

**Greenland**  
by JJ Dettman

The lone bulb in the upper corner of the room flashed in long, authoritative pulses. Its light washed every surface in an unnatural red, then left behind total darkness. The mechanical bell below the bulb was much more panicked in its duty. Niels turned over beneath his covers, groaned, then pulled himself out of his bed and into his robe and slippers. What incredible volume for such a tiny device, he thought.

Niels was the last of his colleagues to get to the central work room. There were just three others, all standing in front of computer monitors, silhouetted against the blue-white of the screens. Someone had turned the alarms off. Niels flipped on the lights and dimmed them low.

Rasmus was at the helm. The cursor flipped from icon to icon, fanning their data out across the four monitors. One screen was dedicated to a full map of Greenland spotted with status markings for the team's research stations across the continent.

No one spoke as they each performed their own analysis. There were problems with two outflow stations in the southwest, that much was clear. The question was what kind. Either something new was happening to the Greenland ice, or their sensors had failed in a new way.

"This can wait until morning, yes?" Päivi said, breaking the minutes-long silence.

Rasmus leaned back in the big chair and bumped into Niels, who towered over the desk, the chair, everything—motionless, thin wisps of breath streaming from his pursed lips. They had seen this look of contemplative concern many times before.

Päivi leaned into Niels's view and said, "I know, it is strange, but if it was bad, we would see something else, don't think you think?" Päivi Hallamaa was the lone professor in the room, making her the de facto authority figure. Informally, however, anyone committed enough to stay at Zackenberg over the winter—student or faculty—was considered an equal member of the team. "Let's sleep and come back in the morning."

Niels nodded. "Morning" was just a number on a clock at that time of year.

"I'd like to go out and see. Just to be sure," he said. "If that's alright."

Päivi buried her hands further into her arms. It was tough to keep Niels inside, even in the permanent dark of winter. The others waited. She shrugged, with a smirk, and said, "Okay."

"I will keep you company," Rasmus offered. He went off to make coffee, shivering, and reassured the others they could go back to bed. Marina, a recent addition to the group, covered herself with her blanket and shuffled down the hall. Propane grew increasingly scarce with every year, and heating was not the top priority in their energy budget.

Päivi stopped Niels before he hurried off. "Be safe," she said. Niels was her lone graduate student. Since the main camp had emptied out in September it'd been just the four of them at Zackenberg. Prof. Hallamaa preferred to keep her

world small. It gave her fewer things to worry about. “You call us soon as you see something.”

Niels nodded, and assured her he’d be back before she woke up.

Rasmus met Niels in the hangar and put a travel mug in the cockpit of their plane. He started spraying the wings with a de-icing solution by hand, taking his time. Half of Niels’s wide, angular frame was already in the winter suit. The pants gave his legs the bulging appearance of over-packed sausage.

On a shelf against the wall sat a compact robotic device hardly bigger than a toaster. Rasmus unplugged it and tapped it twice on a head-like protrusion at the front. The appliance rose of its own accord, revealing four metallic legs curled beneath its body. It leapt to the floor, tested its joints with a few wiggles and squats, then stood still, head cocked at Rasmus. Dr. Hallamaa had spent an entire year’s acquisition budget on the slightly used explorer drone. The scientists at Zackenberg named her Ludde. She was the closest thing to a pet for a thousand kilometers. Niels whistled and pointed at the rear of the cockpit. The robot hopped in and made itself comfortable.

After a final run through the take-off checklist, Niels shot his friend a nod, then climbed into the pilot’s seat. Rasmus scampered back into the warmer indoor air, holding his steaming travel mug close.

