

FIELD OF VIEW

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The first thing we hear is low, heavy breathing. Panic, barely suppressed.

A CHYRON OVER BLACK READS: Afghanistan - 2017

And we FADE IN on --

MEL HARRIS (early 30s, in full US Navy combat gear). She moves forward slowly, holding a rifle in front of her. We pull back and realize that we're in --

A BULLET RIDDLED HOUSE. Blood spattered on the walls. Bullet shells clink as Mel walks over them, and past --

CONNOR BRADLEY (30s, upright, authoritative). As she moves beyond him, he radios --

CONNOR (INTO MIC)
TOC, we're gonna need an extra
vehicle for exfil --

She seems to ease at the confidence in his voice. But it only lasts for a moment. Palpable fear begins to creep back in as she moves into a small sitting room.

She crosses the room, stepping over a bloodied CORPSE, and arriving at the window. Crouching low, she peeks out through the broken glass, rifle first.

It looks onto a stretch of deserted street. No movement.

CONNOR (OVER COMMS)
(quiet)
Incoming...

A long moment of nothing but silence. Mel watches, waiting. Tension building. Suddenly --

POP POP POP POP POP --

The rapid spray of an AK erupts from down the block. Bullets blow SHARDS of glass from the window into Mel's face --

The shards CUT her, but mercifully the bullets miss wide left.

Mel ducks as another clip smashes through the stucco walls where her head was a second before, showering her with dust.

We see her face. She's shaken --

But Mel's a fighter. She scrambles back to her feet and swings her rifle out the window, tracking an ISIS soldier who dashes across the street --

POP POP.

Mel sends a bullet through the soldier's neck. He drops.

Mel blinks. Wipes dust from her face. Realizes --

Her hand is TREMBLING.

Sounds of a fight rage all around. Mel covers her small vantage point, but no new attack comes towards her.

Her eyes linger on the man she shot. Lifeless eyes opened towards the sky. Unmoving.

The sounds of the fight die down. Eventually they fade to nothing. Mel takes a moment to steady herself. Slowly backs away from the window. Stands up. Brushes off, when --

CLINK, CLINK. The world goes silent for a second.

CONNOR (O.S.)

Fuck --

BOOM! Mel instinctively ducks, as the whole house SHAKES.

A grenade explosion.

Mel stumbles back. She looks around for the source, terrified. She hears footsteps dashing through the house --

Then gunshots --

POP POP --

Then --

VOICE (O.S.)

Man down!

Mel takes off towards the sound of the voice as we CUT TO BLACK.

The blackness is all encompassing. It stays that way for a beat, silent and dark.

Then we hear a rhythmic pounding --

THUMP THUMP. Beat. THUMP THUMP. Beat. THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP --

And it continues as we open on our title card --

FIELD OF VIEW

INT. BOXING GYM - DAY

CHYRON: Three Years Later

Mel (mid 30s now, hasn't had a good night's sleep in years, a shadow of her former self) relentlessly laying into a speed bag with a sort of deep fury --

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP...

She's in an old-school boxing gym, ornamented with concrete and brown leather.

As Mel hits, we see a YOUNG WOMAN (late 20s, similarly fierce) work a bag of her own nearby. Mel clocks the woman.

After unleashing a powerful THUMP, Mel leaves her speedbag behind, letting it spin out. She approaches the young woman.

But before Mel gets there, she's intercepted by BRYANT MOSES (30s, ex-Navy SEAL, the kind of guy you want on your side).

BRYANT

Don't do it.

MEL

(playing dumb)

Do what?

BRYANT

I own the gym, Mel. I can keep you out --

MEL

Yeah, but you won't.

Mel breezes past Bryant. She reaches the Young Woman.

MEL (CONT'D)

Kim, right?

Kim gives her a once-over.

KIM

Do I know you?

MEL

Probably not. But I noticed -- you've been coming here for a few weeks. Barely breaking a sweat.

(nodding at Kim's punching bag)

You should try something that can actually hit back.

Kim scowls. Mel walks towards the boxing ring.

In the background Bryant folds his hands behind his head, as Kim follows Mel.

INT. RING - BOXING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

THUMP. THUMP THUMP.

Mel is ripping into Kim. Bryant hangs off the side of the ring. Mel's skill and speed far exceed Kim's. It's not a fair fight.

As they retreat for a short water break in the corners, we see: Kim's *angry* now.

Bryant watches as Mel gets water. For some reason, he looks worried.

Round two.

As the second round begins, something changes in Mel. Whereas in round one she was fast, purposeful, in control -- now, she backs off. Slows down. Stays on her heels. Retreats.

Her guard sags. Her hands drop. Kim attacks. Now, Mel's getting *her ass* kicked.

BRYANT

(yells)

Keep your goddam gloves up.

As Kim presses her attacking advantage, Mel holds back. Kim maneuvers Mel to the ropes.

She rains blows down on Mel, who just keeps taking them. Gritting through the assault. It's hard to watch.

Bryant turns away from the ring. He's seen enough.

Off Mel grimacing, we cut to --

INT. LOCKER AREA - BOXING GYM - LATER

The aftermath. Mel's slumped over on a bench. Unwrapping her hands. Bryant sits next to her. Staring. Judgmental.

Kim swaggers by.

KIM

Seemed like you'd be better than that. All that talk...

Mel doesn't look up. She just keeps unwrapping. Kim walks away.

BRYANT
Are you coming tonight?

Mel throws him a look -- *do you even have to ask?*

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Just checking.

MEL
I'll be there.

Bryant stands, looks like he's got more to say, but --

A little ball of energy barrels into his leg in the form of his 4-year old daughter, DEE. He scoops her up.

BRYANT
Well what do we have HERE!?

DEE
I sneak attacked you!

She giggles excitedly, throws her arms around his neck. She looks at Mel. Mel gives her a little wave.

Dee waves back at Mel as Bryant's wife, PARISA (late 30s), comes up to them. She gives Bryant a kiss. Hugs Mel, who winces slightly from her bruises.

PARISA
(to Bryant)
Ready? She made me buy a pint of ice cream. It's melting in the car.

DEE
Chocolate chip cookie dough! Like we had on the way home from camping!

BRYANT
(whisper)
Great work, Deedee.

He turns to Mel --

BRYANT (CONT'D)
See you tonight.

Mel nods.

MEL
Bye Parisa.

DEE
(indignant)
What about me?

MEL
Bye Dee.

Bryant and his family leave. We stay with Mel.

As soon as they're gone, whatever brightness Mel may have gotten from them fades. Her shoulders sink. She looks beat.

EXT. FORT ROSECRANS CEMETERY - EVENING

The beginning of a beautiful sunset. The sun falls over the Pacific Ocean, as Mel hobbles through the tombstones, clearly still in pain from the fight. A bottle of LIQUOR in her hand.

Thousands and thousands of fallen soldiers here. Fort Rosecrans stretches as far as we can see.

MOURNERS pepper the graveyard. Nobody takes notice of Mel. All lost in their own worlds.

She catches sight of four silhouettes in the distance, backlit against the sun. She heads towards them.

EXT. HEADSTONE - CEMETERY - MOMENTS LATER

Bryant stands in front of a headstone that says CONNOR BRADLEY with --

BEN ELLIS (30s, kind but constantly on edge),

JOHNNY DOMINGUEZ (30s, strung out as all hell), and

DANE PRICE (30s, hulking, caustic) --

Sharing a six pack of BEER in front of Connor's headstone. They turn to see Mel coming towards them.

She opens the handle, takes a swig, and passes it to Ellis.

MEL
How's our boy?

She nods to the headstone.

ELLIS
No different, really.

PRICE
Still can't hold his liquor.

Price grabs a second beer from the pack. Pops the cap off. Clinks it with his own and DUMPS out the newly opened beer onto Connor's grave. Everyone watches this ceremony.

JOHNNY
He'd be laughing if he could see us now. Still putting up with the world's bullshit while he gets a well-deserved rest.

Johnny laughs alone. His snicker morphs into a sob.

Everyone just watches quietly, awkwardly.

Bryant puts a single comforting hand on Johnny's shoulder.

Mel stares at the grave, off in her memories.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
(through his tears)
I'm sorry man.

He's spiraling. Ellis shakes his head.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I thought I took that guy out --

ELLIS
Shut the fuck up, Johnny.

PRICE
Bro.

Ellis doesn't have any more patience for Johnny. He walks off to cool down as Johnny continues to flounder.

Mel looks at Johnny, she's hurting as much as he is, but in silence.

BRYANT
We don't blame you. None of us do.

Bryant takes the handle and tries to hand it to Johnny, who doesn't take it. So Bryant keeps it for himself. Raises it.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
To Connor. Frogman's frogman.

He slugs a drink.

Off Mel, still staring at the tombstone --

INT. BAR - LATER

Blue collar. Lots of beer and hard liquor, not a lotta wine or cocktails. A decent amount of patrons. A BARTENDER (Lonzo) serves A CUSTOMER. Next to him, also tending bar is --

Mel. She's in the process of pouring some beers when a GOATEED CUSTOMER leans over the bar and SNAPS his fingers obnoxiously at her.

GOATEE

Helloooo. Can I get a little help over here?

MEL

Snap at me again, you fucking --

LONZO

(sharp)
Mel!

Lonzo stares Mel down. She relents. Lonzo turns to Goatee --

LONZO (CONT'D)

What do you want, man?

Mel shakes off her irritation and brings the beers she was pouring over to --

Bryant, Price, Johnny, and Ellis. Huddled around a dart board in the corner of the bar. Price flings darts with impressive force and little accuracy. One clanks off the board.

As Mel comes over to distribute the drinks --

PRICE

Fiver on a bullseye?

ELLIS

You're so dumb I almost feel bad about this...

They shake. Price throws. Misses by a mile.

JOHNNY

Gotta take a piss.

Johnny leaves to go to the bathroom.

PRICE
Double or nothing?

BRYANT
What'd the board ever do to you,
Price?

PRICE
Fuck off.

Mel sets the drinks down.

MEL
On the house.

Price grins at the drinks.

PRICE
Cultural support team in action.

MEL
(reacting to the bad joke)
Huh...?

PRICE
'Cause you were a CST. And even
though we're back, you're still
supporting us. *Culturally*. Get it?

Mel rolls her eyes.

MEL
You have to pay for that drink now.
No one else. Just you.

BRYANT
(to Price)
Take mine, you clown. I gotta get
back home.

PRICE
Boooooo.

BRYANT
Parisa's already been an angel
about today. Don't wanna keep her
waiting.

ELLIS
(insinuating)
Ohhh, got it. Action on the
homefront.
(saluting)
Good luck soldier.

Bryant shakes his head and punches Ellis in the arm. Gets up. Says goodbye to the guys.

