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Martha slumps into a wooden chair, Patel holds her up.

PATEL
Are you alright? What happened?

Martha, rasps, gestures vaguely for water. Patel sprints to the kitchen. Returns with a cup.

Martha gulps it, spills half down her chest.

MARTHA
More.

Patel rushes back. Hands her another. Martha drains it. Xolo sniffs Martha.

Patel's eyes trail down, muddy shorts, no leg.

PATEL
(staggered)
What happened? Where are the others? The kids?

Martha's gaze lifts, sharp.

MARTHA
Where's Sani?

PATEL
(confused)
He left. Drove to town, to get new tires for your truck.

Martha shakes her head, tries to make sense of it.

MARTHA
(urgent, louder)
What?... Sani? Where is he?

PATEL
(signs)
City. He's not here. Went to buy tires, your truck, remember?

Martha sinks back, breath shallow.

MARTHA
Sani's in town?...

Patel nods.

PATEL
Tell me?! what happened?!

MARTHA
Call nine one one. Your phone. Now.

Patel snatches his phone. Dials. Waits. Nothing. He shakes his head.

Martha grabs it. Checks, no bars.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
No signal? Anyone nearby? You got a
satellite phone?

Patel nods no, overwhelmed.

PATEL
(shouting)
What happened?!

Martha locks eyes with him.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Mist. Glow sticks flicker green. Claire, kneels near the edge, soaked, arms wrapped around herself. Her headlamp flickers.

CLAIRE
Adam, just hold on. Don't sleep.
You hear me?

Zoe lays on the moss wall. A dozen of fireflies blink in and out.

ZOE
(whispers)
Fairies...

She reaches out slowly, one lands on her hand, glowing softly.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Patel moves fast. Opens a dusty backpack, tosses in water bottles, granola bars, leftover chocolate. No hesitation. Just instinct.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - SHED - NIGHT

The flickering bulb hums. Patel yanks open a shelf drawer. Tools clatter. He grabs a flashlight, a multi tool, keeps scanning, no rope.

Martha limps in behind him.

MARTHA

Even something short. Just strong
enough to hold weight.

Patel shakes his head, nothing. They exchange a look. Bolts outside.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - BACK - NIGHT

The rain's eased. Everything drips.

Patel spots a clothesline wire stretched between trees. He rushes over, rips down soaked clothes, hacks the wire with his pocket knife.

Nearby, Martha eyes a coiled garden hose. She tugs too tight. She leans into it, grits her teeth, yanks harder.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Zoe sleeps, curled against the mossy rock wall.

Claire soaked to the bone, eyes locked on the cliff's edge.

CLAIRE

You're doing great, Adam! Stay with
me, baby!

A beat. Claire glances at Zoe. Protective. Exhausted.

CRUNCH. FOOTSTEPS.

Claire snaps alert. Two FLASHLIGHTS bob down the trail, slow, deliberate.

She stands, hits the wall mounted flashlight Martha installed. A powerful beam floods the path.

The other lights pause. Then one starts moving forward again.

Claire shivers, arms crossed over her chest. Her wet T-shirt clings to her belly. Her legs tremble.

Out of the darkness emerge Two men, BEN and KANE, early 40s. Hikers. Drenched, but oddly calm. Packs strapped. Faces too clean.

Claire instinctively steps back, shields herself with one arm.

BEN

Hey... Sorry to bug you. We're
totally lost.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)
Missed a turn after base camp. I'm
Ben, this is Kane, my business
partner. This trail lead
anywhere?...

CLAIRE
(nods, quiet)
Hey, Yeah. It's... it's a private
route. Old native trail. Leads
down. You're on the right track.

Ben takes her in, eyes lingers a second too long on her face,
her chest, her belly, her bare feet.

Claire avoids his gaze, stares down the cliff.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Do you have rope? My brother's down
there. We need help pulling him up.

Kane steps to the edge, peers over. He sees the faint glow
sticks far below.

KANE
That him?

Claire drops to her knees beside him, points into the void.
Ben eyes Claire's back.

CLAIRE
Yes. Adam. He's stuck.

Ben drops down next to her. Too close. Claire shifts away,
uneasy.

BEN
(long beat)
Shit...

CLAIRE
Do you have rope?

Ben just stares at her. Something hungry in his eyes.

BEN
You two up here alone?

KANE
Three.
(to Claire)
Your daughter?

Claire nods quickly, voice firm now.

CLAIRE

No. My sister, and my mom's on her way. Should be close. Can you help us? Please?

KANE

(cliff again)

That drop's near vertical. We've got no rope. No signal. It's not safe. We need to get out to the trail head, then get help. It's...

Kane eyes on her cleavage. Claire looks down the trail.

Ben keeps his eyes on Claire, drifts from her soaked shirt to her thighs. She notices. Stands up. Folds her arms tighter.

Silence grows heavy. The air sharp with dread.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - NIGHT

Under the hanging rope from earlier, Patel and Martha pull down with everything they've got.

Xolo barks excitedly, tail wagging.

