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WAR DOG

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT./EXT. TIFFANY'S CAR - DAY

It's a late model sedan, driving along a highway in a mountainous area where there isn't a lot of other traffic.

The driver is TIFFANY SANCHEZ (38, Puerto Rican). She's a professional journalist on her way to a big interview.

On the seat next to her is a case with her laptop and a bag with some recording gear.

Her smart phone is in a holder, and she's talking via speakerphone with JULIUS (35), her editor.

JULIUS (O.S.)
(filtered)
I don't like it.

TIFFANY
Give me one good reason to cancel.

JULIUS (O.S.)
(filtered)
Why is he talking to you?

TIFFANY
I'm a Pulitzer prize winning
journalist and best selling author.

JULIUS (O.S.)
(filtered)
You won the Pulitzer and wrote the
best-selling book criticizing the
organization he works for. If I
were him I wouldn't talk to you.

TIFFANY
My point is they can't just
disappear me. People would notice.

JULIUS (O.S.)
(filtered)
If they figure out what you're
really doing there's no telling how
far they'll go to shut you up.

TIFFANY
Only if he's in on it. I don't
think he is.

JULIUS (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 You're making a lot of assumptions,
 Tiff. And this guy is dangerous.
 Remember that waiver you had to
 sign to do this?

TIFFANY
 The one where I acknowledge that if
 he killed me it would be my fault?

JULIUS (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 That makes it smell like a setup to
 me.

TIFFANY
 Well, you'll have to put your
 concerns on hold. I'm here.

JULIUS (O.S.)
 (filtered)
 Call me when you're done.

Tiffany disconnects the call.

EXT. GATE TO POSEIDON BASE - DAY

It's a high fence, razor wire on the top, a paved driveway
 through a closed gate. Inside the gate there's a steep
 incline, with a line of trees hiding what may be beyond.

On the fence are signs: "NO ADMITTANCE. PROPERTY OF US NAVY.
 TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED."

Just inside the gate is a small building with a tiny parking
 lot that has a two jeeps parked there.

The guard station is a kiosk. Inside is LANCE CORPORAL
 WASHINGTON (20, African-American, male, wearing a US Marine
 uniform and carrying a sidearm). Nearby is an assault rifle.

INT./EXT. TIFFANY'S CAR - DAY

Tiffany drives up to the gate and stops, rolls down her
 window and then digs through her purse looking for her
 driver's license.

EXT. GATE TO POSEIDON BASE - DAY

Washington steps outside of the kiosk and approaches the car.

TIFFANY

Good morning. I've got an appointment at 10:00 to see --

WASHINGTON

Pull your car into the parking lot.

TIFFANY

Uh, okay.

Washington goes back into the kiosk and flips the switch that opens the gate. Tiffany drives through it.

EXT. OFFICE FOR POSEIDON BASE - DAY

Tiffany parks next to the jeeps as the gate closes.

The door to the office opens and COMMANDER MATTHEWS (30, wearing a US Navy uniform) emerges.

TIFFANY

Commander Matthews! This is a surprise.

She gets out of her car as he approaches. She extends a hand for a handshake but he does not reciprocate, keeping his own hands behind his back.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Oh. Okay.

Tiffany lowers her hand.

MATTHEWS

This is a bad idea.

TIFFANY

Well, uh, thank you for telling me. Then why am I here?

MATTHEWS

I was overruled. As was my superior officer, and his superior officer.

TIFFANY

I see. Well, if there's nothing else --

MATTHEWS

You will need to either leave all of your electronic devices here or sign a waiver.

TIFFANY

I need my "electronic devices."

MATTHEWS

I'll get the waiver, then. Please wait here.

Matthews turns and goes back into the office while Tiffany sits on the hood of the car.

A dog emerges from the trees and approaches her but stops while he's still several feet away. This is ZEUS, a Tibetan Mastiff. He's gigantic.

Zeus sits, just outside of the tree-line, and stares at her. She watches him, too, a little alarmed.

TIFFANY

(muttering)

Uh, good doggie? You don't eat Puerto Ricans, do you?

Matthews reemerges from the office, carrying a clipboard with a paper attached, and a pen. He hands those to Tiffany, who looks over the document on the clipboard.