When he gets to Mel he wraps her up in a warm hug. Momentarily shielding his friend from the world. Then, finally, he pulls away.

BRYANT

Can't believe he's been gone three years.

(then, lighter)

Keep those gloves up.

Mel smiles. Flips Bryant off as he goes.

Price types into his phone, then looks up --

PRICE

Does anyone wanna come to Vegas with me this weekend? I'm bodyguarding Aaron Carter.

ELLIS

How much you lose last time you went up there?

PRICE

Least I found a way to have fun.

MEL

Vegas doesn't qualify as "fun" if you blow your whole paycheck before you leave the city.

PRICE

And yet...

He raises a beer for a cheers. Ellis and Mel clink him.

ELLIS

Yo where the hell is Johnny?

MEL

Bathroom. Takin' a leak.

ELLIS

(worried)

How long ago?

Ellis is already moving towards the bathroom.

Price and Mel follow him.

INT. MEN'S BATHROOM - BAR - CONTINUOUS

Ellis busts into the small, dingy bathroom to see Johnny on the floor, leaning up against a wall. Needle and rubber hose. Johnny gives him a loopy grin.

JOHNNY

(slow)

Hey guys...!

Mel and Price cram in.

PRICE

Ah, Johnny. Buddy.

ELLIS

Shit. I gotta take him home.

The guys pick Johnny off the floor.

MEL

I'll take you.

ELLIS

We're good...

MEL

I got it. Come on. I'll tell Lonzo to cover for me.

PRICE

You sure you're good to drive?

Mel glares at him, and leaves the bathroom.

INT. MEL'S CAR - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Mel drives fast, racing down blocks. Ellis riding shotgun and Johnny in the back.

She's a little too drunk, and takes a couple turns with too much swerve. Johnny puts his hands in the air.

JOHNNY

(still high)

Woooo.

Ellis grips the door handle.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens, Mel and Ellis have Johnny's arms draped over their shoulders. They stagger in with him.

JOHNNY

You guys are so fucking chill. I love it. We're all just chill. Do y'all wanna Netflix and chill?

They drop him on the couch. He gives them a smile.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I didn't mean have sex guys. You know that, right?

ELLIS

Yeah man, we know.

Ellis helps Johnny lie down.

JOHNNY

You can pick the show...

Johnny's eyes close.

Mel watches how Ellis takes care of Johnny and appreciates it. Within seconds, Johnny's snoring. Ellis relaxes a little, then turns to Mel.

ELLIS

(sarcastic)

For a moment I was worried that if the heroin didn't kill him, your driving would finish the job...

MEL

(loud)

I got you here, didn't I? Why are you such a prick all the time --

ELLIS

Calm down, you're gonna wake him up.

He looks down at Johnny with sadness. Mel sees.

MEL

Is he gonna be okay?

ELLIS

Some days are worse than others.

(beat)

(MORE)

ELLIS (CONT'D)

He mostly has it under control I guess.

MEL

How are *you*?

ELLIS

I'm fine. I'm good.

MEL

...You ever get tired of taking care of him?

Ellis doesn't respond. Mel doesn't push. Eventually --

MEL (CONT'D)

I should get home.

ELLIS

Drive safe.

Mel leaves.

INT. BACKYARD - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel is in a backyard. Her backyard. It's very dark, but there's a faint outline of a ROPE lying on the ground in front of her, leading somewhere. She follows it, compelled.

A loud CLINKING sound echoes all around her. Over and over. Like some kind of aluminum heartbeat. We can't tell where it's coming from.

But Mel doesn't investigate the noise, she follows the rope.

Tension builds. The clinking grows louder as she follows the rope towards a HOLE in the ground. She's scared.

She walks up to the hole, but can't see into it. The bottom is shrouded in ABSOLUTE DARKNESS. The clinking is almost deafening now. She suddenly turns around and sees --

The far end of the rope is LIT, and it's hurtling towards her. She realizes --

It's a FUSE. She's frozen, can't move --

The lit fuse rushes past where Mel stands, down into the hole, and --

A MASSIVE, FIERY EXPLOSION ERUPTS --

But instead of a BOOM, we hear --

AN ANNOYING HONK.

INT. MEL'S CAR - NIGHT

Mel startles awake with a violent jerk. Downtown San Diego. Another HONK.

Mel's sitting at a (green) light. The cars ahead of her have already gone.

She tries to take a moment to gather herself, rattled by the nightmare.

The light turns yellow. The BMW behind her ZOOMS around her, and the guy driving FLIPS THE BIRD at Mel as he goes. It triggers something in her.

She SLAMS the gas, running what is now a red light --

Other cars in the intersection honk at her as she speeds through, racing after the BMW.

Her face is contorted with uncontrollable rage.

The BMW slows down and stops at the next light. Mel, just behind him, doesn't slow.

She REAR ENDS him. The CRUNCH of crushed metal. It's a vicious hit.

Mel gets out, not even checking the damage to their cars, and strides towards the driver's side of the BMW.

The window rolls down --

BMW DRIVER

What the hell?

Mel reaches the door, and without missing a beat, KICKS OFF HIS SIDEVIEW MIRROR.

BMW DRIVER (CONT'D)

What's your fucking problem??

Mel doesn't back down as the BMW Driver jumps out of his car. He towers over her, 6'2 and hulking. We're frightened for Mel, though she seems like she's *hungry* for this fight.

MEL

You're my fucking problem. What was that back there!?

BMW DRIVER
Are you crazy, lady?

Mel steps towards him. She's fearless. Or she *is* crazy.

MEL
Fuck you!

The guy looks like he might step to her, but instead takes out his phone, and dials.

Off Mel, starting to realize what she's done --

INT. COURTROOM - SAN DIEGO COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mel sits at the defendant's table, dressed in a rumpled suit. Her LAWYER (early 30s) next to her. JUDGE ROSA PEREZ (60s, will not be rushed) presides.

In the pews, there's a man dressed in a police uniform. This is OWEN HARRIS, Mel's husband. He's in his 30s and looks like he used to have a lot of energy. Right now, he's stressed.

Perez stares down at her papers. Mel's jaw is clenched, defiant.

JUDGE PEREZ
Driving your car into someone with the intent to cause harm is assault with a deadly weapon.
(looks up at Mel)
You're looking at ten years if convicted.

In the pews, Owen buries his head.

MEL
I wasn't trying to hurt anybody.

Perez studies her. Then --

JUDGE PEREZ
The VICTOR program has openings.

MEL
The what?

She doesn't like the sound of "program."

JUDGE PEREZ
It's a program the VA is using to treat PTSD with virtual reality.

Mel doesn't respond.

JUDGE PEREZ (CONT'D)

It seems to me that, given your experiences, you may be a prime candidate. But it also seems to me that you might need a push. I went ahead and called the director and she agrees with my assessment --

MEL

So you're forcing me into it.

Perez takes a breath.

JUDGE PEREZ

I'm *offering* you a spot in this program. Or you can take the time.

(beat)

The choice is yours.

Mel's quiet. Judge Perez waits for an answer.

Off Mel, the decision surprisingly hard for her...

EXT. COURTHOUSE - SAN DIEGO - LATER

Mel exits through the double doors of the courthouse with Owen. Mel is in her own head, but Owen is positive. They walk towards the parking lot.

OWEN

(earnest)

This is great, Mel. Really great. I'm so proud of you for doing this.

MEL

Alright, *Dad*.

OWEN

Come on. Maybe it'll help you process --

MEL

It's not gonna fix anything.

OWEN

I didn't say it would. I'm just asking you to keep an open mind.

(beat)

I'm really glad you chose to do this.

MEL
(exasperated)
I didn't "choose" this, Owen. It
was the program or jail.

OWEN
(upbeat)
Still, it could be a big step
towards getting better.

Mel whips on him --

MEL
Fucking listen to me -- I'm not
doing this because it will help.
I'm doing it because I have to. Did
you actually think there was a
chance I was just gonna take jail
time?

Mel keeps walking towards the car.

OWEN
You punish yourself, Mel. It's what
you do. This time, you didn't.

Mel and Owen reach Owen's POLICE CRUISER. Mel opens the door
and gets in.

OWEN (CONT'D)
That's a good thing.

MEL
Whatever you say.

Mel slams her door closed.

INT. MEL'S BAR - NIGHT

Mel clocks in. Gets behind the bar. She starts making drinks
as CUSTOMERS begin barking orders at her.

She keeps working, trying not to explode.

LATER --

She sneaks off for a moment, drinks a shot for herself. Sits
down and rests. Tired of the world.

INT. MEL'S BATHROOM - LATER

Mel looks at herself in the mirror. Gathering herself and getting ready for bed.

We DRIFT over to the window, which overlooks --

Her backyard (from the nightmare). She scans it, looking for something... but there's no sign of a hole.

INT. MEL'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Mel passes Owen in the kitchen as she heads for the door, fully dressed and in the simplest outfit of black shirt and jeans.

OWEN

Good luck. Call me if you need anything.

She nods to him, grabs a Padres hat off the coat rack, and leaves.

EXT. VICTOR CENTER - LATE MORNING

Mel parks in the lot of an all-glass building. She steps out of her car, checks out her surroundings, pulls down her hat, and walks towards the building.

INT. VICTOR CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Mel looks around the lobby -- well-kept plants and white furniture, nothing to make it distinct from any other modern office building. A RECEPTIONIST (30s) is at the front desk.

Mel approaches slowly. Skeptical of this whole thing.

MEL

Mel Harris. Here for the... Virtual Immersion Combat Theater --

RECEPTIONIST

The VICTOR program, yes. Please wait while I check for you in the system --

VOICE (O.S.)

It's alright Beth, I've got her.

A woman comes out of a hallway behind the desk.

She's in her 40s, has a warm motherly vibe to her for the most part, except for the slight edge that says don't fuck with her. This is DR. SAMANTHA BERENSON.

DR. BERENSON
Mel Harris -- I'm Dr. Sam Berenson.
I run the VICTOR program.

She offers a hand, Mel shakes it but doesn't answer.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
Padres fan, huh?

MEL
...Not much these days. Team's broken.

DR. BERENSON
I dunno. One or two big moves and you could be a playoff team. Walk with me?

Mel follows her, slightly more comfortable.

INT. DR. BERENSON'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

They step together into Berenson's office, which looks more like a library. It's mostly wood, bookshelves line the walls, and natural light streams in through the glass.

Dr. Berenson sits down in a big comfy chair, crossing her legs and intertwining her hands. Mel moves to the couch.

For a minute, Berenson just observes her. Mel shifts uncomfortably.

DR. BERENSON
You don't like any of this.