Niels leaned back and pulled forward pleasant memories—holidays with his cousins; dark, hearty beers by the fireplace—and solidified them in the present with long, slow breaths. Once he found peace, he unwound the control cable from the dashboard and plugged it into the port behind his ear. The lights went out. His

entire body spasmed, his vision flickered with bursts of bright and dark spots, and every inch of his skin sizzled as if it were being broiled under the sun. Before he could scream the worst of it passed. This was the price owed. His reward was total control. As if it were one of his arms, he lowered the cockpit door, then locked himself within as if clenching his fists. He called on the main generator, and the thrusters hummed to life. No bodily analogy could account for this, for the sensation of a hundred thousand horsepower fusing to your skeleton, within the fibers of your muscles, all ready to explode at the end of your thoughts. Niels had gone out in their ancient hand-me-down plane dozens of times. Despite the shock, he never grew tired of it.

He flipped on the comms. "Ready to go, Ras."

There was a warning buzz, then a thunderous rattling as the hangar door was heaved aside. The outdoor lights shone onto frozen piles of snow. Beyond, the infinite darkness beckoned. Niels pushed off with the vertical thrusters and eased his way out. The air was still and barely registered his presence. In a blink he was up and away, coasting at a third the speed of sound.

The sky was patchy with stretched, partially lit clouds, gesturing to where a half-moon intermittently showed its face. The snow-covered surfaces of the Earth glowed with an even cadence interrupted only by the sharp crags that punched through the thinner coastal ice. Before long, Niels left the Greenland sea behind and was out over the interior of the vast ice sheet. In winter, there were no surface rivers or lakes—no blemishes at all—and everywhere the snow fell level, so that

from a thousand meters high, it looked as though a freshly laundered bedsheet had been pulled tight across the entire planet.

Rasmus read out loud the BBC's latest international headlines, some with a mocking tone. Niels and Rasmus kept their political discourse to themselves. Their colleagues preferred to stay out of the news, specifically that concerning the arctic, because most of it was trouble, and all of it was out of their hands. The far north had become the trendiest battleground for testing the limits 21st-century diplomacy. Stand-offs with hundreds of navy ships off the coast of Alaska, open threats involving intercontinental missiles in the evening news. Multi-billion-dollar games of chicken to determine whose name was fixed to the untapped reserves of arctic oil, and who got to charge admittance to international trading routes once covered with ice. All things considered, the scientists at Zackenberg viewed their governments as violent, impulsive third parties rather than true allies or adversaries. With one hand, these governments funded their work in combating climate change, and with the other, they fought amongst themselves with the same attitude and objectives that had jeopardized the global environment in the first place. For civilians, ignoring international politics provided mental relief at a time when that was difficult to find.

"Rasmus, there's something here," Niels said, interrupting. He brought the seat forward so he could inspect the ground. He slowed the plane to a hover.

In the middle of the infinite white there was a splotch. The ice here was over a kilometer thick. No chance it was a mountain peak.

“Can you check my coordinates—” Niels dictated the latitude and longitude from his GPS.

“The radar says the same,” Rasmus confirmed. He checked all their maps. “There is supposed to be nothing. What do you see?”

“Not sure. Just a dark mess.” Niels began stuffing himself into his dense winter gear. “I’m going down.”

“Should I wake up the others?”

“Not yet.”

The plane jostled onto the ice. Niels flinched and disconnected the control cable, then opened the door with his hands.

The air was shockingly still. The cold scraped Niels’s cheeks, which were the only exposed part of his skin. The moon slipped behind a cloud and Niels lost his target in the total darkness. He switched on his headlamp and red light spilled onto the dry, packed snow.

It was a scene of destruction. The scattered, exploded remains of a compact building. Thick sheets of galvanized steel crumpled like paper. It was impossible to tell what exactly had been inside. Everything was coated in soot and scorch marks or half-buried in snow. The remains of a bed, some computers, communications equipment, a charred sleeping bag, the bottom shell of an exploded propane tank. Taking a closer look at the arrangement of the chaos, Niels concluded the tank had clearly exploded after whatever else had blown a hole through two centimeters of steel.