MATTHEWS

Just so you understand that, should there be any damage to any electronic devices you elect to carry into the house, you will not hold the US Government responsible.

Tiffany is signing the document already. She hands the clipboard and pen back to him.

Matthews tucks the clipboard under his arm.

MATTHEWS (CONT'D)

You understand the consequences, should you startle him?

TIFFANY

Yes.

MATTHEWS

What are those consequences?

TIFFANY

He may kill me before he can stop himself because he suffers from PTSD and his reflexes are --

MATTHEWS

His reflexes are several times faster than any animal that inhabits this planet, Ms. Sanchez. Sometimes he acts before his brain can catch up. Things have happened. Regrettable things.

TIFFANY

I've interviewed him before.

MATTHEWS

That was before Custard. He's changed. He would feel bad if he killed you. But you would be dead.

TIFFANY

I see. Uh, so, I just drive up the driveway to the house?

MATTHEWS

No. You will leave your car here. You'll be walking to the house.

TIFFANY

Walking? Uh, about that dog --

MATTHEWS

If you make no threatening moves, he will probably not attack you.

TIFFANY

"Probably"?

MATTHEWS

Have a good day.

Matthews turns and walks back into the office. Tiffany gets down from the hood of her car and opens the door, leaning in to get her stuff.

INT./EXT. TIFFANY'S CAR - DAY

Tiffany grabs the case that contains her laptop, the bag with her gear, and her smart phone, and exits.

EXT. OFFICE FOR POSEIDON BASE - DAY

She slips the strap for the laptop case over her shoulder and turns to see Zeus is now sitting right behind her. Tiffany jumps a little, startled.

TIFFANY

My, what a quiet dragon doggie you are.

Zeus gets up and trots past her and heads up the driveway.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

(muttering)

I guess that means "Follow me."

She follows him up the driveway into the trees.

EXT. HOME OF KEITH HUMBOLT - DAY

It's a one-story, sprawling home, shady, with a lawn that's full of fruit trees and flowers.

There are no cars in the driveway. It's quiet, with only bird sounds and the panting and snorting of Zeus as he trots up to a doggie door in the front door and pushes his way inside.

Tiffany goes up to the front door and spends a moment gathering herself. She's a bit out of breath from the walk.

Then she rings the doorbell.

After a moment it opens and she's face-to-face with Commander Keith Humbolt (45, US Navy, retired, slim, athletic, and a bit grizzly).

TIFFANY

Commander Humbolt? I'm Tiffany Sanchez.

HUMBOLT

Hi, Tiffany. Yeah, I remember you. Come on in.

He steps aside and she enters the house.

INT. KEITH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

The room is spacious, neat, and orderly. There are some paintings on the walls, and several nearly full bookcases.

Several potted plants and flowers are scattered throughout. None of these are varieties that would be harmful to dogs.

There's a comfortable-looking couch and a couple of easy chairs forming a conversation area.

TIFFANY

Nice house.

HUMBOLT

Thank you. It's a bachelor pad, but
it's not bad.

Zeus emerges from the back, before coming over and sitting
next to Humbolt, who reaches down to scratch Zeus's head.

TIFFANY

Nice dog you got there.

HUMBOLT

He's a Tibetan Mastiff. Used to
belong to a warlord.

Humbolt kneels so he's eye-level with Zeus, scratching the
dog's head.

HUMBOLT (CONT'D)

He's a good boy. Aren't you, Zeus?
You're my really good boy, aren't
you? (to Tiffany) He was trained as
an attack dog. Abused. There's no
record of how many people he's
killed, but we know of five.

Humbolt stands up and turns to face Tiffany.

TIFFANY

I see why he's yours.

HUMBOLT

Yeah. We have some things in
common. The Chinese were going to
put him to sleep after they
arrested his owner but I used my
connections to get them to let me
have him. I've been rehabbing him.
They thought he was too dangerous
for human company.

TIFFANY

But he isn't, I guess.

HUMBOLT

Oh, yes, he is. Or he was. So,
where do you want to set up for
this?

Tiffany glances around the room.

TIFFANY

I think here would be fine. I can set up on the coffee table.