They strain, nothing.

Patel signals Martha to hold it steady. Climbs halfway up the trunk like a monkey.

MARTHA

Little more... Right there.

Patel saws at the knot. One cut. Two. SNAP. He falls straight onto Martha.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

(grunting)

I got you, I got you.

They roll off each other, muddy, panting.

Martha adjusts her glasses, steadies her breath. Patel coils the rope tight, focused.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Ben and Kane rise slowly. Their eyes stay on Claire. She backs up instinctively, body tense.

BEN

Hey. We'll help. We can get him
up... Right, Kane?

Ben just keeps staring at her.

KANE

Yeah. Sure. We'll help.

Claire squints, inches back. Something shifts in the air.
Off. Predatory.

BEN

But first... Maybe we make a little
trade?

Claire stiffens. Her hand subtly reaches back toward the
wall.

CLAIRE

No, thank you. My mom is nearby,
and also Sani. He's big, he is on
his way. I don't need anything.

Ben glances behind, only black trees and silence. Zoe
sleeping.

BEN

We're not here to hurt you. Just...
Lighten the mood. You're young. We
will save your brother. No harm in
some... You know, highschool
campfire memories.

Kane looks back at the cliff, then grabs Ben's arm, pulls him
slightly back. Whispers, but not quietly enough.

KANE

(whispers)

We dump her down, slip and fall.

Claire hears. Her pulse spikes. She lunges, grabs a nearby
wooden rod, swings fast.

CLAIRE

Back off! She's military. If she
sees you touch me, you're dead.

Claire lifts the rod, Ben catches it mid air, rips it from
her hands, tosses it over the cliff.

KANE

(stepping in)

Should've just said yes.

Kane lunges, Claire knees him in the groin. He stumbles, gasps.

She grabs a rock, throws, hits Kane in the face.

Ben grabs Claire by hair, Yanks her back.

CLAIRE
(yelling)
Zoe! Run!

Zoe bolts upright, sees her mom struggling.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Go! Get help! Go!

Claire kicks, claws, tries to scream again. Zoe runs away.

Ben closes her mouth. Claire bites his hand. He screams.

EXT. SLIPPERY SLOPE - BOTTOM - NIGHT

Martha and Patel slide down, lands hard but steady. Mud splashes.

Martha spots her bent prosthetic leg half buried in the muck. She grabs it, straps it on with a grunt.

Patel looks up the slope. Xolo stands frozen at the ridge, ears perked, growls low.

PATEL
(whistles)
Xolo!

Xolo stands still. Something caught his nose.

With a sudden snarl, he bolts, leaps over Patel, disappears into the dark underbrush.

PATEL (CONT'D)
No! Xolo!

Patel whistles again, sharper. No response.

MARTHA
Xolo! Get back!

PATEL
(sighs)
Chasing rabbits!

MARTHA

What?!

PATEL

He's ex-K9. Still thinks he's on duty.

Martha nods.

PATEL (CONT'D)

Ex-K9 dog.

MARTHA

I get it. K9 dog. Yeah. Ex-k9.

Patel gives a half smile. Martha slaps his back.

They press forward, urgency picks up in their steps.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Claire on the floor, t-shirt torn, cries. Kane sits above her.

CLAIRE

Please! Please! Please!

Kane slaps her.

KANE

Fucking bitch. Shut up!

Claire screams. Ben, tries to remove her shorts. Kane unzips his pants.

KANE (CONT'D)

Just pull it!

Ben fastens his hand. A stone hits his head. THUD. Another stone hits Kane's head.

Zoe throwing stones.

KANE (CONT'D)

Throw her down.

CLAIRE

No! Zoe run! Run! Run!

Zoe runs, Ben chases her. She screams.

Zoe stumbles, slips on the slick rock, thuds to the ground.

Ben lunges, snatches her by the arm.

Suddenly, a blur of black and tan bursts from the dark. Xolo.

The dog clamps down on Ben's neck, yanks him back with a vicious snarl.

Ben screams, thrashes, blood sprays in the moonlight.

Kane, frozen, stares wide eyed at the chaos.

KANE

Shit!

He scrambles for a rock, hurls it. It misses.

Xolo drops Ben, turns growling, lips peeled back at Kane.

Kane rips his hiking stick from his pack.

Xolo charges.

Kane swings, misses. Xolo lunges, teeth sinks into his hip.

KANE (CONT'D)

AHHH!

Ben, staggers, blood on his collar, grabs his backpack, slams it into Xolo.

The dog tumbles, lands hard but bounces back, teeth bared, steady.

Zoe screams. Claire, breathless, scrambles to her side, shields her with her body.

ZOE

Bite him, Xolo! Bite him!

Ben, wheezing, slams his fist into the dog's muzzle.

Xolo stumbles, regains footing, crouches low, snarls.

Ben and Kane, bleeding and panting, back up slowly, side by side.

Claire clutches Zoe. Both terrified.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - SHORTCUT ASCENT - NIGHT

Patel, with a bag, a rope rolled on his shoulders.