There, a few meters from the tank. A jacket. Just the sleeve. An arm was still in it. No sign of the rest of the torso. Niels glanced at the debris. A body could easily be lost in there. He covered his mouth with his sleeve, then turned the arm over with the end of a hammer. There was no patch identifying who the limb had belonged to, or which worldly organization had given this jacket to them.

Niels turned away from the wind, pulled his gaiter down, and relayed the scene to Rasmus. By his guess, the shack had been standing no longer than a week ago.

Rasmus cursed in Swedish. "We have to call someone."

Niels didn't respond. Who? The military? Who says they weren't involved?

"Wait," Niels said. "Let me check our station first. I'm almost there."

"I don't like that, Niels."

"I will be fast."

Niels hurried back to the plane, plugged in with a shudder, and took off. He was close enough now to follow one of the pipes directly to the first station. The pipes were heated to five degrees to keep the water from freezing, so they stood out as a gray, sodden line of muck amongst the pristine snow field.

"Niels, what's going on?" Päivi's voice came into the comms—panicked, and unlike her. Niels tried to downplay the situation regarding the unidentifiable, unregistered, and recently exploded shack in the middle of the ice sheet. He hoped he sounded calm. He could feel his blood throbbing in his wrists against the tight glove straps.

“Can you ask Igloolik if they saw anything strange?” Niels said, moving the conversation somewhere else. He wasn’t far now. Marina offered to check in with their colleagues.

In the distance, a familiar rectangular structure poked out of the snow. The lumpy line guiding Niels ended at one of the walls. He dove low with the plane and came to a sliding stop a hundred meters from the building. He grabbed his gear and tapped Ludde on the head.

A piercing breeze cut in from the west. The exposed rock of the coast wasn’t far now. Niels pulled his hood over his hat, leaned into the wind, and trudged away from the plane. His snowshoes sank into the crunchy snow, which lifted off in the breeze like sand. Ludde unfurled a pair of wings inset with mechanical fans and hovered along behind him. Niels asked the drone to go ahead and scout a path. The ice at the fringes of the sheet was rotten, even in winter. Pits and crevices could hide anywhere beneath the thin, brittle surface. There was no danger if he was careful.

A snowdrift had buried the main entrance to the station. Niels pulled out the ladder, swapped his snowshoes for crampons, and climbed up onto the roof, which was made of the same galvanized steel that he’d seen torn to shreds a half-hour ago. He hacked through ice and pried the roof hatch open. He pulled the string for the lone bulb in the ceiling and a warm glow erased the darkness of the windowless space.

The room was tight. Not meant for long-term habitation. There were a couple computers clustered on one desk with a screen mounted on the wall. A



drawer full of tools and sensors. Technology that was brand-new a decade ago. A hammock was folded neatly in the corner, not recently used. Niels had spent a few nights in one of those last summer. His breath hung in the air like thin miniature clouds.

Nothing was obviously amiss, just as their data at Zackenberg had said. In the back corner, a solid pipe as thick as Niels' wingspan came straight through the wall, bent ninety degrees, then disappeared into the floor, where it continued downward, boring through a half kilometer of ice until it reached the space where the ice sheet met solid rock.

This pipe, as with the other stations in the vast network monitored by the team at Zackenberg, was the focal point of their whole mission. Their job was to slow the ocean-bound motion of the Greenland ice sheet by extracting the melt water that ran underneath it. In some places the water collected into rivers that pushed the ice downhill, acting as a sort of lubricant. Once the ice broke off from the rest of the sheet and fell into the open ocean, it was doomed. However, if that meltwater were to be removed—say, pumped upwards, using the pressure from the massive weight of the ice to do most of the heavy lifting—then this motion would be slowed, and the melt rate reduced. As a bonus, the liquid water now at the top of the ice sheet could be redistributed along pre-existing faults to reseal them, if the weather was right. Their project began ten years prior and had immediate impact. Within a year, the melt rates in Greenland stabilized, for the first time in a century. The faltering North Atlantic Ocean currents recovered. It was a rare, albeit isolated, victory in humanity's struggle against itself, and the project

became a symbol of hope. The pipes alone could not solve the numerous environmental threats related to climate change, but they did buy time, and the continued health of the second-largest mass of ice on Earth—and by extension most life on the planet—depended on how humanity used that extra time.