HUMBOLT

A bit brave of you, bringing a computer and a phone with you.

TIFFANY

I don't believe all I've heard.

HUMBOLT

Really? (closes eyes) That's a new computer. Barely any files on it. And your cloud account is brand new, too. Hardly anything there. (opens eyes) You bought that computer and set up your account just for this interview.

TIFFANY

(impressed)
Uh, right. Damn.

Humbolt chuckles.

HUMBOLT

I get curious. I just can't help myself. You live around here?

TIFFANY

What? Oh, yeah. About an hour away.

HUMBOLT

You get set up. I'm going to get myself something to drink. Can I get you anything?

TIFFANY

I'm good, thank you.

HUMBOLT

Be right back.

He exits. She glances at Zeus, who lays down on the floor between the couch and the coffee table, eyeing her as she sets up the laptop.

Humbolt enters, carrying a glass with a bright greenish liquid looks like milk with green food coloring added. He settles into an easy chair and puts the glass on a coaster on the end table.

TIFFANY

What's that you're drinking?

Humbolt picks it up and looks at it.

HUMBOLT

You know, I don't think it's got a name. You shouldn't drink it.

He takes a sip from it and puts the glass back on the coaster.

TIFFANY

Why not? Is it poison for us?

HUMBOLT

Because it tastes like crap. It's good for me, according to the Navy.

TIFFANY

How can you stand it?

HUMBOLT

I turn my taste buds off.

TIFFANY

Is that something else the Alpha program gave you?

HUMBOLT

Yes.

TIFFANY

Oh. Wow. Uh, are you ready?

HUMBOLT

Sure.

Tiffany taps the space bar on her laptop, to begin recording.

TIFFANY

Tiffany Sanchez interviewing
Commander Keith Humbolt, retired,
in his residence on the US Navy's
Poseidon compound.

HUMBOLT

You know, Commander Matthews really
doesn't like you.

TIFFANY

I gathered. I can't imagine why.

Humbolt chuckles.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

He said he thought this was a bad idea but he was overruled. Do you know who did that?

HUMBOLT

Sure. It was me.

TIFFANY

Why?

HUMBOLT

You interviewed me, back just before Operation Custard.

TIFFANY

I'm surprised you remember it. I'm sure you were interviewed by a lot of people.

HUMBOLT

And I remember them all. That's another benefit to the Alpha program. (taps temple) I can't forget anything.

TIFFANY

Wow. You're a walking wifi hotspot, with an eidetic memory and Olympic-athlete caliber reflexes.

HUMBOLT

Plus agility, speed, and endurance.

TIFFANY

Sounds like you're Superman.

HUMBOLT

Not quite. I can still get injured. But I recover from injuries quickly. I had a broken rib heal in a few hours. But I'm damned hard to kill. As the Ave'anash discovered.

TIFFANY

I'm glad you mentioned them. Tomorrow, you're going to begin your journey back to the moon, the site of Project Custard, the final battle against the Ave'anash.

HUMBOLT

Right.

TIFFANY

Why?

HUMBOLT

You know why. To fix it.

TIFFANY

I know that. I'm asking, why you?

HUMBOLT

Because nobody else can do what needs to be done.

TIFFANY

I'm sure they could use automation to --

HUMBOLT

Automation wouldn't work. Every simulation with a robot failed. With me there's a sixty-seven percent chance of success. And the device took the combined resources of the United States, China, Russia, France, and several other countries to create. It's the only one we'll ever have. This is our only shot at this.

TIFFANY

I see. Hold on a second.

She creates a new word processing document and types, "I'M HEARING THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO MAKE IT BACK."

She saves the document, giving it the file name "HEY_KEITH" and closes it.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

So, why you?

HUMBOLT

I remember every step of the way. The device needs to be triggered as close as possible to the site of the original detonation.

TIFFANY

How does it work?

HUMBOLT

Hell, I don't know. It's got to be done, though.

Humbolt leans back in the chair, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, sipping his drink.

TIFFANY

Why?

Humbolt exhales, opening his eyes, putting the drink down.