Mel looks at her.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
Feels like a power imbalance.
You're here by court mandate, you need my signatures so everyone knows you're fulfilling your obligation. I have a file on you, you don't know anything about me. I understand. I wouldn't like it either.
(beat)
Do you want some sparkling water?

She gets up and goes to her mini-fridge.

MEL

No thanks.

Berenson takes out a can and cracks it open.

DR. BERENSON

I'm addicted. From my time in the tech industry.

Berenson walks back towards her desk, stops by a PHOTO of herself hugging a similar age NICE-LOOKING MAN.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

I was never in the military. All the soldiers I knew were through my husband Victor.

(lingers on the photo)

He had the sweetest smile.

Mel feels her heart reach out for a second.

MEL

How'd he die?

DR. BERENSON

Suicide.

A beat, then --

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

I saw the struggles of PTSD through Victor, but at the time I wasn't able to help. Now I can.

Mel nods. A little bit of respect for this woman forming.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

That's all to say, I care about this, Mel. It isn't just some anonymous program. I want to help you.

They share their first bit of meaningful eye contact. Mel decides to open up, just a little.

MEL

So how exactly is this gonna work?

DR. BERENSON

I'll take you through it.

As Mel listens, we cut to --

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - A DIFFERENT DAY

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

Based on your After Action Reports,
we have reconstructed your most
traumatic mission in the field.

Mel stands in an ADAPTABLE ROOM (set up for elements like vibrations and temperature to enhance the experience, as well as some select PROPS).

There's a CHAIR in the middle of the room.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

I want to stress -- the program is
extremely real. Our technology has
a binocular field of view of 220
degrees. Full range of human sight.
It won't feel like you're wearing
anything, it'll just feel like
you're back on that mission.
Everything you see and everything
you hear are designed to recreate
that moment with as much accuracy
as possible.

ASSISTANTS help Mel put on a VR suit:

Hand sensors. Foot sensors. A weighted backpack.

DR. BERENSON

You can tell us to pull you out of
the simulation whenever you want,
but the goal is for you to stick it
out as long as you can.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

A small control center where Berenson stands with a few ASSISTANT TECHNICIANS at computers. A SCREEN with what Mel is seeing dominates the front of the room.

DR. BERENSON

(into a mic)

We want to get you to a place where
memories of that day no longer
trigger PTSD episodes. In order to
do that, we need you to relive it.
Over and over again.

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

An assistant brings a BIG, IMMERSIVE HEADSET to Mel. He looks at Mel -- *are you ready?*

Mel nods. Sits down into the chair in the middle of the room.

MEL
Let's do this.

Mel takes a breath. The assistant lowers it onto her head.

For a second, it's only black.

Then we fade in on...

INT. HELICOPTER - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

A CHINOOK. Loaded up with a team of NAVY SEALS. Mel stands in the middle, looking around.

[Note: when we are in the simulation, everything will be written in bold.]

The WHIRR of HELICOPTER BLADES is dominant. It very much feels like we are on this chopper. It is nearly indistinguishable from reality.

Mel is frozen. She's staring at her team leader, CONNOR, who sits in the middle of ELLIS and PRICE. She's gone pale.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
Are you alright, Mel?

Berenson's voice sounds omnipresent. Like the voice of God in Mel's head.

MEL
(no)
Yes.

She spots the SIMULATION VERSION OF HERSELF (her "Sim") sitting with the guys. Looks younger. Lighter. Happier. Her sim speaks.

MEL'S SIM
I looked her dead in the eye. I said, Sheila, god damn it I love you but if you don't get in this car and drive with me to this concert right now, our friendship is over.

(MORE)

MEL'S SIM (CONT'D)

(beat)

She ended up fucking the drummer!

Everyone laughs. Mel's Sim grins.

[Note: The voices in the sim are RECORDINGS from the team's comms, so everyone looks as if they're talking, but it will always sound as if their voice is coming through a radio.]

PRICE

Is anyone else still nursing a hangover?

ELLIS

Those are the four extra fingers of whiskey talkin'. You said they "needed a home."

PRICE

Who better to adopt them than Papa Price?

CONNOR

Maybe take it easy tomorrow night, buddy.

Mel's still staring at him. Watching him speak hurts her.

PRICE

They don't pay me enough not to drink.

JOHNNY

(laughing)

Amen brotha.

JOHNNY sits across from them, next to BRYANT.

BRYANT

(without opening his eyes)

Connor's just lookin' out for you. I can smell your breath from here.

Even the casual banter is almost too much for Mel to bear. She fixates on Bryant for a moment. Then --

MEL

Bryant never wore his helmet on the chopper. Said he couldn't nap.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

Okay. Mel -- just focus on trying to stay in the experience.

(MORE)

DR. BERENSON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 There are going to be details that
 are off, it's not a perfect system.

Mel doesn't respond, but lets herself take in what's
 happening again.

CONNOR
 You alright, Harris?

Mel flinches, jerks her head towards Connor.

But Connor's talking to her Sim. She watches them.

MEL'S SIM
 Four hours of sleep in the past two
 days? Never been better.

CONNOR
 (mimes drinking)
 You probably could've gotten one or
 two more with some better choices.

MEL'S SIM
 Probably.

In this moment we see the real Mel start to spiral. We STAY
 CLOSE on her as her JAW TWITCHES and she SWALLOWS
 continuously -- Bryant's voice plays over --

BRYANT (O.S.)
 You wanna talk about no sleep? Try
 having a newborn. I feel so bad
 Parisa's alone with Dee. She ain't
 sleepin' one wink.

Mel's eyes drift from Connor to Ellis. Fixes on him. Nearly
 hyperventilating --

MEL
 And -- and Ellis didn't sit next to
 Connor. They didn't like each --

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
 Mel, please. Focus --

MEL
 I'm done. Turn it off, or end it,
 or --

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
 Alright, Mel, alright.

The scene fades out as Mel feels the headset being lifted off
 of her. We can see her eyes are red, watery --

Berenson comes out of a side room, as Mel rushes towards the exit --

DR. BERENSON

Mel...

MEL

I just -- I gotta go.

Berenson watches her leave.

EXT. VICTOR CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

The doors swing open as Mel runs out of the building. She sees a bench nearby. She collapses onto it, shaking a little. She breathes in the fresh air.

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel gets home, sees Owen's car in the driveway, then looks up at the house --

Which is eerily dark.

INT. KITCHEN - MEL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mel stalks through the kitchen. Wary. A dim light comes from the living room.

MEL

Hello...?

OWEN

(from the living room)

It's just me.

Mel relaxes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She enters the living room where there are some big CANDLES lit and a BOTTLE OF WINE on the table. Owen sits on the couch.

OWEN

How'd it go today?

MEL

(ignores the question)
Why are all the lights out? You
scared me shitless.

OWEN

My bad. Just wanted to surprise
you.

MEL

With candles?

OWEN

You make it sound like a crime.

MEL

It's not really my thing.
(then)
Right?

What little energy Owen had seeps out.

MEL (CONT'D)

Sorry. I'm just having a day.
(reconsiders)
You know what. This is nice.

She gestures at the wine.

MEL (CONT'D)

Pour me a glass.

Owen unscrews the bottle and starts pouring. He smiles
(almost timidly) at her. Then hands her the glass.

OWEN

It's from *New Zealand*.

He does it in an endearing, mediocre Kiwi accent. Mel humors
him.

MEL

(in her own Kiwi accent)
Is it now?

OWEN

We should've gone there for our
honeymoon.

MEL

I can't argue with that.

OWEN

We had a lot of places we wanted to go.

MEL

Big dreams.

Owen lifts his glass up to cheers. They clink and drink.

OWEN

But Palm Springs was fun too.
(shrugs)
Things tend to work out the way they should.

MEL

Not always.

An awkward beat.

OWEN

I mean -- I sort of just meant --

MEL

I know what you meant.
(beat)
I just disagree.

OWEN

(small)
You didn't used to.

MEL

Great point. Once I was a beautiful happy princess, and now I'm an irredeemable, fucked up bitch.

OWEN

That's not what I'm saying.

MEL

Okay.

OWEN

I'm just -- trying.
(beat, quietly)
Why does that annoy you?

The chasm is wide, and neither knows how to cross it. Mel puts down her glass.

MEL
(controlled)
I should go to bed. Um. Thanks for
the wine.

She gets up and leaves the room. Owen watches her go, then slowly starts blowing out the candles.

EXT. MEL'S BACKYARD - DEAD OF NIGHT

Mel's dreaming. In the backyard again.

The hole is just feet in front of her.

Mel stares at it. The faint, familiar sound of CLINKING fades in. A sense of TERROR overtakes us. An overpowering feeling of *don't-go-near-that-hole again*.

But Mel steps towards it. And with each advancing step, the clinking gets LOUDER.

The darkness of the hole draws her in. She's almost there...

Her breath catches. As she peers into it, this time she can see --

An unmoving figure. A body? Her breath catches.

The sound of the FUSE BEING LIT. She turns around, her eyes go wide --

INT. MEL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Mel wakes up. She's alone in bed. She takes a long blink.

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - DAY

The VR room. Same set up as before, only this time, instead of any assistants around, it's just Berenson with Mel. She holds the headset.

DR. BERENSON
This time, I want you to try to be
as present as possible. We have a
lot more to get through.

MEL
I'm here, aren't I?

Berenson smiles at her. Lifts the headset. Mel nods in approval. Berenson lowers it over her.

And as it goes black, we fade up on:

INT. HELICOPTER - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Same scene as before, but Bryant's helmet is off, and Ellis and Connor sit across from each other now.

Mel's jaw immediately clenches, she's still triggered. But at least now it matches her memory.

We hear snippets of dialogue we've already heard, while --

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

We're with Berenson in the control room. Mel's POV up on the screen.

INT./EXT. HELICOPTER - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

The helicopter starts its descent. Mel feels the SHAKE and the WIND as it comes down. Her hand quivers. This is scary. She's back in a war zone.

The helicopter lands and everyone quickly steps off in a line. They move smoothly and with precision. Mel follows her Sim. A look of trepidation on her face.

They patrol towards a TOWN in the distance.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

Mel's apprehension is mirrored on Berenson's face. But Berenson's fear is for Mel.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN - NIGHT

The team approaches the nearest house, a brick one painted white. Mel twitches a little, stares at it.

MEL

Can we pause it? That house wasn't white. It was yellow.

The whole scene suddenly STANDS STILL.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

Mel --

MEL

It was yellow. I'm sure of it.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

Berenson shakes her head, frustrated. She nods to an Assistant. The Assistant goes to work at her computer.

BERENSON

We'll adjust this, Mel, but no more. We need you to stay in it.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

The scene UNFREEZES. Mel starts to follow the team again, reluctantly. And as she passes the house, we see that it is now YELLOW.