ZOE (O.S.)

Mommy!

Martha freezes.

MARTHA

Zoe?!

Patel hurls the rope and bag aside, bolts uphill. Martha snatches them up, follows him.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - NIGHT

The old truck stops. Sani steps out. Gets back, pulls the duffle bag from the trunk.

SANI

Patel?!

Silence.

Sani whistles. Nothing.

SANI (CONT'D)

Xolo!

Sani eyes suspicious, gets inside the cabin.

INT. WOODEN CABIN - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Sani enters, drops the bag, strolls into the kitchen, comes back to the back door.

SANI

Patel?!

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - BACK - NIGHT

Sani eyes the totem, looks up the mountains, then around, sees the clothes on the floor, clothesline cut, turns aside, garden hose gone.

He stares at the trail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Xolo snarls, blocks Ben and Kane.

Kane reaches for his bag. Xolo lunges, he swings hard, thwack.

Xolo stumbles but holds ground, growls deep.

Ben raises his own bag to strike, pauses.

A flashlight darts through the trees toward them.

KANE
Push'em now!

Ben leaps. Claire, trembles, shields Zoe, her heart pounds.

ZOE
Bite, Xolo! Bite them!

Xolo blocks, snarls again, but then--

PATEL (O.S.)
Hey!

Claire jerks around. Patel emerges, breath heaving.

He clocks the scene, the men, Claire's torn t-shirt, the dog.

PATEL (CONT'D)
Xolo?

He steps forward. Claire grabs his arm.

CLAIRE
No wait. They tried to kill us.

Patel's eyes flare. He pulls a knife, screams.

PATEL
Come on! Come on!

Behind, Martha bursts up the path, gasping.

The flashlight beam hits Ben and Kane, they back off, melt into the darkness.

Xolo growls, alert but still.

Martha reaches, Zoe runs into Martha's arms.

ZOE
They hit Xolo... they hit Mom too.

Martha freezes.

MARTHA
What? Who?

Patel quickly takes off his shirt, wraps it around Claire's shoulders.

He crouches, whispers to Xolo, pulls a small treat from his pocket.

Claire, shaking, slumps against the moss wall, silent tears falling.

Martha kneels beside her. Zoe lays beside Claire.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Hey. What happened?

Claire can't meet her eyes.

CLAIRE
Save him. Just please save Adam.

MARTHA
I will... You okay?

Claire hesitates, keeps mum.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Claire, talk to me, what happened?!

Claire breaks, clutches her.

CLAIRE
Why do you care?! You never did!

Martha holds her. Claire cries.

MARTHA
I'm sorry Claire. This is on me.
(softly)
Goddammit... Are you hurt?

Claire bites her teeth, inhales.

CLAIRE
It's all because of you!

She hits, slaps Martha, sobs again.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
He was a fine little boy, you
brought him here, changed his fate!
I have to go through this crap...

Martha eyes her cheek, red.

MARTHA
What happened?

CLAIRE
Move away from my face!

Claire pushes Martha, cries.

Patel crouches at the edge, cracks a glow stick, snap, tosses it down.

A faint green glow reveals Adam, sprawled below.

PATEL
Adam?! Patel! I'm here!

Martha drops beside Patel, out of breath.

MARTHA
Adam! We are getting you up!

Patel flicks his flashlight, catches a glimpse of Adam's hand, limp but clutching the earth.

He tightens the rope around his chest. Looks at Martha.

PATEL
(Hand signs)
I go down, you hold the rope,
tight, I put the rope on Adam. I
say pull, you pull. Ok?!

Martha nods.

MARTHA
Ya, I hold the rope, you go to
Adam, I pull you both.

They glance at the makeshift rope- Garden hose, swing cord, clothesline wire.

Martha grips it, wraps it twice around her forearm.

Patel, flashlight in his mouth, begins the descent, feet on branches, fingers search rock holds.

Martha braces, digs in. Suddenly, another hand joins. Claire, eyes red. Silent, strong.

Zoe watches, huddled back near the moss wall.

Down below...

PATEL (O.S.)
(Faint guttural)
Pull, pull.

MARTHA

Pull! Pull!

Martha and Claire haul, inch by inch, struggles.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Ahh!

They pull up hard. Martha's prosthetic leg snaps, buckles.

Martha collapses, the rope yanks back, burns her hand, clutches it tight. Grunts.

Claire falls to her knees, strains.

Claire and Martha. Pull One. Pull Two. Then Three, four, five, six... A hand on the ledge, it's Patel's. They haul him over.

But no Adam.

CLAIRE

Where's Adam?

MARTHA

Patel?

Patel, gasps, holds up a finger, wait.

Claire snatches the flashlight from him, shines it down. Adam still lies there, barely moving.

PATEL

Adam? Leg tight. His leg tight.

Martha nods.

MARTHA

You couldn't reach?

Patel nods no fast.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

What?

CLAIRE

Patel?

Patel points his left leg.

MARTHA

Leg! His leg?

Patel nods yes. Then sticks his both hands, then tries to separate it, holds it together.