HUMBOLT

Because with tidal forces it's falling apart, and some of those pieces are the size of continents. It's entirely possible that at least one of them will collide with earth within the next decade. Humanity would not survive an impact like that. We just don't have the resources to build more FTL ships like the Darwin to move to another system, and we won't for many years. And if we wait until it falls apart there won't be a damned thing we can do.

TIFFANY

Humanity almost didn't survive the Ave'anash.

HUMBOLT

True. For the first time in human history every country, every ethnic group, every religious denomination, was working towards one goal -- to defeat the Ave'anash or face extinction. A coalition that has never happened before.

TIFFANY

And is now beginning to fall apart.

HUMBOLT

Sadly.

TIFFANY

After Custard you became a hero to billions of people.

HUMBOLT

All I did was push a button.

TIFFANY

There was a lot that led up to you being in a position to push that button, though.

HUMBOLT

A lot of sacrifice and courage and blood and sweat from several other people besides me.

TIFFANY

There are those who say that the Ave'anash shouldn't have been exterminated.

HUMBOLT

Do you believe that?

TIFFANY

This isn't about me.

HUMBOLT

I read your book.

TIFFANY

Then you know how I feel about it.

HUMBOLT

There would be no peace with them. No co-existence.

TIFFANY

But still --

HUMBOLT

What they did to the crew of the Darwin when they caught them exploring their system shows what monsters they were. The experiments they performed to learn about us, vivisection, psychological torture ... a horror beyond imagining. I'm aware of the people who thought we shouldn't wipe them out. You're safe in ignoring them.

TIFFANY

Really? Because I have a source that said you were ordered not to trigger the weapon that wiped them out.

HUMBOLT

That was out of concern for the moon. Some thought the device was powerful enough to fragment it immediately, throwing huge chunks in the direction of earth. We'd win the war but lose everything else.

TIFFANY

You set it off anyway.

HUMBOLT

Yes. Because I thought that either way humanity would be better off.

TIFFANY

So, the moon wound up cracking like an egg.

HUMBOLT

Which we'd deal with later. Which is what we're doing now.

TIFFANY

So, that's the only reason people wanted the Ave'anash to survive? Not to protect them, but to protect the moon?

HUMBOLT

If they had made their base somewhere else it wouldn't have even come up.

TIFFANY

You don't think that some people in our Defense Department had a secret agenda, and wanted the Ave'anash to survive to help with that agenda? I know that there were communications sent to the alien base from certain high-level personnel in D-O-D in the final days before you pushed that button.

HUMBOLT

So?

TIFFANY

Why communicate with them? And there is evidence that they responded.

HUMBOLT

I don't know who is telling you this --

TIFFANY

The same sources I've used for years. And it's been verified. There was something going on, Commander. Something that stinks.

(MORE)

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Somebody in the Department of Defense tried to betray the coalition to the aliens. This is something I know. I just want to know why. I think you have an idea.

Humbolt closes his eyes takes a deep breath and lets it out, slowly.

HUMBOLT

You are referring to the organization I have proudly and at great personal risk served my entire adult life. (getting louder and angrier) I put my life on the line when I volunteered for Alpha. I was a SEAL. I had commendations for bravery. And a Purple Heart. I didn't have to do it. And I knew going in my chances of surviving the process were slim. But I did it. (even angrier and louder) And unlike over two thousand others, special forces from all over the world, I survived, and experienced the full benefits of the program. And then ...

Humbolt stands. Zeus sits upright, then hops on the couch to sit next to Tiffany. Zeus is watching Humbolt.

HUMBOLT (CONT'D)

And then, I and nineteen of fellow Alphas participated in Operation Custard, which cost all of them except for me their lives! I have sacrificed everything for my world, and for my country!

Zeus starts barking, warning, at Humbolt. Then he lowers his head slightly and bares his teeth, growling quietly.

Humbolt pauses, closing his eyes and taking a slow, deep breath. Then he opens his eyes again.

HUMBOLT (CONT'D)

(quieter and calmer)
Get out. Get out of my house. Now.

TIFFANY

Okay, okay. Jesus.

She hurriedly gathers her equipment and laptop in the bag, and exits.

EXT. HOME OF KEITH HUMBOLT - DAY

As she leaves Humbolt steps up to the open door. Zeus is next to him.