Niels inspected the pipe up close. Its surface was rough, bumpy, and unpainted. Like any tool designed to do a job first and appear presentable second. He put his ear to the metal, then, after hearing silence, opened a release valve, and nothing came out. It was time to figure out why.

Niels undid the twelve bolts pinning the chest-sized service hatch to the pipe, then heaved it onto the floor. The rusty smell of stale freshwater wafted out with it. Niels stuck his head in and looked down. Darkness stared back. Clicks, taps, and other grating sounds echoed up in an endless series of agitated bursts, like an argument destined to last forever. This was the ice adjusting and readjusting against the reinforced pipe, as if it were alive, and rejecting the intrusion that pierced its body. Niels supposed that, under similar circumstances, his body would react in the same way.

He let out one, short syllable: “*bøh*,” to surprise anyone waiting down there. His voice echoed down the pipe until it faded away, and never came back.

“The pipe is completely dry,” Niels said to his colleagues, taking his head out. “I am sending Ludde down to see more.”

The drone was resting on the desk in its compact airborne shape, resembling an aluminum football with wings. Niels brought Ludde out of sleep, while holding down a button behind his own ear, set to the wireless pair function.

There was a brief prick, like a needle—barely noteworthy compared to the gross discomfort of the old plane—then Niels and his drone were connected. His mind streamed two visual feeds at once: one from his human eyes, and another from the sensors at the front of Ludde’s body, which could perceive not just visual but also infrared and weakly ultraviolet light. As he held the drone in his hands, directed towards his face, there was an effect much like looking into a mirror, as the drone’s beady lenses returned an image of his rosy, fleshy visage glowing gently against the dim arctic backdrop, which was some fifty degrees colder than his skin. It was to observe himself on the outside, but from within. The effect gave inexperienced pilots heavy bouts of vertigo. But Niels and Ludde were well acquainted.

The drone’s mechanical physiology was now at Niels’s command. He willed Ludde into the pipe and began a descent into the abyss. Niels walked over and watched the small, delicate machine vanish from sight.

The front-facing LEDs illuminated the dark passage. There wasn’t much to see; the same segments of pipe repeated themselves over and over. Lone jewels of water clung to the walls and sparkled in Ludde’s light. The pipe was designed to be mildly flexible, and forfeit space to the advances of the ice where possible. This meant that the path to the bottom was not straight, and the fastest Niels could fall was a controlled, swinging descent at the pace of a light jog. White distance markers composed of circles and slashes marked his progress.

“I am at the bottom now, still no sign of standing water,” Niels said with his eyes closed. The lips of the pipe were lined with jagged teeth.

Ludde slipped into the terminal cave. Niels put the drone in the classic quadcopter configuration, turned up all the LEDs, and gave himself a full, spherical view of the space.

He was surrounded by air. The scraped, rocky ground was exposed; barely a stream of melt trickled through. Just yesterday there had been so much water here that it could be piped up a kilometer against gravity and still have enough pressure left over to maintain a steady flow. And the cave had shrunk. Ludde hovered not even two meters from the bare rock. According to their records this cave was supposed to be three times that height.

Niels described the empty, misshapen cave to his colleagues while he went to the computer screens to look at data. Ludde hovered down below, waiting.