PATEL

Tight.

CLAIRE

Tight. His legs are tight?!

Patel nods quickly, chest heaves.

He snatches his knife from the dirt, clenches it between his teeth.

Without a word, he crawls back toward the edge.

Martha yanks him back roughly.

MARTHA

Hold up. You're too heavy to haul... Come with me.

Martha grabs her staff, limps toward the shortcut, followed by Patel.

Xolo stays posted, eyes locked on the dark trail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - NIGHT

Martha and Patel reaches the descent, scans the area.

Spots a long, heavy log.

They shoulders it. Martha drops it. Struggles to pick it. Grunts. They roll the log.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Zoe nibbles on a chocolate bar.

The dog stands stiff, ears perked.

Martha and Patel appear, sweat soaked, rolls a massive log.

Claire helps lay it near the wall.

Martha picks up the dented food tin, starts digging, on the path floor.

Patel joins in, carves with a jagged rock.

They work in silence. Determined. Focused.

A beat.

The pit's deep enough. Martha and Patel slam the thick log upright into the hole.

Martha yanks the rope tight around it, knots secure.

MARTHA

Let's see if it reaches. Then you go.

Patel nods.

Martha lowers the rope.

Claire crouches, flashlight beams, rope sways just above Adam's hips.

CLAIRE

Adam? Can you reach?

A faint twitch, Adam tries. Fails.

Suddenly, Xolo growls. Loud. Sharp. Then barks, wild.

Everyone freezes.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

It's them.

Martha shoves Claire behind her, staff raised. Patel grips his knife. Claire pulls Zoe close.

Xolo's bark intensifies, then, silence.

MARTHA

Xolo?!

A low growl rumbles from the dark.

Then CRASH.

A hulk BLACK BEAR stomps into view, blood streaking its snout.

Martha looks back at Zoe.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Run!

Claire scoops Zoe, bolts up the trail.

The bear charges. Xolo lunges, claws tear, jaws snap. A vicious struggle.

Patel and Martha scream, to scare the bear off.

The bear latches onto Xolo's leg, hurls him.

Xolo crashes at Martha's feet.

The beast looms, steps over the dog.

Martha and Patel backpedal.

The bear rears up, grabs the wooden log, rips it free, flings it off the cliff. The rope sails down with it.

Martha swings her staff, landing solid hits. Patel pelts rocks. The bear snarls, maddened.

It lunges at Martha. She falls, bear on top. Martha jams her staff across it's jaws, holds it off.

Patel kicks its snout hard. Martha slams the staff into it's face again.

The bear reels back.

Patel yanks Martha to her feet. But too late. The bear turns, charges again. Grabs Martha, hurls her into a rock.

Martha hits hard. Head snaps back. Vision blurs, she searches for Zoe.

Through blurred vision, Martha sees a massive silhouette human figure stumbles toward her, arms outstretched, unnatural. A guttural noise.

Martha blinks, goes into darkness.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH. DREAM - NIGHT

Martha's eyes flutter open. Silence. She's flat on her back. Cold earth beneath. Breath visible.

A carved totem stands at the cliff's edge, it's eyes hollow, watches.

Nearby, Patel and Xolo sleep, curled close. Claire and Zoe lie tucked against a mossy wall, still.

A frayed rope stretches from the totem disappears over the cliff.

Stillness. Then, a jolt. Rope tightens.

Martha scrambles to it, starts to pull. SNAP. The rope yanks from her hands. She stumbles back, heart pounds.

She crawls to the ledge. No Adam. Just dark. Empty.

Then, a flash of blue light.

A tall blue figure, four hands, leaps up from the abyss, wearing lion's head as a crown, draped in lion's skin, black eyes locked on Martha. Inhuman. Silent.

Martha scrambles backward, breath shallow. The figure slowly points upward.

Martha follows the gesture, sees the Orion constellation, bright and still.

She looks back down. The figure's gone.

A voice, calm, familiar.

ADAM (O.S.)

Mom? I'm safe. I made it up.

Martha turns, hopeful. But. A creepy grinning Fiona stares back. Her smile too wide. Too knowing. Martha jerks.

Creepy Fiona lunges, drags her down, pins her. Her breath on Martha's face.

Martha shuts her eyes. A soft voice.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Martha? Martha?

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH. PRESENT - NIGHT

Martha's eyes blink open. Claire's face hovers upside down.

CLAIRE

Mom?

She groans, sits up, blinks, scans. No totem. No rope. No Patel. Just damp night air.

MARTHA

Adam?

She crawls to the cliff's edge, voice raw.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Adam!

Footsteps crunch. Sani appears, holds a carved wooden bottle.

SANI

Here.

Martha turns, disoriented. Recognizes him. Takes the bottle, gulps.

She looks around again, calm, too calm.

Then spots Zoe, bundled in a sleeping bag nearby. There is Xolo, laying far from her.

MARTHA

Zoe?

SANI

She's safe. Let her sleep.

MARTHA

Adam fell. Down the cliff.