HUMBOLT

And I better not read any of these
lies in the news media!

Tiffany keeps going, heading back down the driveway. Humbolt slams the door shut behind her.

EXT. OFFICE FOR POSEIDON BASE - DAY

Tiffany gets into her car and cranks it, then sits for a moment, fighting to keep from breaking down in the parking lot.

INT./EXT. TIFFANY'S CAR - DAY

Tiffany puts the car in reverse and starts backing out of her parking space. She checks the rear-view mirror and sees Zeus sitting in the driveway just outside of the tree-line, watching her.

INT. TIFFANY'S HOME, DEN - NIGHT

It's a large, cluttered room, with nice furniture and tasteful art. There's a new couch, an easy chair, and an expensive recliner. There are several bookshelves, full of books, and awards Tiffany has won.

There's a door on one side that gives access to a large deck.

On the coffee table in front of the couch is Tiffany's laptop, open. On the screen is a box that says, "THE FILE YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO OPEN IS ENCRYPTED AND REQUIRES A KEY." There's a box to enter the key. The box is quite long.

The room is dark, with only indirect light from the full moon coming in through the windows.

Tiffany is dressed in a jogging suit and T-shirt, sitting on the couch. She's talking on her cell phone. There's a drink on the end table nearby.

TIFFANY

I shit you not, Julius. I got home
and tried to open the file and got
a screen that said it's encrypted.

(MORE)

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

It's looking for a hundred-twenty-eight byte key.

JULIUS (O.S.)

(filtered)

Why would he do something like that?

TIFFANY

I don't know. But I can't use the interview if I can't access it. And I can't access it without that key. And there's no way I can just guess a hundred --

Her doorbell rings. Tiffany awkwardly gets off the couch.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Julius, hang on. The pizza's here.

She gets up, and opens the door to find Lance Corporal Washington standing there. He's holding the end of a leash that is attached to Zeus, who is sitting next to him.

The strap to a full duffle bag is draped over one of his shoulders.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Uh, Julius? Let me call you back.

JULIUS (O.S.)

(filtered)

Wha --

She disconnects the call and slips the phone into a pocket.

WASHINGTON

Sorry to bother you at home, ma'am.
But I have something here for you.

He hands her the end of the leash and she takes it, confused. Then he hands her the duffle bag, which she takes absently.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Veterinary records and instructions are on a USB drive in the bag.

TIFFANY

I don't --

WASHINGTON

Have a good night, ma'am.

Washington turns and leaves. She watches him go.

Zeus gives a little bark and she steps aside as he enters. She closes the door, still holding his leash, and Zeus pauses, turning to look at her.

TIFFANY

Uh. Okay. Feel free to look around.
But don't break anything and don't
eat the furniture.

She unhooks the leash from his collar and Zeus exits, casually sniffing and exploring.

Tiffany goes drops the duffle bag on the couch and opens it.

Inside are metal dog dishes, a bag of dog food, a few beef femurs and a couple of dog toys. Inside of a zipped pocket is a USB drive.

She takes the USB drive and goes over to the laptop.

She plugs the drive into a port and the "in use" light flickers on.

On the laptop screen a sequence of numbers appears in the field where the key should be entered. Then, the cursor moves to click "OK."

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

I'll be damned.

From the laptop's speakers Humbolt's voice emerges, slightly distorted.

HUMBOLT (O.S.)

(distorted)

This message will only play once.
You were right. About everything.
This is the only way I could tell
you. Keep digging, and take care of
Zeus. He's a really good boy.

TIFFANY

(whispering)

Oh, my God. My God.

She turns to see Zeus sitting a few feet away, watching her.

A file opens on her screen, the document she called "HEY_KEITH", with a new line added. It says, "GIVE HIM A BEEF FEMUR."

Tiffany laughs.

EXT. TIFFANY'S HOME, DECK - NIGHT

The moon is full and high in the sky.

Tiffany is sitting in a patio chair, her laptop on a table, typing away furiously, in the throes of powerful inspiration.

Next to her, Zeus is laying on the deck, chomping on a beef femur, content.

Hanging in the night sky above them, the face of the full moon is riddled with cracks, shattered.

FADE OUT.