

IN THE GRIP OF WINTER

Written by a vegetarian

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The ground is covered in snow. A campfire burns beside a dilapidated tent.

CALVIN (21) and VAUGHN (30) sit off to the side. They're disheveled and clad in windswept winter wear. A dead Doberman pinscher lies between them. Calvin weeps as he strokes the dog's face.

VAUGHN

It's like you always say. It's dead.
It doesn't matter what we do. Nothing
can hurt it anymore.

CALVIN

Fuck you. You're not supposed to know
the animal. Meat's just meat until you
see the... Why am I explaining this to
you? I've had Elvis since I was
thirteen. He was there for me for
everything. Every girl that broke my
heart. Grandma and Grandpa. Leaving
home. I grew up with this dog...

Calvin breaks down.

CALVIN

You're so full of shit, Vaughn. All
that shit about how we don't need meat
to survive—

VAUGHN

Don't be dense. It's okay to pass on
filet mignon when you go out to some
shitty chain restaurant. You don't have
to scarf down a cheese steak everyday
or get pepperoni on your pizza just to
see the next morning.

Vaughn grabs Calvin by the shoulders.

VAUGHN

But we're not at home anymore. We're stranded in the fucking wilderness and I'm telling you if we don't eat this dog, we're going to starve to death.

Calvin cries harder. Vaughn releases him.

VAUGHN

You think you're the only one who cared about Elvis?

Calvin calms himself.

VAUGHN

Remember when you were sixteen and he got hit by that car? Who was the vet who had to stitch him up and set all his broken bones?

CALVIN

You.

VAUGHN

You know, most vets are lucky. They don't have to deal with their own pets. They don't have to deal with all the emotional repercussions of an accident. They can't afford to. But I didn't have a choice. I had to listen to your dog moan in pain for all the weeks that followed. I had to watch him sleep and wonder if he was really sleeping. I had to worry if I was gonna let my little brother down. I had to drink just to cope with the stress.

A tear rolls down Vaughn's cheek.

VAUGHN

I dedicated my life to taking care of animals, not eating them. So don't think for a fucking second that this is easy for me.

Vaughn looks down at Elvis.

VAUGHN

We just don't have a choice.

LATER

Elvis lies on a towel in the snow. Calvin and Vaughn sit in front of him. Calvin shines a flashlight on Elvis as Vaughn digs inside a backpack.

VAUGHN

I think we're going to need some of this.

Vaughn produces a bottle of whiskey. He unscrews the top and takes a swig. He hands it to Calvin who does the same.

VAUGHN

(shaky)

Okay... Here we go...

Vaughn produces a hunting knife and extends it toward Elvis's belly. His hand trembles violently.

CALVIN

Are you okay?

Sweat glistens on Vaughn's brow.

VAUGHN

No.

CALVIN

I can do it.

VAUGHN

What?

CALVIN

He was my dog. Let me do it.

Vaughn nods. He exchanges the knife for Calvin's flashlight. He shines it on Elvis as Calvin positions the knife.

Calvin strokes the dog's fur. Tears trickle down his face.

CALVIN
I'm sorry, boy. I love you.

Vaughn looks away as Calvin plunges the knife into Elvis.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

Calvin and Vaughn trudge through the snowy forest with equipment on their backs.

CALVIN
Can we stop for a minute?

VAUGHN
We're not going get any less lost by stopping.

CALVIN
Well, I'm tired. Maybe if I had some of that whiskey-

VAUGHN
No! No more! We can't afford to let our minds go to shit.

CALVIN
What are you talking about? Our minds are already shit.

VAUGHN
No kidding. Our sanity's disintegrating with every step we take. You want to speed up the process?

CALVIN
I want to speed up, period. Just let me have a little-

VAUGHN
No!

Calvin speeds up and grabs Vaughn's backpack. Vaughn whirls around. Calvin freezes.

Vaughn takes off his backpack and removes the whiskey bottle. He unscrews the top and threatens to pour it out into the snow.

CALVIN

No!

Vaughn lets a splash of whiskey spill out. Calvin winces.

CALVIN

I hate you.

VAUGHN

Feel free. All I care about right now is getting us out of here.

CALVIN

We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. You're the one who wanted to go hiking. You're the one who wanted to come before the snow hit.

Calvin looks down at their footprints in the snow.

CALVIN

You know, if we'd come out when there was snow, we couldn't follow our footprints back—

VAUGHN

And maybe we could've broken a leg—

CALVIN

You made me eat my dog!

Vaughn chokes up.

VAUGHN

That's not fair. We're still alive—

CALVIN

Yeah, we're still alive! Still alive to die a slow and painful death!

Calvin breaks down. He slumps into the snow and sobs.

He reaches into his jacket and produces the skull of a dog held together by scraps of sinew. The bone is stained brown with dried blood. Calvin stares into its black eye sockets.

CALVIN

He was my best friend. He was always there for me. He never judged me. Not like you.

VAUGHN

Don't do this, Calvin.

CALVIN

I ate my best friend. I thought there was a good reason. I thought he would've wanted it this way. But it was all for nothing.

VAUGHN

It'll only be for nothing if we give up. We've made it this far. We can-

CALVIN

I don't care anymore. Everyday the woods get bigger and bigger and we never know if we're walking out or walking in. I just don't fucking care anymore.

Calvin reaches into his jacket and produces the hunting knife.

VAUGHN

What are you doing?

Calvin puts the knife to his wrist

VAUGHN

NO!

Vaughn drops the whiskey bottle and tackles Calvin to the ground. The knife flies out of his hand.

Vaughn regains himself and finds his jacket covered in blood. He spots a bloody slit on Calvin's wrist. His eyes dart to Calvin's pale face. Calvin's final breath vaporizes in the cold air.

Vaughn breaks down. He grabs his brother into his arms and collapses in the snow. He howls in torment.

Elvis's skull lies in the snow nearby. It's stained with Calvin's blood.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Vaughn sits in front of a campfire. He holds Elvis's skull in his hands. Its hollow eye sockets reflect the emptiness in his own damp eyes. He rubs a spot of bone streaked with Calvin's blood.

After a moment, he sets the skull aside and grabs the whiskey bottle from beside him. He takes a swig and stares into the campfire. It's dying.

A wolf howls in the distance. Vaughn turns around and scans the darkness. Something scampers further out in the forest. Too far to be considered an immediate threat.

Vaughn turns back to the fire. He grabs a stick off the ground and tosses it into the flames. Embers fly up.

A twig snaps in the distance. Vaughn's eyes flick toward its origin then back toward the dying fire. He sighs.

After a moment, he brings his legs in toward him. He undoes his boots and takes them off. He kicks over the whiskey bottle as he stands up.

Vaughn removes his jacket and casts it aside. He sheds away his winter wear until his malnourished torso is exposed. He removes his pants and long johns.

He crouches naked in the snow and removes the hunting knife from his discarded jacket.

He stands up and stretches out his arm. He drags the knife across his forearm and draws blood. He raises the knife to his shoulder and makes another cut. He repeats the process several times until his entire arm is soaked in blood.

Vaughn switches the knife to his other hand and cuts into his other arm. Blood drips into the snow.

Vaughn turns the knife to his chest and proceeds to carve several gashes into his flesh until his entire torso is covered in them.

He crouches slightly and drags the knife across his shins, thighs and hamstrings.

After a moment, he stands up, covered from head to toe in knife wounds. They're shallow but bleed profusely.

Vaughn picks up Elvis's skull and lies down in the snow.

A pack of wolves erupts in howls in the distance. Vaughn clutches the skull to his chest as he shuts his eyes and waits to die.

FADE OUT.