CONNOR

Let's keep moving. Target house is third on the right.

They patrol until they reach the target house. Silent streets inducing an oppressive feeling of being watched.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

From the screen in the room, Berenson watches as Price sets a SMALL EXPLOSIVE CHARGE on the door handle of the house.

INT. MID-SIZED AFGHANI HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel covers her ears as the handle EXPLODES off. The door swings open --

Connor nods to Price, the breacher, and Price charges in through the door --

Mel frowns, pauses. Something bothering her about that.

Bryant bursts through after him, full speed.

Ellis is after Bryant. Mel frowns at this too.

Once inside, the team chucks frag grenades into rooms in front of them, and a series of BOOMS follow.

Enemy screams from within the house, as explosions shake them from their positions.

The team splits. Mel follows Johnny and Ellis.

POP! POP! She sees them take down TWO ENEMY FIGHTERS.

In the next room, Ellis and Johnny split. Mel follows Johnny. Johnny throws a smoke grenade into the next room.

ONE MORE ENEMY FIGHTER APPEARS OUT OF THE SMOKE. Johnny hits him square in the chest. The Fighter goes down.

Mel stares at the Fighter's body. A tremor runs through her. For a moment, she's stuck. Then --

She takes off through the virtual SMOKE, crossing through rooms that have already been swept through by the team. Mel finally reaches --

PRICE (OVER COMMS)

Booyah.

A central room where the team has gathered. Inside --

TWO MILLION DOLLARS IN CASH, and SEVERAL HUNDRED BRICKS OF HEROIN.

Mel sees it all. The guys and her Sim stand there looking at it in shock. Mel starts to hyperventilate.

MEL

Pull me out.

DR. BERENSON

You've come so far --

MEL

Out.

Silence.

And the scene fades to black...

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Mel comes out of the simulation, frazzled. Berenson and an assistant enter the VR space.

MEL

There's still shit wrong with that simulation.

(then, rapid fire)

Ellis went in first. Not Price.

Breacher sets the charge, and ducks away from the door.

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

Guys behind him are always the first ones in. That's what we're taught to do.

DR. BERENSON

It's been three years. Maybe you're misremembering.

MEL

I'm not.

DR. BERENSON

That's what was in the After Action Reports, Mel.

MEL

Well maybe the AARs are wrong.

Berenson tilts her head, as if considering the words she's about to say.

DR. BERENSON

(more gently)

Are you sure you aren't just avoiding the part you really need to face?

Mel ignores her. Gets up to go.

MEL

I'm not "misremembering."

EXT. DRIVEWAY - PRICE'S HOUSE - DAY

Mel pulls up in front of a house in the city meant for one.

In the driveway, a REALLY NICE TRUCK. A pair of boots stick out from under it.

Mel gets out of her car and walks up to them.

Price slides out from under the truck. Stays down.

PRICE

You really couldn't wait until I was done fixing my truck, huh?

MEL

I didn't know when there was gonna be some D-lister in need of your services later.

PRICE
Whaddya you want smartass?

MEL
I've been thinking about the day
everything went down.

Price goes cold. She's got his attention.

MEL (CONT'D)
How well do you remember it.

PRICE
(quiet)
What are you doing?

MEL
Come on, I'm not trying to get us
in trouble.

He looks down the street. Glances around. Then, firmly --

PRICE
I don't really remember much about
it, sorry.

He slides back under the truck without answering. Mel doesn't
budge.

MEL
I'm in therapy now.

PRICE
(scoffs)
Fuckin' shrinks. No wonder.

MEL
I'm trying to figure out if I'm
going crazy or I remember it right.

PRICE
If it's a question, must be going
crazy.

MEL
Help me out.

PRICE
(from under the truck)
No.

MEL
So you'd rather just be a dick?

PRICE
 (from under the truck)
 Suits me.

MEL
 Okay, that's cool.
 (then, seemingly random)
 How exactly did you afford this
 truck again?

A loaded beat, and then Price slides back out. Angry.

PRICE
 That was a shitty, shitty day. But
 I've moved on. I'm over it. If you
 wanna dive back into the past,
 kindly leave me the fuck out.

Mel rolls her eyes, frustrated. Starts walking away. KICKS
 his truck on the way.

PRICE (CONT'D)
 Bitch!

MEL
 Fuck you too.

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Different than where Mel works. Dingy jukebox pool-table
 vibe. Pretty empty. Mel hunches over a bar, nursing the end
 of a whiskey neat and staring at the TV playing a soap opera.

Light pours in as another CUSTOMER enters, telling us it's
 still day.

The BARTENDER (30s, handsome in a grunge sort of way) comes
 over to Mel.

GRUNGY BARTENDER
 You want a third?

MEL
 Yep.

The Bartender takes the JAMESON out with a flourish. Gives a
 generous pour.

GRUNGY BARTENDER
 Going through a break up?

MEL
 Sure.

GRUNGY BARTENDER
This one's on me.

MEL
Thanks.

Bartender casually leans on his elbows over the bar.

GRUNGY BARTENDER
Went through a break up myself a
month ago. Sucks huh.

MEL
Sorry to hear that.

GRUNGY BARTENDER
(smiles flirtatiously)
If you ever wanna drown your
sorrows...

Mel abruptly SLAMS her hands on the bar, scaring the two other people in the place, but mostly the Bartender, who jumps back.

Mel gives an abrasive false grin.

MEL
Yeah, come find me sometime.

The bartender looks freaked out. Mel shoots the whiskey in a single shot and heads for the door.

INT. KITCHEN - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She walks into the kitchen. Owen appears in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room. He looks at her, silently asking how her day went.

She gives him a thumbs up. Then goes to the sink. He realizes he's not getting any more than that and retreats into the living room.

She gets a glass. As she fills it with water, her gaze drifts through the window and to her backyard.

She looks out onto the setting of her nightmare.

She sips the water. Her mind no longer in the present. As she stares out the window, the glass slips from her hand and SHATTERS in the sink.

She picks up the shards, cutting herself slightly. Some blood oozes out, but Mel doesn't care.

She throws the bigger shards in the trash and sweeps the smaller ones into the garbage disposal. Turns it on.

The disturbing CLINK of glass being PULVERIZED.

INT. BEDROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - LATER

Mel collapses onto her bed. Her eyes drift closed...

INT. MEL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mel lies face down, a pillow over her head. The sheets are rumped and strewn all over.

We stay with her a moment. Then her phone starts vibrating from the bedside table.

Slowly, she unwraps herself from the pillow and the sheets.

Mel looks at the name and picks it up groggily.

MEL

Ellis?

ELLIS

Johnny OD'ed last night.

On Mel's face -- *fuck*.

MEL

Is he alright?

ELLIS

Yeah. But it's time to put this shit to bed. We're gonna talk to him. You should be here.

MEL

Okay. I will.

She hangs up.

EXT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - LATER

Mel exits her car. Walks up to Johnny's house, where Price and Bryant are standing outside.

MEL

You didn't have to wait for me.

BRYANT

Ellis figured we should all come in
at the same time.

PRICE

Let's do it.

He knocks on the door. They wait in silence, until --
The door opens. Ellis stands there.

ELLIS

Come on in.

He ushers them inside.

INT. JOHNNY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Johnny's lying in bed. Half-awake. Perks up when everyone
else enters.

JOHNNY

Wow. Whole gang's here. This is
better than my birthday.

PRICE

Jesus man, you look like shit.

Ellis throws Price a look.

PRICE (CONT'D)

What? He does.

JOHNNY

It's cool. I feel even worse.

The rest of the team exchanges awkward glances with one
another. Johnny notices.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Why are you all acting weird?

No one steps up so Ellis starts.

ELLIS

Listen man, we're worried about
you. This is getting out of hand.

He gestures at the bedside table, where a series of pill
bottles lie open.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

We looked into it, and there's a really great outpatient program at Betty Ford.

Ellis pulls out a pamphlet for "Drug Treatment at the Betty Ford Rehabilitation Center." Drops it on the bedside table.

Johnny stares back defiantly.

JOHNNY

So what is this, some kind of intervention? You guys are fucking hilarious.

BRYANT

We're just looking out for you, bro.

JOHNNY

(sarcastic)

Thanks for the concern, bro. But you four are more fucked up than I am. Maybe start fixing yourselves before you come at me.

PRICE

We are.

(shrugs)

Or, at least, Mel's seein' a shrink.

Mel turns on him --

MEL

The fuck, Price?

BRYANT

You are?

ELLIS

Wow.

JOHNNY

Seriously?

Mel puts a hand to her head.

MEL

Not really a shrink. It's a different thing. Called the VICTOR program.

BRYANT

I don't know what that is.

But Ellis recognizes it.

ELLIS

It's a virtual reality simulation.

(then, loaded)

They make you relive your worst day
in the field.

A thick tension fills the room.

MEL

You know it?

ELLIS

They offered me a spot in it a few
months ago at my VA appointment.

He stares Mel down.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

(low)

I said no fucking way.

Mel holds his stare. But their silent conversation is
interrupted by Johnny.

JOHNNY

Is it helping?

Mel looks back to him.

MEL

I dunno.

Johnny studies her. Then --

JOHNNY

I don't need therapy. I'm doing
fine on my own.

A moment. The guys glance at one another. Finally --

BRYANT

No you're not.

(Johnny looks at him)

Why do you think we're here?

Clearly you're worse off than any
of us. And give me a break with
this "on my own" bullshit. He won't
say it, but Ellis has been carrying
you. He's tired.

(MORE)

BRYANT (CONT'D)

Get help, if for no other reason
than to give your friend a fucking
break.

A long silence. Johnny looks at Ellis, who can't meet his eyes. He picks up the Betty Ford pamphlet from the bedside table.

JOHNNY

(quiet)

I guess I could give it a chance.

BRYANT

Beats being in free fall.

Off Mel, Bryant's words landing on her as well, we cut to --

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Mel patrols in with the team.

We can tell she's nervous.

Her eyes dart around as they get into town.

She stares at the first house.

MEL

**I think that house was white,
actually.**

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

Dr. Berenson stands in the middle of the room. A few of the assistants look at her questioningly. One of them decides to speak up --

ASSISTANT

That was the one she changed...

DR. BERENSON

I know. Just change it back.

The assistant shrugs, executes Berenson's order.

EXT./INT. AFGHANI HOUSE - NIGHT

They're at the main door. Breach charge is set.

The handle explodes off --

Price PEELS in first, followed by Bryant --

MEL

Pause.

The scene pauses -- a striking, chaotic image of SMOKE and DEBRIS and DYNAMIC MOVEMENT.

MEL (CONT'D)

Price is still going in first. You didn't fix it.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

(carefully)

Correct. This is what the AAR said. It isn't your job to focus on this. Your job is to confront what comes next.