Sani rests a hand on Martha's shoulder.

SANI

I know. Patel's gone up to the base camp for help.

Martha looks up the sky, sees the orion constellation bright.

SANI (CONT'D)

He'll be back.

Martha nods slowly. Breath heavy.

MARTHA

The bear?

SANI

It's gone, won't come back. You rest.

Sani nods, walks over to sit beside Zoe.

Claire kneels beside Martha.

CLAIRE

He's not moving...

Martha lowers her head. Silent beat.

MARTHA

He's fine.

Claire shakes her head, tears spill.

EXT. BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Tents in a half circle glow faintly under string lights. A dying campfire at the centre.

Children's laughter fades into the tents, red, green, and blue domes zipped shut.

A larger canvas tent, marked 'Supervisors'. A folding table outside.

Glow sticks mark a trail toward the trees, portable toilets just out of sight.

Quiet. Still. Silent.

Patel approaches, bare chest, a crumpled paper clutched tight.

THE SUPERVISOR, 60, stands out far, guarding, torch in hand. The beam catches Patel. He raises a hand, breath ragged.

The supervisor steps forward, wary. Patel hands him the paper, urgency in his eyes.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Martha lies near the edge, stares into the dark. Claire sits beside her, silent tears streaking her face.

She gently reaches for her hand, Claire pulls away.

MARTHA

Claire... He's okay. We're going to get him back.

(beat)

What's really going on with you?

CLAIRE

(quiet, sharp)

You don't get to ask me that.

(beat)

You brought us here. You. This is all on you.

Martha stays quiet.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(voice cracking)

He's out there alone... maybe dead...

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(snarls)

And you dragged us into this mess
like it's a family vacation.

Zoe stirs in her sleep. From a distance, Sani gently strokes
her hair. Watching.

MARTHA

He's my son. Your brother. We are
not leaving without him--

CLAIRE

Don't act like a mother now. You
weren't there. Not once. Now you
show up with hiking boots and good
intentions?

MARTHA

(soft)

I'm trying.

CLAIRE

Too late.

MARTHA

I didn't leave to hurt you. I left
to protect you.

CLAIRE

Bullshit. You left because it was
easier. Easier than being a mom.
Easier than facing us.

MARTHA

You think I wanted this?

CLAIRE

You disappeared. And then I had to
smile through it. Pretend like I
was okay. You broke everything.

Silence.

MARTHA

(quietly breaking)

I came back once. To surprise you.
You and the kids were at school. I
let myself in... gifts in hand...

She breathes, the memory pulling at her.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

He didn't hear me. He was in our
room. With Fiona. Enjoying her.

Claire stiffens.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I just left, didn't scream. Didn't fight. I walked out, got on a plane, and I kept going. I kept going because I thought if I stopped, I'd fall apart. Our family will fall. Everything we have created would come down.

Claire's eyes flood, lips trembling.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I was out there every day, sleeping in dirt, dodging bullets, saving everything I had for you three. Every dollar. Every letter I didn't send. I carried you in every step, Claire. I wasn't gone. I was surviving for you.

CLAIRE

(whispers)

You should've told us.

MARTHA

And say what? That your dad turned our home into something unrecognizable? I didn't want that poison to touch you.

Claire stares at her. A long pause. The hurt itches her.

CLAIRE

You think that makes you the hero?

MARTHA

No. I think it makes me your mother.

Claire looks away, tears streaking her cheeks.

CLAIRE

You weren't there when we needed you.

Martha lowers her head. Her voice barely a breath.

MARTHA

I know. But I never stopped loving you. I just couldn't show.

A long silence.

CLAIRE
Dad would've never let this happen.
Fiona would've kept us safe.

Martha blinks, stunned. Her face falls, hollow, empty.

Claire looks down, wipes her face, she looks up, but Martha's gone.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(confused)
Mom...?

She turns around. Empty.

Sani rushes toward the cliff's edge.

SANI
(sharp, panicked)
Martha?!

Silence.

CLAIRE
(choked)
No... no, mom! I'm sorry...

Zoe watches, wide eyed. Claire stumbles back, reaches Zoe, holds on tight.

ZOE
Mommy?!

The main flashlight dims, flickers out.

Sani clicks on his torch, eyes sweep the shadows.

SANI
Martha?!

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

Dark. No headlamps. No prosthetic.

Martha dangles by one arm, clutches a thin branch, muscles shake. Below, a faint green glow from a cracked glow stick.

Adam dangling upside down, passed out.

Martha scans.

Just beneath Martha: mid-range roots. Lower: Adam's leg, tangled in thick vines.

Martha grits her teeth. Releases the branch. Drops. Catches the mid roots, but they're slick.

She slips. Catches herself on the thick tangle below.

Now inches above Adam. She swings one leg into the root tangle, locks herself in, bends upside down.

Adam's face, pale, still.

MARTHA

Adam?

No response. Panics.

Martha reaches down, grabs a fistful of Adam's shirt, pulls, grunts, struggles to lift him closer.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Patel reaches Claire, grins, shouts.