“I need all of you to look at the seismic activity,” he said in a short burst. The seismometer measured mechanical vibrations in the ice, i.e. “icequakes.” In the last twenty-four hours there were no standout events—no single spike big enough to trigger automatic warnings, or even raise concern when the full crew at Zackenberg had consulted this figure just a few hours prior. But they’d missed something. They’d been looking for broken limbs, blood clots, cardiac distress, and missed the patch of bruises, which presented here as an anomalously frequent series of miniature quakes. This could come from an innocent injury—like a bad fall, or an over-exerted muscle—but Niels feared something much more serious, like internal bleeding. Ten blips peeked over the background noise last night alone. It’d be strange to see more than one.

“Niels you have to get out,” Rasmus said. “Right now.” There were no rebuttals.

Niels turned Ludde over to its own piloting routines and activated the homing beacon, maximum urgency. He arranged the bolts in an easily accessible row on the floor, stood the pipe hatch door at his side, and unclipped the swaying drill from his hip. He wasn't going to leave the drone behind. All he could do was wait for her. Snow skittered against the steel walls and roof; wind whistled through the grooves in the exterior wall, stopped, then started again. Niels tapped his boot on the padded floor. It brought him a sense of control against the noise.

There was a boom and a thousand cracks and then the ground leapt, tossing Niels against the wall. The world went quiet. Niels blinked. His vision was a blur. He could tell the walls were intact, so was the roof. The monitors had crashed to the floor. The pipe had buckled at the elbow, but mostly held its form. He tried one of his hands. It was intact. All of his limbs were attached correctly but the pipe hatch pinned his right leg to the ground. He couldn't tell how bad it was.

The room came back into focus. The fog lifted and he could hear his colleagues shouting into the comms. He had to turn down the volume.

“I'm okay,” he said, then pushed the hatch off and went to stand up and fell right over. The leg was not okay. Touching the foot to the ground sent needles into his shin. No chance of even standing on it, but he could move. His arctic pants packed the leg tight. He hopped over to the ladder, leaning on the desk, then pulled himself up the ladder to the roof hatch.

The moon was out and the land glowed. Niels shuddered against the unimpeded wind. Not thirty meters from his compact shelter, a crater smoldered and simmered. Exploded chunks of ice surrounded the gaping hole. Finer ejecta sketched out a tail pointed downwind.

Another crash opened the sky. Niels ducked into the shelter and slammed the hatch.

“Cease fire!” he yelled, open to all frequencies. “I repeat: cease fire! Stop! I am a civilian! A scientist!”

Rasmus jumped on the radio and repeated the message in German, Marina in Russian and French.

There was no response.

Niels limped down from the ladder and rolled under the desk. Ludde hovered down beside him. He hadn’t even noticed the drone’s return. He wondered if she understood what was going on.

After a minute, no further explosions came. No reply, explanation, or apology. The whistling of the wind picked up again, as well as the gentle pattering of the airborne snow-ice tickling the steel walls.

“I am going to the plane,” Niels announced.

“Be quick!” Päivi yelled.

He hurried out through the roof. On the ice, Ludde morphed into a bipedal form with extended limbs to give Niels a crutch. The moon came and went behind a series of clouds, concealing and then revealing the plane ahead of them. The crater from the second explosion was still simmering.

Neils stepped and his leg wobbled. His good one. If Ludde hadn't spun around to catch him he'd have fallen on his face.

The wobble came through again. It didn't come from his leg, but the ground. The ice was quiet. A gentle rumble crept in from the distance.

*"Hvad fanden var det?"* he said, peering into the empty, glassy eyes of the drone.

Another tremor, with a direction and purpose. Niels spun around. The snowy land had shrunk. Was shrinking. He could see the end of the world now, where white met black. It was closing in on him, with the roaring thunder of a tidal wave.

*"Gå!"*

Every step took the effort of a leap. The tremors grew faster, and harder, tossing Niels like the sea. The ice beneath their feet cried out in booming screeches and moans. Ludde tried to propel him forward but her thin arms lacked strength. Every time Niels got back up it seemed like the plane had moved farther away.