Mel can see she's not gonna get any further.

MEL

...Unpause.

The simulation unpauses.

The rest of the team follows Price and Bryant inside the house. Once everyone's inside, they all chuck grenades into the open doors leading into the rooms beyond when --

MEL (CONT'D)

Stop.

The simulation stops again.

DR. BERENSON

Mel...

MEL

It's just -- the first two guys into the house have to hold positions. They don't throw grenades. Only the later guys do that. Can we adjust?

DR. BERENSON

No. I'm sorry.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

The simulation unpauses.

As the grenades explode, Berenson sees Mel FLINCH. A tinge of concern on Berenson's face, but she believes in this process.

She watches Mel enter the house.

INT. AFGHANI HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel follows Johnny -- we see her watch as he and Ellis kill two ENEMY FIGHTERS. We've seen this before.

Johnny splits off, and again Mel follows him -- he throws a smoke grenade. THE SAME ENEMY FIGHTER APPEARS OUT OF THE SMOKE --

POP. Johnny brings him down and moves past. Mel takes a beat, and then follows Johnny into the room with the heroin.

Mel braces for whatever comes next... but the guys just stand around. Mel looks confused.

She walks between the static avatars. Eerie in their stillness. It's a strange moment of *nothing*.

Only ambient city-noise can be heard when Berenson says --

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

We don't have recordings from the next minute or so.

Mel nods, remembering...

MEL

We turned off our comms when we got into the room.

(beat)

ISIS had been intercepting our communications, so we did our planning offline.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

We can program their voices into the system. Would it help you for us to fill in the details?

MEL

No, it doesn't matter.

Something about the way Mel says this -- we can tell she's nervous about something.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - VICTOR CENTER - SAME TIME

The same assistant looks to Berenson.

ASSISTANT
 (under his breath)
 Now the details don't matter?

Berenson ignores him. Focuses on Mel. We can feel the intensity in the room building.

INT. AFGHANI HOUSE - SAME TIME

Mel watches Connor.

A long moment as he stands there. Mel moves closer to him. Slowly approaching. But then --

Connor's voice crackles, breaking the silence --

CONNOR
 TOC, we're gonna need an extra
 vehicle for exfil --

And suddenly, the team snaps back to life. It startles Mel as they split to guard different entrances. Mel follows her own sim into THE ROOM FROM THE OPENING.

Mel's Sim looks out the window in ready position. For a beat, it's just Mel watching herself.

Sounds of the team getting into their various positions elsewhere in the house. Then silence. We stay on Mel as --

CONNOR (OVER COMMS) (CONT'D)
 (quiet)
 Incoming.

We start to hear sounds in the distance. Voices. Getting close to the house. Then --

Gunfire lashes through the window. Mel's Sim ducks. Barely avoiding it. More shots. Through the wall. Just above her Sim's head. Her Sim pops back up in the window.

POP POP.

Brains the fighter running down the street.

Eventually, the fighting subsides. It was short-lived. Mel watches her Sim. This fight seemed so much longer in her memory...

BRYANT

Hey, bring me some of those logs?

Mel picks some up from a LOG PILE and carries them over to him. He chops one in half with an ax.

DEE

Hi Mel!

Dee appears from behind Bryant's leg.

DEE (CONT'D)

I'm helping Daddy make a fire!

BRYANT

"Helping" is generous. You almost burned the house down five minutes ago.

DEE

Did not!

(to Mel)

We're going camping again.

Dee gives her an adorable thumbs up.

MEL

Great.

BRYANT

Only if you learn how to make a fire. If you don't, I'm leaving you at home this time.

(then, to Mel)

What's up?

MEL

I need your help.

Bryant looks at her. Sees the fear in her eyes.

BRYANT

Dee, five minute break from work.

Dee skips away.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

Of course. What do you need?

MEL

...I want you to go through the Victor program with me.

A pause. Bryant doesn't respond.

MEL (CONT'D)

In order for me to get better, I need to watch Connor die... but I can't. Not alone. Every time I'm supposed to see what happened -- I just freeze.

Still nothing.

MEL (CONT'D)

Are you listening to me?

BRYANT

Yes.

But he offers nothing more.

MEL

And?

BRYANT

And I think... what's done is done.
(pointed)
I don't want to fuck up any lives.

Mel looks at her friend. Bryant simmers with... fear? Anger? She can't quite tell.

DEE

(from afar)
Daddy, what does "fuck up" mean?

BRYANT

(still looking at Mel)
Go help your Mom make lunch.

Dee runs off, and they hear from inside the house --

DEE (O.S.)

Mom, what does "fuck up" mean?

Just Bryant and Mel now.

BRYANT

I want to help you, but this is not the way to get better, Mel.

MEL

Please.
(begging)
I promise, they don't know anything.

BRYANT
But they could.

A long moment. Bryant studies her. Mel can't meet his eyes.

PARISA (O.S.)
Babe, did you say "fuck up?"

Parisa stands on the porch of the house.

PARISA (CONT'D)
You staying for food, Mel?

BRYANT
No, she's on her way out.

Mel looks at him, sees he's serious.

MEL
Yeah, sorry about that Parisa. Wish
I could.

Mel walks out, defeated.

Bryant watches her go.

EXT. BACKYARD - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's the backyard, but the nightmare version again -- a sort of ENDLESS DARKSCAPE. Mel's running from the ALREADY-LIT FUSE.

The CLINKING pounds against her ears.

She's sprinting for her life. Stumbles for a moment --

The fuse is gonna reach her --

She regains her feet, keeps running, even more scared --

Then suddenly TRIPS and FALLS into --

THE HOLE.

And in that hole is -- CONNOR'S DEAD BODY. Right next to her.

She SCREAMS and SCREAMS and --

INT. MEL'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

Jolts up, screaming, into Owen's arms, who's sitting beside the bed. It's dark but for the light coming from the hallway through her open door.

OWEN
Mel! Mel. Calm down.

She sees him, but she's still in the nightmare. He holds her for a beat as she comes back to reality.

She pushes him away.

MEL
I'm fine.

OWEN
You were screaming.

They sit apart now.

Owen watches her trying to control her breathing.

OWEN (CONT'D)
What do you dream about?

MEL
I don't.

Owen rises, hurt.

He goes to the door. Mel watches him, feeling disappointed with herself. She decides to open up.

MEL (CONT'D)
Connor.

Owen nods. A long silence. Then --

OWEN
You would talk in your sleep when your nightmares were at their worst. While we were still sharing a bed.

MEL
What would I say?

OWEN
"We shouldn't." Over and over, the same thing.

Mel's quiet.

OWEN (CONT'D)
What does that mean?

Then, putting up her shield again --

MEL
That it was a good idea we stopped
sleeping in the same bed.

He shakes his head and goes to exit. Turns before he can get to the door, and --

OWEN
Do you even want to get better?

Off Mel, withdrawing deeper into herself --

INT. SHED - BACKYARD - LATER

Mel enters a grimy, wooden shed at the end of her backyard. Inside, she grabs the hanging string and yanks --

Turning on the LIGHT.

Cobwebs hang from the ceiling, insects scurry as Mel enters.

Mel approaches a wall covered in shelves, on which sit large boxes. Her de facto attic.

She gingerly takes one of those boxes from its resting place and sits it on an old stool in the middle of the room. Removes the top. We follow her gaze inside and see --

PARAPHERNALIA from her time with the teams. Old PHOTOS featuring faces we've come to know -- Johnny, Bryant, Price, Ellis, Mel, and Connor.

Mel pauses over them, riffling through old memories.

She stops at one: a picture of her and Connor, arms over shoulders, smiling for the camera.

We see her go back in time to that moment. It's incredibly painful.

But she doesn't look away from the photo.

Off Mel, in her grief, we cut to --

INT. DR. BERENSON'S OFFICE - VICTOR CENTER - DAY

Mel waits on the couch. Berenson walks in, sipping a can of sparkling water. She's surprised to see Mel.

DR. BERENSON
Hello...? Did we have a session today? I'm so sorry, I don't have you scheduled until --

MEL
I wanted to talk to you.

Berenson sits down. All ears.

MEL (CONT'D)
I haven't been completely honest.

Berenson frowns.

DR. BERENSON
...How do you mean?

Mel sits there. No response. Eyes on the floor. Struggling immensely with something. Fighting for the courage to speak. Finally --

MEL
Everyone says deployment doesn't really count because you're 5000 miles away from home and it never means anything real, but Connor was special.
(it's getting harder)
I was married. He was too. Wife's name was Andrea. He had pictures of her above his bed, like he was trying to act the part of doting husband even though his relationship was done for. Connor and I... we found each other and something about it just worked. So that day was... harder for me... because...

Mel trails off. Looks like she won't be able to finish. But --

MEL (CONT'D)
Because I loved him.

Berenson nods.

DR. BERENSON
That explains a lot.

Mel looks up, sees an understanding in Berenson's eyes. Non-judgmental.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
 Thank you for telling me.
 (beat)
 I think that's the first real step
 you've taken to getting better.

She gives Mel a look of affirmation.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
 Are you ready now?

Off Mel, taking a deep breath as we cut to --

EXT./INT. AFGHANI HOUSE - NIGHT

The team is about to breach the door. The handle explodes. Price darts through the doorway. Bryant, next in. The rest of the team follows.

The team uncorks their grenades -- Mel watches as they toss them into the adjacent rooms.

BOOM -- smoke and debris bounce around -- and in the chaos, the team charges forward.

Mel follows Johnny and Ellis. They do their thing. Dispatch TWO GUYS, split up.

Again Mel follows Johnny -- smoke grenade -- enemy fighter out of the smoke --

POP. The fighter goes down.

JOHNNY
 Clear!

Johnny leaves, but Mel stays with the downed Fighter. We notice --

The Fighter moves slightly.

Mel sees the guys in the heroin room silently standing there, and then turns her eyes back to the Fighter, who remains still. A GRENADE clipped to his belt --

Mel studies him. His eyes blink.

CONNOR (OVER COMMS)
 TOC, we're gonna need an extra
 vehicle for exfil --

The team spreads out to cover the entry points, and Connor comes into sight of the Fighter. The second wave arrives.

SHOUTS -- GUNSHOTS -- CHAOS --

We see Connor fire a couple shots --

And then the Fighter starts crawling towards him.

The battle dies down. Mel watches as the fighter takes the pin out of his grenade and tosses it --

Even though she knows what's about to happen, Mel instinctively tries to reach out and stop it --

MEL

No --

The grenade bounces across the floor, lands next to Connor, and --

CONNOR

Fuck --

BOOM.

Connor is tossed into the air as shrapnel rips into him. The realism of the simulation is stark here. We've never seen anything quite like this before.