PATEL

They're coming! Coming down!

Sani turns, slow and tense.

Patel scans the area, no sign of Martha. His eyes land on Claire, clutches Zoe, both trembles.

Patel's grin fades.

The supervisor reaches, nods at Sani, bends down to the cliff edge.

SANI

Medics?

THE SUPERVISOR

They will be here.

(Squints down)

What's she doing?

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

Martha clutches a root, hauls herself upright.

She spots Adam's foot, tangled deep in the knotted roots.

With one hand, she anchors herself, reaches down, grabs Adam. Strains.

Braces Adam's back against the cliff. Digs into the roots, yanks the leg free.

Adam slips. Martha shoves him tight against the wall. Grits her teeth.

She shifts, bends, slides Adam onto her shoulders. Secure.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

The supervisor's flashlight blazes to life.

Silhouettes a battered Martha climbing, Adam limp over her shoulders.

Sani's POV: Martha grips the roots, ascending slow, deliberate.

SANI
Martha?! Hold! Don't come up yet!
Move to the left!

Martha edges left.

SANI (CONT'D)
Right! Your right!

Claire peers down, eyes widen at the sight of Adam on Martha's back.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

Martha steadies herself, shifts right. Nears the end of the roots.

Looks up, light spills across the stone. Shadows move above.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Sani, the supervisor, and Patel moves faraway aside, drop to their knees near the edge.

The nearby edge is slanted, not vertical, but slick.

Flashlights sweep the slanted cliff, hides Martha and Adam beneath.

SANI
(Shouts)
Martha?! You're close, climb up!
Slow. Steady!

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

Martha breathes deep. Steels herself.

She climbs, grit in every move. Arms trembling, one step at a time.

She reaches the mid roots. Slips once, recovers. Keeps going.

She eyes the above branches, grabs one. It snaps in her hand. She lunges catches another. It holds.

She dangles for a beat. Then pulls. Hard. Keeps climbing.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - NIGHT

Sani, the supervisor, and Patel edge toward the cliff, but the angle blocks their view.

Sani eyes the supervisor.

SANI
Grab my leg.

The supervisor nods, clamps both hands around Sani's leg.

Sani lowers himself, body slides down the slanted stone.

SANI (CONT'D)
Martha! I can't see you, talk to me!

MARTHA (O.S.)
I'm here!

Sani twists right, listens, gestures. The supervisor shifts, drags Sani along the ledge.

Finally, Adam's head breaks into view, strains.

Sani stretches his arms out.

SANI
One more push, Martha! Hold onto him!

Martha grunts, jerks her shoulders, Adam's hand and head rolls onto the slope.

Martha braces Adam with her head, lets go one arm at a time, pushes her higher.

Sani can't reach, fingers graze Adam's jacket collar.

Suddenly, Patel slides in fast, locks onto Adam's armpits.

Sani grabs Patel's leg.

PATEL

Pull!

SANI

Pull! Now!

The supervisor strains. Too heavy.

Claire rushes in, grabs Sani's leg, pulls.

One by one, they're dragged back, until finally, Patel hauls Adam over the ledge.

Claire screams, races in.

CLAIRE

Adam!

She cradles him, sobs, lays him gently near the wall. Adam is out cold.

Zoe runs over, eyes locked on her brother.

The supervisor checks for a pulse.

THE SUPERVISOR

It's faint. We've gotta get the boy
to base camp, now.

Sani stares down the steep, angled ledge, heart races.

SANI

Martha?!

Patel peers into the darkness. Nothing.

Claire scans the shadows.

Zoe clutches Adam's hand, looks around, scared.

CLAIRE

Where is she?

ZOE

Mommy?

A tense beat.

Patel slides down again, Sani grabs his legs, braces. The supervisor grabs Sani's from behind, anchors the line.

Patel leans out, can't see the bottom, edge is too far.

PATEL

Martha?!

Patel inches forward.

SANI

No, Patel! Don't! Too far!

Claire's eyes widen, something's wrong.

PATEL

Martha?!

Silence. Patel, chin down, slides back.

Suddenly, a hand slaps the edge, Martha's. Patel's head lift, lunges, tries to grab it, just short.

He turns back, frantic.

PATEL (CONT'D)

Down!

SANI

No! No!

Sani sees the hand, tightens his grip.

SANI (CONT'D)

Come on, Martha!

(beat)

Pull up! Pull!

Sani and the supervisor grunts, struggles.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

Martha dangles on the slanted ledge, barely holding on.

Her right hand claws the edge. Left hand clutches a thin, bending branch.

Her amputated leg braces against a rock, the other hangs free.

Martha grunts, jaw clenched.

She lets go of the branch, swings her left hand up, scrambles for grip.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - CLIFFSIDE PATH - CONTINUOUS

Patel lunges forward, grabs Martha's wrist.

Sani slides with Patel, grabs Patel's foot.

The supervisor drops, slides, Claire dives, catches his foot.

Now all of them, sprawled flat on the slanted cliff, lays, hanging on like a human rope.