Then the floor vanished. Niels flew into the air while the ground fell to the center of the Earth, like a shelf had broken off the world. Gravity took over, and their fall commenced. The ice rushed up to meet them, and there was nothing Niels could do to stop it.

Total blackness, interrupted by fizzing lights streaking across the void, popping in and out of existence. A blanket of dull ringing from the inside. Vision returned, faded. Muddled patches of dark and white, chunk by chunk. Glistening sparks fell on his cheeks with a cool kiss. The floor rumbled against his body—

calm, and regular, like he was shipping out on a great journey. Niels had always wanted to go to space.

There was a tug at his sleeve. A friend, the robot Ludde. It wanted him to grab something—a handle, something fixed in place, sturdy and unmoveable. He took hold and pulled himself forward because it felt like the right thing to do. The device directed him to another hold, and another, and then the floor became smooth, and level, and the rumbling stopped. The room was still. He'd arrived.

"Huh?" Niels shot up. He was lying on the floor of the plane. Ludde was curled up on the other side of the chair, watching him. They were in the sky, out over the great ice sheet, hovering in place. He grabbed on to the arm of the chair to pull himself up but then his brain throbbed against every inch of his skull and he had to stop. He gingerly took off his hood and his hat. An enormous welt ballooned off the left side of his head. No blood, but he could barely touch it. He rolled his way into the chair, then closed his eyes and waited for the wave of dizziness and throbbing to pass.

Fragments of memory came back: his visit to the station, Ludde's descent down the pipe, the explosions. There were only fragments—horrendous images that implied the impossible—

But no. He scooted to the window. A gaping wound had opened in the ice. A circular chunk of the sheet had been blown off the side, reduced to a pile of rubble that trickled downhill to the sea. Freshly shorn cliffs towered above it all. The scar that marked the new boundary between the Greenland ice and the rest of the world. On either side of the open pit, the ice sheet descended gradually towards



the coast, as it had for centuries. Glaciers calve all the time, but Niels had never heard of something like this. It would only take a few summers for the ice rubble to melt entirely. And then the scattered remnants of steel walls and pipes among the barren rock would be the only sign that one of nature's grandest creations had stood there, and that a handful of humans tried to protect it.

Niels needed to talk to somebody. There was no response from his comms. His mental interface was out. Must have been the hit to the head.

Wait. His comms were out. There were people looking for him. People he couldn't hear.

He ripped the headset off the dashboard, turned a few knobs to find the Zackenberg frequency, and spoke.

"Niels!" Päivi blurted. He turned down the volume.

"This is Niels. I'm okay," he said.

He could feel their tears from across the continent. He couldn't pick out individual words in the mess, but he didn't need to.

"I'm okay," he repeated, twice. Everyone took a few minutes to calm down, then Niels explained what happened. "The station is gone. The ice is gone. It collapsed all the way to the ground, into nothing. It is just a pile of dust."

He took a photograph with the plane's camera and sent it to them. Marina gasped. It was the kind of surprise not even decades of study could prepare you for.

"You were down there?" Päivi said.

"I think, yes. I don't remember it all."

“I can’t believe you got away,” Rasmus said.

“Me too,” Niels said. His brain had yet to accept that he’d peered over life’s edge and locked eyes with oblivion. The thoughts behind his eyes seemed unreal, a part of both the material world and the one beyond. “Ludde saved my life,” he said. “She got me to the plane while I was hurt.”

“Hurt how?” Päivi said.

“I think I have a concussion and that my leg is broken.”

“Well do not plug into the plane. Yes?” she returned. “Niels? You know this? Let Ludde drive back and you rest. Then I will fly you to Reykjavík right away.”

There was more idle chatter. Niels turned down the volume and zoned out. To the southeast the sky had turned mauve, bringing enough light to reveal the boundaries between the open water and the ice-carved hills of a snowy inland bay. The stars were hiding. It’d been months since the sky had been that bright at Zackenberg.