His torn up body is slumped against a wall. Mel's frozen in horror.

Footsteps in the distance. Growing closer. Then --

Bryant's Sim rushes in. Sees the Fighter on the ground. Shoots twice --

POP POP.

The Fighter's body spasms and expires.

BRYANT (OVER COMMS)

Man down!

Ellis arrives right as Bryant does. He rushes to check Connor's body as Bryant radios back to TOC.

As the rest of the team piles in, Mel shrinks back as a wave of emotion crashes over her.

EXT. PORCH - DR. BERENSON'S OFFICE - LATER

A small outdoor porch just outside of Berenson's office. Mel leans over the railing. She looks sick.

Berenson comes through the glass door with two cans of seltzer. She offers one to Mel. Mel takes it.

DR. BERENSON

You okay?

Mel doesn't respond.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

I know it's hard.

(nods to the can)

Trust me, it'll help settle you.

Mel opens the seltzer up and drinks.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

When I found Vic, I didn't scream.
I didn't cry. I just... handled it.
The second time -- that was when I
broke down. That's when I felt it.

MEL

Second time?

(realizing)

You've done this.

DR. BERENSON

What kind of doctor would I be if I
hadn't given it a test run?

Mel takes a beat, then --

MEL

Let me you ask a question in your
capacity as a doctor. Do you think
that fighter could've crawled after
being shot twice in the chest?

Berenson sighs.

DR. BERENSON

Mel, why are you asking that?

MEL

Because seeing it now, it looks
pretty unlikely.

DR. BERENSON
(gently, but firmly)
You're making progress. Don't throw
that away now.

MEL
I'm not throwing anything away. I'm
just asking a question.

DR. BERENSON
I used to ask myself if I could
have done anything different. Every
day. You can't move on until you
accept that you did your best.

Off Mel, grappling with herself --

EXT. BOXING GYM - NIGHT

Mel gets out of her car.

INT. BOXING GYM - NIGHT

Mel enters the boxing gym. A LARGE FIGHTER (JORGE) is in the
ring pounding on some poor OPPONENT.

She sees Bryant in the corner talking to a PATRON. Ignores
him and goes straight to the locker room. We see him glance
at her from afar.

When Mel comes back out she's dressed to punch. She makes a
bee-line for Jorge, a fight on her mind.

Before she can get there --

Bryant steps in front of her.

BRYANT
Hey.

MEL
Later, I'm about to get in the
ring.

BRYANT
Not with him you're not.

His tone is strong, forceful. But Mel doesn't care.

MEL
I need to fight.

BRYANT
You're not just looking to fight.

MEL
Yes I am.

BRYANT
Then I'll spar with you.

Called her bluff. She nods.

They approach the ring.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Alright Jorge. We're taking over.

Jorge gives him a fist bump and exits the ring.

MEL
(aside to Jorge)
You get a free pass today.

JORGE
Fuckin' love to see you try, *puta*.

Bryant and Mel enter. Mel hops up and down. Bryant looks at her as he puts on his gloves.

BRYANT
Y'alright?

MEL
Yeah. Fine.

BRYANT
Gloves up.

They approach each other. Mel throws a few punches. Bryant ducks and weaves.

MEL
Hit back.

BRYANT
You still mad at me?

MEL
Cause I asked you to step up and you didn't? No, I'm great.

She swings and misses again, then executes a quick follow up which lands.

BRYANT

Nice hit. Maybe that thing *is* helping.

MEL

I don't need your sarcasm.

She throws A FLURRY OF PUNCHES.

But Bryant won't hit back.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, BOXING GYM - LATER

They're both sweating and taking off their gloves. Gym's more or less empty by now.

On Mel -- struggling with something, she just need to gets it out --

MEL

I did it. I watched it happen.

Bryant looks at her. An awkwardly long silence, then --

BRYANT

I told you I don't wanna talk about that day, Mel.

MEL

I don't want to keep running from it. Do you?

Bryant gets up. Puts a hand on her shoulder. Then leaves.

Mel shakes her head. Down but not out.

INT. BETTY FORD CENTER - DAY

A large welcoming room. Ellis and Mel stand at a window, looking out onto a lawn where --

Johnny is practicing Tai Chi with a small class of all ages and sizes, led by a young Asian woman. He's the most into it out of all of them.

ELLIS

Fuckin' Zen master over here.

MEL

He looks good.

ELLIS

Yeah. As good as you can for a week in. Let's see if he can keep it up.

MEL

Baby steps, asshole.

ELLIS

Why'd you wanna come today by the way?

MEL

(evasive)

Just wanted to see how he was doing.

Ellis looks at her questioningly, but accepts it.

INT. OUTSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM - BETTY FORD CENTER - LATER

Johnny comes out of the locker room still in his shorts and with a towel around his neck.

JOHNNY

S'up nerds.

They do some quick hugs.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Just gonna grab some water.

They walk over to a nearby water dispenser and all pour themselves a small cup.

ELLIS

Hot teacher.

MEL

Jesus, Ellis.

JOHNNY

Don't you dare bro.

ELLIS

Wouldn't dream of it.

He winks at Johnny.

JOHNNY

I'll kill you.

MEL

How you doin'?

JOHNNY

I'm alright. Sometimes everyone talks so fuckin' calm around here I wanna run screaming for the hills. But yeah, apparently alright. You?

MEL

Yeah...

(glances at Ellis)

I'm good. Program's okay. I've been thinking I could use another set of eyes on it.

ELLIS

That's why you're here? To try and get us to join you?

It's an accusation.

MEL

Hear me out --

ELLIS

No. Stop asking.

MEL

Johnny?

ELLIS

Fuck off Mel, he's got his own shit going on.

But Johnny's listening to Mel.

JOHNNY

(slowly)

Connor's death never made sense.

ELLIS

Doesn't have to make sense. People get mowed down in the streets of America every day. We were in *Afghanistan*.

A pregnant silence. Broken by --

JOHNNY

I'm not so sure.

ELLIS

(aggravated)

Come on man --

JOHNNY

(picking up steam)

No. That's what I've been saying from the start, bro. I killed that dude. He was dead. How could he have killed Connor?

MEL

I hear you, Johnny. Go through the simulation with me. Let's look at it.

ELLIS

(furious)

What the fuck?! He just started rehab! He doesn't need you to drag him off to virtual war --

JOHNNY

Stop answering for me! Christ!

The outburst stops everyone. Johnny looks crazed. Manic. But as quickly as it came, it subsides.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I'm not your fuckin' kid. So don't treat me like one.

(then)

Maybe it'll help, you know? If I see it again, maybe I'll get some kind of closure.

ELLIS

You're risking *everything*.

JOHNNY

(to Mel)

Send me the info.

He throws a look at Ellis before standing to leave.

ELLIS

This is so fucked.

JOHNNY

I'm gonna check out and head home. Thanks for coming, Mel.

ELLIS

Johnny --

Johnny leaves. Just Mel and Ellis now.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
You are so fucking selfish.

MEL
He can make his own decisions.

Ellis shakes his head and leaves, still furious.

INT. BERENSON'S OFFICE - VICTOR CENTER - DAY

Mel sits in front of Berenson, who shakes her head.

DR. BERENSON
You already went through it once. I don't see why we you want to add extra support now.

MEL
Why is that an issue?

DR. BERENSON
Because it feels like backpedaling. You are doing so well --

MEL
You keep saying that.

DR. BERENSON
It's true.

MEL
Well it doesn't feel like I am to *me*. And I'm the patient here. I think this will help, so who are you to tell me otherwise?

Berenson sighs.

DR. BERENSON
You and the surviving members of the team left the Navy shortly after this mission, correct?

MEL
Yes...

DR. BERENSON
Why was that?

MEL
That day was a hard thing to come back from.

DR. BERENSON
 And were your lives better after
 you left the service?

It's not an attack, but Mel takes it as one.

MEL
 (getting aggressive)
 You're starting to sound like a
 shrink.

DR. BERENSON
 I'm just trying to reconcile a
 group of people deciding that
distancing was the best method of
 coping with a trauma, while at the
 same time looking to accept help
 from and find solace with those
 who, ostensibly, are the most
 triggering.

MEL
 They're the only ones who get it.

DR. BERENSON
 Or, for some reason, you aren't
 letting each other rebuild.
 (then)
 Mel, you're doing so well. It is my
 professional opinion that having
 one of your teammates here won't
 help you. If you do this it might
 cause you to revert. You are strong
 enough to do this alone.

MEL
 (resolute)
 I'm strong enough to do it with
 someone else, too.

BerenSON looks at her. Sizing Mel up. Finally --

DR. BERENSON
 Okay.

INT. BACKYARD - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Mel's face, smushed in dirt. She gets up. She's IN
 THE HOLE.

Next to her, Connor's dead body, lying face down. She
 struggles to keep calm, looks around for an exit.

There's nothing in sight. She goes to feel the walls of the hole. Runs her hands over the dirt.

Her hand catches on something --

The ROPE. She pulls it out of the dirt wall.

She tugs on it, it holds tight.

She looks up into the darkness, rope in hand --

INT. MEL'S BEDROOM - LATE

Middle of the night. Mel's awake again. A beat as she collects herself. Then lies back down for another restless night.

INT. VICTOR CENTER - DAY

Mel sits in the lobby, leg bouncing. She's clearly been waiting there for a while.

She pulls out her phone, checks it. Nothing.

The receptionist manning the front desk calls out to her --

RECEPTIONIST

Are you sure he's coming?

MEL

I texted him the info. He'll be here.

RECEPTIONIST

Maybe try calling. We have a tight schedule today.

Mel picks up her phone. Calls Johnny's number. No response. Straight to voicemail.

Mel looks to the young woman, who's staring at her expectantly. Mel shakes her head.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

A lot of people get cold feet. It's not uncommon when it's going to be their first time.

(then, helpfully)

I'll reschedule you.

MEL

Yeah, thanks.

Off Mel, concern building, we cut to --

EXT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mel gets out of her car. Looks up at the house in front of her.

It's completely dark inside. Mel's brow furrows.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - JOHNNY'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mel walks up to the front door and knocks. No answer. She frowns.

Peers in through the window, but can't see anything.

She cups her mouth and puts it up to the mail slot --

MEL

Johnny?

Nothing.

MEL (CONT'D)

You home?

Still nothing.

Mel circles the house.

EXT. BACK OF JOHNNY'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mel approaches the back door. Tries it.

It's unlocked.

She hesitates for a moment. Then opens the door and enters --

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mel walks into the living room. Still doesn't see anything.

MEL

Hello?

She moves to the kitchen, where --

MEL (CONT'D)

FUCK!

It's Johnny. Slumped over. A rubber hose tie-off on his arm. A spent needle on the floor next to him.