PATEL
(shouts)
Pull! Pull!

THE SUPERVISOR
Pull us back, he's slipping!

Claire strains, tries to pull them all, but it's too much.

Far away, lights beam, CLAIRE's eyes widen, TWO WOMEN, mid 40s, and a group of SCOUT GIRLS, 15-16 year olds, rush in, headlamps blazing.

They drop a first-aid kit, beam their lights toward the cliff.

The scout girls rush in, grab the supervisor's other leg, forms a human chain, pulls.

The women kneel by Adam, start treating him.

Martha groans, tries to lift, Patel's grip slips on her left wrist.

Martha's right hand, thumb missing, struggles to find grip.

PATEL
Martha!

He grabs Martha's right wrist with both hands, it's slick sliding.

Below, the supervisor's feet hit solid ground.

The scout girls collapse, some slides back. Gravity pull others down.

Claire, still gripping tight, cries out, barely holding on.

Patel locks eyes with Martha, she fades, slips.

Patel, a sharp WHISTLE.

Xolo, the dog, leaps onto the slope, teeth latches onto Martha's rugged shorts.

It growls, digs in, pulls with all its might.

CLAIRE
Come on Xolo!

All pull together, grunts, strains.

Martha is yanked up, over the edge, collapses onto the narrow trail with the others.

They lie there, bodies heave, breath ragged.

Martha pants, spent.

Sani and Patel exchange a look, then a smile. Victory.

Patel sits up, eyes Martha, then Adam, a faint smile, catches his breath.

PATEL
(softly)
Xolo?

Patel whistles. Silence.

Sani rises, peers over the cliff. Stillness. No sign.

Martha scrambles over to Adam, who lies limp, surrounded by the women and scout girls.

MARTHA
Adam?
(To the women)
Is he okay?

LADY #1
Blood rush. He needs care, now.

The supervisor lifts Adam, starts moving.

The others follow, Claire supported, Zoe cradled by the girls, walks away up the path.

Patel whistle's again, no response, stands frozen, tears.

Sani places a hand on his shoulder.

SANI
(softly)
It was his time. He did his job.

Martha limps over, hugs Patel, eyes glassy.

MARTHA
(choked)
Thank you.

Sani pats Martha's shoulder.

The first light of sunrise breaks the horizon.

Martha breathes, gazes the sun.

A beat.

Martha and Patel, picks their belongings from the floor to a bag.

Martha eyes at the bear's dry foot print on the mud, he spots a purple flower aside, plucks it.

EXT. BASE CAMP - DAY

Bright morning sun.

Crowded with FIREMEN, COP and MEDICS.

A few Medics exit a tent.

Cops and Medics check on Claire, Zoe, and Martha.

Patel and Sani watch as a group of firemen approach, carrying a small stretcher. Xolo lies still.

A fireman looks at Patel, nods no. Somber.

Patel's face breaks. Tears stream.

Martha holding a stick, joins Sani, pulls him into a hug.

MARTHA
Thank you... For saving Adam.

Sani shakes his head.

SANI
You saved him.

Martha looks at him, eyes full.

MARTHA
No... The shoelace. You tied his shoelace tight. That's what saved him.

SANI

The spirits Martha, the spirits.

Sani gives Martha a gentle pat, then turns. Looks toward Zoe, who stares back at them. He smiles.

INT. TENT - BASE CAMP - DAY

A faint beep. The slow drip of a glucose IV.

Adam, pale and bruised, inhaler mask over his mouth, lies propped up on a cot. A needle taped to his hand.

His eyelids flutter awake, barely. Still.

Beside him, Claire sits stiff, hands clenched in her lap.

Zoe leans on her sister's side, eyes never leaving Adam's face.

The tent flap rustles, Martha and Sani step in. Dust streaked. Hollowed out.

MARTHA

(soft)

One hell of a hike.

Adam's lips twitch into a faint smile. It's weak. But it's real.

Sani steps closer. Kneels.

SANI

(gentle)

You walked through the valley...
And death stepped aside.

Sani brushes Adam's damp hair back, whispers something inaudible.

From his pocket, he pulls a small feather, lays it gently in Adam's palm.

A quiet beat. Sani nods once, stands, walks out.

Martha lingers. She reaches into her jacket, pulls out the purple flower, crushed slightly, but intact.

Martha holds it out. Adam blinks at it, then grins, turns to Zoe, offers it to her.

She smiles, receives it like a treasure.

Claire's eyes lift, she looks at Martha.

Martha meets her gaze, her face unreadable.

She turns to Adam, holds the stare a moment.

Her breath trembles. She exhales, nods softly, and leaves.
But...

A hug, Claire hugs Martha tight.

CLAIRE

I love you.

Martha hugs back, kisses her head. Zoe joins.

MARTHA

I love you all.

Martha drops a tear. Adam smiles as he rests.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - DAY

SUPER: *Days later.*

Jane lounges in a chair nearby, crinkles a bag of chips, mid-chew.

Martha sits calm but inward.

