

FADE IN:

EXT. FARGO ICE PALACE -- DAY (WINTER, PRESENT TIME)

The word "Palace" is a shameless exaggeration. It's a converted U.S. Army WWII Quonset Hut.

The wind HOWLS and snow SKIDS. A tattered sign flaps over the main entrance: "Home of Your First Place Fargo Flames, Northern Professional Hockey League." Except some wag has scrawled "Almost" before "First."

INT. RINK, FARGO ICE PALACE -- DAY

A hockey rink is surrounded by seats for 1,500. At one end of the rink KATIE SHAFER (26), in work-out clothes, skates alone in speedy zig-zag patterns and shoots puck after puck at an empty net. Her athletic body drips sweat. With each slap shot

KATIE

YEAHHHHH!

Underway at the rink's other end is a Pee Wee League hockey practice.

TEN FIVE-YEAR OLDS careen, collide and cry. BRENT JEFFERSON (27), in the uniform of the Fargo Flames (with "Jefferson" on his jersey), without pads or helmet, holding a hockey stick, assists TWO COACHES (40s). He's muscular, unshaven and looks every inch the minor league pro hockey player; he's bemused by the kids' chaos. A girl skates to Jefferson.

GIRL

Coach, can girls play real hockey?

Jefferson smiles, points to Katie.

JEFFERSON

That's Katie. She wants to.

Four boys skate from nearby.

BOY #1

Girls can't play real hockey.

BOY #2

My Dad says she's your girlfriend.

A WHISTLE and the kids scramble off to a gaggle of earnest parka-clad PARENTS.

Jefferson skates to Katie, though just behind and to her side. She zigs, he zigs. As she closes on a puck he tries to lift her stick. She deflects each attempt.

JEFFERSON
Dinner tonight?

Their playful chase continues.

KATIE
Dream on. Gotta meet Miceli.

JEFFERSON
That takes all night?

KATIE
Then I get the ice after the game.

Jefferson smiles, could be a leer.

JEFFERSON
Isn't that bed time?

KATIE
I need the practice.

JEFFERSON
I think you're plenty practiced.
Expert in fact.

Katie skids to a stop. Sweat cascades off her. Her sweatshirt is soaked. She catches her breath. Jefferson circles. She's frustrated.

KATIE
This is all a joke to you.

JEFFERSON
No. No. All I'm saying is --- three
nights ago was free weights. Two
nights ago it was game films. Then
last night was more ice time.

KATIE
It's crunch time. You know that.

JEFFERSON
I know. I know. I'm sorry. I just
miss you.

She softens a bit.

KATIE
Coupla more days. Then we'll know.

She turns coquettish for an "inside" remark.

KATIE (CONT'D)
You should've asked more questions.

Jefferson smiles, nods; they've been here before.

JEFFERSON

Right. I should've asked more questions.

A beat.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Go get 'em.

They embrace, though it's a bit distant.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Gotta check in.

He skates away and then turns; Katie resumes training.

EIGHT Missoula Mountaineers PLAYERS, without pads and helmets, enter at the far end. They watch Katie's training routine. SOME CATCALLS AND WOLF WHISTLES.

Katie continues practicing though she watches the Mountaineers.

Jefferson skates toward the Mountaineers.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Knock it off, guys. Just do your warm ups.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

He's whipped.

ANOTHER MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Put a skirt on him. Our ice anyway.

Katie skates into the group of Mountaineers. SIX MORE have entered the rink including BOGDAN BRENTONOVIC (36), a Neanderthal-type of vaguely eastern Europe heritage. He's menacing just standing there. He's apart from the others.

KATIE

Younger. Peterson. Three times up and back.

The Mountaineers react to the challenge.

MALE VOICE

Oooh. Bad girl. Bad girl.

KATIE

Well?

Their teammates shove YOUNGER (21) and PETERSON (27) forward, typical minor league hockey players. THREE PUCKS slide out.

YOUNGER

We're not warmed up.