MEL (CONT'D)

Johnny --

She unties his arm and checks his pulse.

MEL (CONT'D)

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK!

Johnny is dead. Mel processes this. Sprints towards the landline next to the fridge. Dials.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Mel sits across the table from OFFICER PRITZKER (50s, large, sympathetic). Her shoulders are slumped.

OFFICER PRITZKER

Do you know the last time Mr. Dominguez OD'ed?

MEL

(monotone)

A few weeks ago.

Officer Pritzker writes that down.

OFFICER PRITZKER

And what were you doing when you found the body?

MEL

I hadn't heard from him. He missed an appointment we had.

OFFICER PRITZKER

You walked around the house to the back door, which was open. You decided to enter the house?

MEL

Correct.

OFFICER PRITZKER

I'm sorry that I even have to ask it, but given the circumstances...

(beat)

The nature of your relationship was what exactly?

MEL
 Just friends.
 (defensive)
 Why?

She casts a glance over to the two-way mirror, where Owen might be watching.

OFFICER PRITZKER
 Not accusing. Doing my due
 diligence.

He keeps writing. Then closes his notebook.

MEL
 He was doing better.

OFFICER PRITZKER
 Mr. Dominguez was?
 (Mel nods)
 You said he OD'ed a few weeks ago.

MEL
 He did.

OFFICER PRITZKER
 Then this case is closed.

MEL
 You're not going to investigate?

Officer Pritzker looks at her, surprised.

OFFICER PRITZKER
 (obvious)
 Your friend was a heroin addict,
 Mel.

He stands. Looks down at her, compassion in his eyes.

OFFICER PRITZKER (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry.

He leaves, as Mel just sits there. Reeling.

INT. OWEN'S OFFICE - POLICE STATION - LATER

Mel's in Owen's office. Mid-argument.

MEL
 I'm telling you, he was fine when I
 saw him a few days ago. If you'd
 open a case --

OWEN
We're not doing that --

MEL
-- maybe you could actually find
out what happened instead of just
guessing --

OWEN
-- You found him -- and I'm sorry
to be so blunt, but -- with a
needle sticking out of his arm.

This silences Mel.

OWEN (CONT'D)
It sucks, but that's a hazard of
being an addict.

MEL
(quiet)
That doesn't necessarily mean he
OD'd.

OWEN
No, just every other time.

Mel gives him an angry stare. Then --

MEL
What if he was killed.

OWEN
I think you know that's not what
happened here.

Mel nods slowly. We can tell she's holding back.

OWEN (CONT'D)
You should get home, Mel.

MEL
I'm fine.

Owen moves towards her.

OWEN
It's hard to save people from
themselves.

Something about the way he says it...

MEL
You mean like me.

A long moment passes. Owen doesn't refute her. Mel brushes past him and exits. The stale air of an unsatisfying ending hangs.

INT. MEL'S BAR - NIGHT

Mel rinses a glass behind the bar. Dunks it in the antibacterial soak. Grabs a towel. Dries it. Flips it back upright.

Places it below the keg tap, and pours until it overflows. Suds are still running down the side as she slides it across the bar to --

Bryant.

He nods thanks at her. Takes a long swig. Then puts the glass down.

He looks like he's going to say something, but can't make the words come out. The two of them share a look -- bonded, again, by tragedy.

They live in silence for a while. Until, finally --

MEL

Fuck.

BRYANT

Yeah.

(then, studying her)

You alright?

MEL

I...

Considers how far to go.

MEL (CONT'D)

He was gonna go through the Victor program with me.

Bryant stares at her.

BRYANT

Is this a guilt trip?

MEL

No. Just trying to figure out if that had anything to do with what happened...

Bryant looks at her with pity.

BRYANT

It's not your fault.

(then)

When we got back, and he started using... I figured it would stop eventually. We all had our ways of coping and that was just Johnny's. He'd do it until he didn't need to anymore. But when it kept dragging on, no sign of stopping, I just...

He trails off. It's hard to say.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

I expected this, Mel. It's fucked, but it's true. And when I got the call you wanna know what I felt? It wasn't sadness, or anger, or pain.

(ashamed)

I felt *relief*. That he didn't have to struggle anymore.

Mel doesn't know how to respond. It's clear she doesn't agree, but she can't argue with her friend. Not now.

MEL

(carefully)

Don't you feel like he was getting better?

BRYANT

He went to rehab. That was a step, not a recovery.

(pointedly)

You know that as well as anyone.

Coming from someone else, that could've made Mel mad. Not Bryant. From him, it's just rings true.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

We should do something for him tomorrow. I'll get the guys there.

Mel nods. Bryant stands.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

Sorry I have to go so soon. Gotta get Dee up for school tomorrow.

MEL

It's okay.

He leaves Mel there. Washing glasses. More unsure of herself than before.

EXT. FORT ROSECRANS CEMETERY - DAY

It's a beautiful sunny morning. Mel, Ellis, Price and Bryant all crowd the top of a small hill, as the soft roar of the Pacific Ocean provides background white noise.

BRYANT

To our boy.

Ellis, Price, and Mel watch as Bryant takes a homemade marker (two small sticks taped together in the shape of a cross), and drives it into the ground next to Connor's headstone.

Price hands a beer to each of them, cracks open two others, places one in front of Connor's tombstone and another in front of Johnny's cross.

They sink into lawn chairs, arrayed in a semi-circle at the foot of the shrine.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

Anyone wanna say a few words?

PRICE

Johnny had something every little boy dreams of growing up.

(dramatic pause)

He had a hell of a dick --

Ellis laughs derisively, sadly.

PRICE (CONT'D)

-- A serious hog. A real "third leg." For that, and that alone, he will be missed.

Ellis' laughter fades out. And then there's silence. Just the waves lapping at the shore in the distance. Everyone goes into their own world.

When Mel finally looks up she sees Ellis, gazing off.

MEL

You alright?

Ellis looks at her, some hostility in his voice.

ELLIS

Just always thought he had more fight.

MEL

You don't think he was getting better?

ELLIS
Are you kidding me?

MEL
You were with me. You saw. He
looked good.

ELLIS
I saw him agree to do that fucking
program with you. If that's not
evidence he was still unwell, I
don't know what is.

BRYANT
Guys, come on.

He gestures towards the makeshift memorial.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Some respect. Please.

ELLIS
You know what? Maybe you getting
him thinking about that day again
is what sent him back. That's what
I think.

Mel throws the rest of her half-drunk beer at Ellis' head. He
ducks it and snarls at her.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Price said the same thing.
(to Price)
Right?

BRYANT
Guys --

MEL
(to Bryant)
Oh now you're stepping up for me --

PRICE
Why'd you ask him to do it, Mel? He
clearly wasn't right.

MEL
(angry now)
I needed someone to help me and
Johnny was the only one who would.

ELLIS
(vitriolic)
It's your fault.

BRYANT
(standing)
That's out of line, Ellis --

MEL
Fuck you all. I'm out.

Mel rises, trying to remain calm.

BRYANT
Mel...

He gets up to follow her.

MEL
Don't.

Bryant freezes. Mel walks away.

EXT. MEL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Mel stands next to her car, shaking. She looks like she's being mentally pulled apart.

INT. BOXING GYM - LATER

Mel whips into the gym in a frenzy.

INT. HEAVY BAG CORNER - BOXING GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Mel approaches a hanging bag.

Grimaces. Takes a step back and starts getting into it without GLOVES.

She goes until her knuckles are raw and starting to bleed. She sinks into the pain. Then looks around, looking for something worse, spots --

JORGE. He's working combinations with A PARTNER (20s) while his TRAINER (FRANK) watches from the sidelines.

FRANK
That's it Jorge, lay into his right side --

MEL
Let me spar with him.

Mel approaches Frank. He doesn't look her way.

FRANK
(ignoring her)
Jorge! Stop going easy, give him
the goods!

Mel brushes past Frank, and swings herself into the ring, as Jorge and his sparring partner keep at it.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Jesus, Mel!

Jorge and his sparring partner stop. Jorge grins.

JORGE
This'll be good.

Jorge nods to Frank, then gestures at his sparring partner to leave the ring.

Mel squares up at Jorge, who looks down at her hands. Then back up at Mel.

JORGE (CONT'D)
You want gloves first?

Mel nods. Frank throws her a pair.

Mel suits up as Jorge's sparring partner exits.

It's just her and Jorge now. He dances, light feet, across from her. Mel mirrors. Cracks her neck. Then --

She SWINGS at him. Twice --

Pfft. Pfft. He absorbs both on the gloves. Doesn't hit back.

She steps back, but he doesn't advance. Just keeps dancing. He's enjoying this. Mel charges, frustrated --

Whhp. She swings a haymaker and completely misses as he ducks under it and retreats.

He offers an easy left-handed jab --

Pfft. Mel meets it with her left and then SWINGS her right. Connects with his head --

THUMP.

He steps back. Shakes it off, completely unfazed. She isn't big enough to do real damage.

He sets back on the balls of his feet. Swaying. Not moving closer. Mel baits him --

MEL

Just as soft as I thought.

Jorge doesn't respond. Takes a step forward. Then offers a lightning quick series of jabs --

Pfft, pfft, pfft. Mel catches all three on her gloves.

He starts unloading on her. She's taking body blow after body blow but she's still standing.

Then she KNEES him in the nuts.

JORGE

The fuck!

That does it. Jorge is pissed now.

Thump. Pfft. Thump. Mel blocks some. Takes others. She's getting beat up, but she doesn't seem to care. *This pain is what she wants.*

She lands some punches back on him after the onslaught, and then moves a little too close to him --

He rears back for a haymaker --

She's tired, her guard's low, and his punch goes right into --

The side of her head.

EVERYTHING GOES BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Mel slowly opens her eyes.

Comes to. Takes in her surroundings.

She's in a hospital room. Hooked up to a heart rate monitor. A black eye where she took the punch. She turns towards the door to see --

Bryant sitting in the chair next to her.

MEL

(groans)

How long was I out.

BRYANT
Couple of hours. Frank called me
when you went down.

MEL
That snitch.

BRYANT
Mel...

She looks away. Can't meet his eyes.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
I know what you were doing. Don't
treat me like I'm someone else.

She stands. Begins taking the IV out of her arm.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Mel, stop. You have a concussion.

MEL
It ain't my first.

Bryant gently pushes her back down. She lets him.

BRYANT
You need to stop hurting yourself.

Mel takes a deep breath. Then --

MEL
I know.

She reaches into her pocket. Pulls out her phone. Scans
through her texts. Only message is from Owen. She doesn't
even bother opening it.

She puts the phone down. Takes a breath, and --

MEL (CONT'D)
Help me up.

Bryant does.