Dr. Kapoor, sat down in front of Martha, tightens the straps on a new prosthetic leg, carefully aligning it to Martha's knee.

MARTHA

...And they checked Zoe and Claire
thrice. Thrice. Just because Don
wanted to, cares for them it seems.
How fake.

JANE

All Don and Fiona said was sorry?
That's it? Man, they both lied in
court, he should hand you a
penthouse, cash and a Ferrari with
that apology.

MARTHA

I asked for time. With the kids. No
drama, no noise. Just, regular
days.

JANE

I'd have asked for a Lambo and naming rights to the company. You gotta level up your negotiating game, girl. Sue him.

Dr. Kapoor glances up from the prosthetic, his focus razor sharp but silent. Jane notices, shrugs.

JANE (CONT'D)

So... Claire? How'd she take it?

MARTHA

(calmly)

She fought them with her own hands, two guys, Zoe too. Brave. Claire, she hugged me, she stood against Don and Fiona. She forgave me?

JANE

But did you?

Martha, silent. Her eyes lock on the leg, tests its weight with a shift.

MARTHA

Still her mom. Can't change the past. Ya, I forgave myself.

JANE

Zoe?

MARTHA

Yeah... She took it better than I thought. Maybe didn't fully process, but, yeah.

Dr. Kapoor steps back, inspects his work. Smiles.

DR. KAPOOR

New hero, new leg. Alright, Captain Cliffhanger, your new ride's ready. You can run, jump, hike, just maybe skip the part where you fly off a mountain next time.

Dr. Kapoor pats Martha's shoulder, exits with a grin.

Martha smirks.

JANE

Come on, cyborg. Let's roll.

Martha nods once. Stands slowly on the new leg, steadier than expected.

They head for the door.

EXT. WOODEN CABIN - BACK - DAY

A simple pine box sits on a stone slab surrounded by tall pines.

Draped on an old faded K9 police vest, patches worn.

Xolo's collar rests on top.

A fire pit glows nearby. Smoke rises like spirit into sky.

Sani, in silence, burns sage. The smoke drifts gently over the box.

Jane and Martha stands still, Zoe and Claire beside Martha holding a small bunch of flowers.

Patel, eyes red, clutches a folded photo of Xolo in uniform.

Sani chants in his native tongue, soft, steady.

SANI
(softly, to Xolo)
You've walked your path. You've
guarded. You've loved. Rest now.

A beat. Everyone stands still. Nature listens.

Martha steps forward, kneels. Places her hand gently on the pine box.

Zoe and Claire places the flowers on top. One slips through the gap in the wood, lands quietly.

A hawk screeches above, circles once.

Patel walks forward, kneels, tears, places an old tennis ball by the box.

Patel cries, Martha places a hand on Patel's shoulder.

Sani pulls a match, lights the cedar logs at the base of the box.

SANI (CONT'D)
His spirit joins the wind, the
trees, the stars.

Sani steps back, looks up.

SANI (CONT'D)
He was sent here. And now he
returns.

They all watch in silence. Not sadness. Something closer to
reverence.

In the distance, wind whistles through the trees. Leaves
rustle.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A soft ding of the door bell. Steam rises off fresh mugs.
Calm.

The low hum of espresso machines. Light chatter.

News on the mounted TV.

On TV - the male news anchor, at the studio desk.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
Celebrating our local Mother,
Martha Patterson for her courageous
efforts during the dramatic hiking
rescue day before yesterday-

On screen: A still of Martha, tired but alive.

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-The two suspects, Ben Spencer and
Kane Vince, business partners,
still remain at large. Both are
wanted for attempted rape and
assault, and are believed to have
fled deeper into the woods...

On screen: A picture of Kane and Ben, together in suit.

A BARISTA glances up, turns down the volume.

In the corner, the same elderly couple, 70s, playing chess.

The old woman, focused, calmly advances her white pawn to the
eighth rank.

OLD MAN
Queen?

She nods no. Smiles.

The old woman replaces the pawn with a white knight.

The chess board: The black queen moves, stalks the center.
Two white rooks sit adjacent, vulnerable.

One. White knight moves. Black queen takes the first white rook.

Two. White bishop moves. Black queen takes another rook.

The black queen now threatens the white knight.

Three. White knight moves.

OLD WOMAN

Checkmate.

The old man blinks. Leans back. A Knight-Bishop mate. The old woman stirs her tea, smirks.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - DAY

Still. Dense. Mist curls between trees. Birds flocking.

A faint growl breaks the silence.

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Dark. Damp.

Two lifeless bodies slump inside, Ben and Kane.

Torn clothes. Blood splattered over the stone.

A black bear, slow, rips through one of the corpses. Bone crunches under its jaws.

Flies buzz. Wind howls faintly outside the cave.

FADE OUT.

TEXT OVER BLACK:

"SHE COULDN'T REWRITE THE YEARS SHE LOST. BUT SHE REWROTE EVERYTHING IN THE MOMENT SHE CHOSE NOT TO LET GO."

THE END