A hundred kilometers away, by the coast, a handful of fishing towns were asleep. The destruction may not have woken them up. They’d find out soon. Niels wondered who they would blame.

“Did you talk to Igloolik, Marina?” Neils said. “Do they know who is out there?”

“They’ve seen no one.”

Niels asked Ludde to circle the area with the plane. The water, sky, and land were empty. The radar was silent. No cruisers, artillery, or circling fighter jets. No

unidentifiable flying objects. Nothing but the natural formations of the Earth, and the unblemished gradient of a slow northern sunrise.

Niels felt cheated. He craved retribution, to meet the aggressor eye-to-eye and demand an explanation. A chase, if it came to it. In his twenty-year-old plane, without guns or tags. Armed with nothing but his self-appointed position from the moral high ground. Maybe that was worth something. Why else would they have listened to his hails for peace? What does the boy with the magnifying glass feel when an ant talks back?

Perhaps this was their way of offering a second chance. If only they'd suggested what he do with it. Was he supposed to give up on Greenland? Apparently, the ice was expendable. Niels could already see next week's articles describing the destruction of the ice, and the ensuing hot potato of blame that would circulate in press conferences until another insane headline appeared and everyone would forget. Somewhere, far away from Zackenberg, people were forging the future without him. He'd only been caught in the crossfire.

Ludde beeped, highlighting the remaining amount of their carefully portioned fuel reserves. They couldn't afford a chase, anyways. Not without asking for a ride back home.

Niels sighed and said to the drone, "Let's go."

When he pulled into the hangar everyone was waiting for him. Niels carefully lowered off the seat so he could greet them at their level. He planned on not making a scene, but on his way down he saw their faces out the window. By the time the door lifted he couldn't make a sound except for a few sobs.

Rasmus grabbed Niels's shoulders with both hands, wanting desperately to give his friend a hug, but he was unsure what parts of him were hurt. Päivi asked Niels questions like what his full name was, how old he was, where he was born, and Niels answered them all until he became too embarrassed and asked to stop. He was okay. A little banged up, and he'd had his bell rung, but he'd make it. Marina entered with a pot of mint tea and some mugs, and they sat in silence. They'd lost two whole stations. There were decisions to be made, options to weigh, corrections to put into motion, and they all had ideas—but now was not the time. The specter of death lurked around the corner, watching. He would leave shortly, but not before they understood just how close Niels came to going with him. Päivi broke the tension to suggest they hurry to the hospital. Niels and his throbbing leg welcomed the idea.

Niels and Päivi didn't speak during take-off. Päivi thought she should talk to him, in case he was meditating alone on heavy thoughts like the fragility of life, or something. But she couldn't find the courage. She felt ill-equipped, and like it wasn't her place. When they got out over the Greenland Sea and settled into a comfortable cruise, Niels spoke up.

"Do you ever feel like we are all on a sinking ship?" he said, carefully, reluctantly, "And me, and you, and the others, are helping, throwing water over the sides, but then there's some *skidespræller* in the other corner shooting new holes into the bottom of the boat, and no one's stopping him."

Päivi turned around. "It is scary to face someone with a gun."

Niels looked out the window. The sky was completely clouded. Colorless, and shapeless.

“Are you certain we are on a sinking ship?” she asked.

“It seems obvious,” Niels replied, with a worse tone than he’d intended.

Päivi slipped into thought. “I see it like we live on a mountain range, surrounded by the ocean, and the water keeps rising and rising, turning the peaks into islands.”

Niels looked at his advisor now. “Is that so different?”

“The water will stop at some point. My whole career is set on that belief,” Päivi said. “And when it does, maybe it won’t be so bad. It depends who is stuck on your island with you.”

There was silence in the cabin. Prof. Hallamaa continued, “Do you disagree, Niels? Are we doomed?”

“I’m not sure,” he said. “But I suppose it is better to hold the bucket than the gun.”

THE END