INT. LOBBY - HOSPITAL - MINUTES LATER

Mel checks out of the hospital as Bryant stands nearby. The
NURSE looks at her with concern.

NURSE
Are you sure you're okay?

Mel gives her a halfhearted shrug and then walks over to Bryant.

She looks demolished. Bryant watches her, searching for something to say. Finally --

BRYANT
I'll do it.

Mel looks up.

MEL
What?

BRYANT
The program. I'll do it with you.

MEL
...You will?
(gratefully)
You'll see -- the simulation is
off. You can help back me up.

Bryant shakes his head.

BRYANT
That's not why I'm doing it.
(then)
You need to get better. If this is
what you want, what you think you
need -- maybe if I -- maybe this
can make a difference. After what
happened to Johnny...

A long pregnant pauses before Bryant admits --

BRYANT (CONT'D)
I'm worried about you.

Mel gives him a hug.

MEL
Thanks.

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - DAY

Mel and Bryant are standing across from each other, getting outfitted by ASSISTANTS. Bryant looks suspiciously at the equipment as they look to put it over his head.

MEL
It doesn't hurt.

BRYANT

Great.

But it's clear he's still apprehensive.

EXT. THE HOUSE - AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Mel stands outside the house like usual, only now she's flanked by Bryant.

Bryant looks around, getting his bearings. He bounces nervously, this is clearly triggering him. Mel watches. Studies him.

MEL

(reassuringly)
It's gonna be okay.

BRYANT

(gruff)
I'm fine. I'm here for you,
remember?

The team arrives at the front door. Bryant's eyes go wide at the sight of Connor. So real.

The team lines up outside the house. They set a breaching charge on the door. Connor gives the signal and the handle explodes. Price's Sim darts through the doorway.

MEL

(to Bryant)
Ellis was first in, right? I've
been saying that --

BRYANT

Looks right to me.

MEL

What? Are you sure?

BRYANT

I was behind him.

Mel shakes it off. She and Bryant follow Price's Sim into the house.

The team tosses grenades in. Mel watches Bryant.

MEL

Did we really toss that many right
on breach?

BRYANT
I -- I think so?

MEL
We didn't save any --

BRYANT
No -- no, this seems right.

Mel's frowning now. *Wrong again.*

The team finishes clearing the house. They all enter the heroin/money room.

Bryant and Mel glance at each other --

Then quickly drop eye contact.

They walk into the room where the guys wait silently. For a beat Bryant stands there, scanning. Almost as if he's analyzing the room.

Then Mel calls out --

MEL
Over here.

Bryant follows her to a side room. She points at the ISIS fighter on the ground.

MEL (CONT'D)
Watch this.

CONNOR (OVER COMMS)
TOC, we're gonna need an extra vehicle for exfil --

The team spreads out to cover the entry points. After a moment of waiting, the action begins --

THE SHOUTS -- THE GUNSHOTS -- THE CHAOS --

We see Connor fire a couple shots, and the ISIS fighter starts to crawl towards him.

MEL
Watch!

BRYANT
I am.

Mel and Bryant watch the fighter as he inches forward. Crawling. Finally reaches the doorway to Connor as the fighting subsides, pulls the pin, and --

CLINK CLINK.

CONNOR

Fuck --

BOOM.

Connor's ripped apart. Bryant turns away.

BRYANT

Jesus.

Mel seizes her moment. Gets in front of Bryant.

MEL

I told you this shit looked weird.
Is it even possible that no one
noticed he was alive? How many of
those ISIS guys even have grenades
anyway --

BRYANT

Why does this matter, Mel?

Mel looks at him in disbelief.

MEL

Bryant. Because if it wasn't the
ISIS guy...

BRYANT

Don't.

MEL

He wouldn't have had a grenade. We
would have --

BRYANT

(quiet)

This isn't helping you. I'm
leaving.

MEL

It doesn't make sense!

BRYANT

(furious)

It doesn't have to. It was WAR.
That fighter was alive. I should
know -- I'm the one who had to
shoot him. Maybe if you weren't
fucking Connor, you'd be able to
see this clearly --

Mel takes a SWING at Bryant -- but in the simulation, her fist passes THROUGH him, and his avatar rearranges itself afterwards. Bryant gives an angry snort.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Try that in real life.

Suddenly everything disappears as the sim shuts down.

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Mel comes out of the simulation as Bryant makes his way towards the door.

MEL
You fucking idiot! Why can't you admit that I'm right --

She charges after him as Berenson and a couple of assistants rush into the VR space. The assistants get between Mel and Bryant.

BRYANT
(gestures around)
This is making you crazy.

Mel's anger is replaced by desperation.

MEL
Let me show you again. If you see it another time, you'll realize --

DR. BERENSON
STOP.
(to Bryant)
I'm so sorry.

Berenson wheels on Mel in a fury.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
This was a terrible idea. I should have trusted myself.
(back to Bryant)
Please go.

Bryant exits, leaving Mel alone with the assistants and a furious Berenson.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
We need to talk.

Berenson signals the assistants out of the room. They leave. Then Berenson gestures for Mel to take a seat.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

Sit.

MEL

No.

They stare daggers at each other.

BERENSON

You know what...

BerenSON takes a beat, rubs her temples. Then looks back up at Mel.

DR. BERENSON

The point of this program is for you to overcome trauma by understanding it. By breaking it's power over your life.

MEL

That's what I'm trying to do.

DR. BERENSON

No, you keep trying to "solve" your experience... as though you'll be able to undo what happened.

(then)

But you can't. Connor will always have died that day. You fail to see that.

(swallows, then)

You've had ample chances to take this process seriously, but you continue to ignore them. To flout the spirit of the program. I can't have that anymore.

MEL

So what now?

DR. BERENSON

It's clear that your inability to fully participate is hurting you. You're trying to rewrite the past --

MEL

I'm not trying to rewrite the past, I'm trying to get to the truth --

DR. BERENSON

(ignoring her)

-- And I have no reason to believe that's going to change.

(MORE)

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
I'm sending a report to the judge
this week, recommending you do the
time. I'm sorry.

Mel's taken aback.

MEL
But I'm still in the program.

DR. BERENSON
Not anymore.

It hits Mel like a ton of bricks. But she doesn't have time
to waste. She rushes out.

EXT. PARKING LOT - VICTOR CENTER - LATER

Mel runs after Bryant. Reaches him before he makes it to his
car --

MEL
Hey!

BRYANT
Fuck off.

MEL
It was Ellis.

Bryant stops. Slowly turns.

MEL (CONT'D)
You know it didn't happen like they
just showed us in there.

BRYANT
So you're accusing Ellis of killing
our brother.

MEL
Ellis and Connor hated each other.
When Connor died, Ellis was first
one in the room. *He was making sure
Connor was dead --*

BRYANT
(you're crazy)
He was checking on his friend.

MEL
I don't think so --

BRYANT

Besides. Ellis used his grenades during the breach. We all did. You saw what they just showed --

MEL

Fuck what they showed. If Ellis was first in, he'd be setting perimeter, not throwing frags. You know that.

(then, desperate)

Bryant, you have to hear me.

BRYANT

I hear you. That's the problem.

Bryant opens his car door.

BRYANT (CONT'D)

I knew you were fucked up. I didn't realize you were a lost cause.

He slams the door and drives off. Mel stands there, destroyed.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - LATER

Mel lies in bed. On her bedside table we see her phone.

It's buzzing (Owen) but she doesn't even look at it. Just ignores it and turns the other way.

INT. BEDROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - LATER

Mel's lying there. It's dark. She hasn't moved in forever. From downstairs, we hear the front door open.

The sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. Mel doesn't react. The person comes to a stop right outside of her door. A moment of pause --

Then the door opens. Light from the hallway floods in.

Owen stands alone. Looking at Mel's back. He doesn't speak. Just waits. Eventually Mel speaks.

MEL

Guess you heard.

OWEN

Yup.

Nothing else. Both waiting for the other one to offer something. Owen breaks first --

OWEN (CONT'D)

I shouldn't be surprised. But somehow I am.

(then)

I always thought you'd get better.

MEL

(small)

No fixing crazy.

Owen doesn't argue.

OWEN

They need you at the courthouse by Saturday. I told them you'd turn yourself in.

He backs out of the room.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Open or closed?

MEL

I don't care.

He closes the door and Mel is once again bathed in darkness.

INT. BACKYARD - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The backyard of her nightmares. Mel stands over the edge of the hole, sweating. She's just climbed out.

She breathes for a moment. But then hears the SOUND OF THE FUSE.

She looks in the distance, and, as before, the rope is on fire. Lit. Moving her way.

But she doesn't run. She just sits there. She's tired. It's almost reached her.

She faces it, closes her eyes, and -- everything goes WHITE.

INT. DINING ROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The next day. Mel sits at the table. Owen brings her a plate of chicken parm that he cooked.

He quietly sits next to her with his own plate. Their phones on the table. They start eating. Silence as they chew. Finally --

OWEN

You're going away for a long time.
Where does that leave us?

MEL

I don't know.

OWEN

What do you want?

MEL

What do *you* want?

Neither of them knows what to say. They keep eating.

His phone BUZZES. Mel glances at it. Her eyes go wide --

ON THE SCREEN: JOHNNY DOMINGUEZ / AUTOPSY...

Owen quickly clicks off the phone and pockets it.

MEL (CONT'D)

What was that?

OWEN

Nothing.

His tone is firm. She doesn't press. But when Owen tucks back into his food, Mel's eyes linger on his pocket.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Owen lies passed out on the couch. Mel enters the room.

She sneaks silently to where Owen's pants lie on the ground. Riffles through his pockets. Finds nothing. She looks around the room, searching for --

His phone. She spots it lying on the coffee table in front of the couch.

She approaches. Grabs it. Glances at Owen before typing in his passcode. She searches through his texts for a moment. Scanning. Finally she zeroes in on something.

She starts reading. For a moment, she's in shock, but then --

She KICKS the couch. Owen groggily wakes --

OWEN

What...?

MEL

(reading)

"Slight contusion on the lower mandible, likely sustained within 24 hours of death --"

OWEN

What are you doing with my phone?

MEL

This is Johnny's fucking autopsy report --

OWEN

It's not your business --

MEL

Of course it is! Owen, this shows that Johnny didn't OD --

OWEN

No it doesn't.

He sits up slowly.

OWEN (CONT'D)

This is why I didn't tell you -- this report doesn't prove shit, but I knew you'd treat it like it did.

MEL

It's pretty fucking convincing.

OWEN

Only for someone who's already convinced.

Owen stands.

MEL

Owen, you gotta trust me --

OWEN

(re: phone)

Oh yeah? Like you trust me?

He RIPS his phone out of her hands.

MEL

That's not fair --

OWEN

Fair?!

Owen explodes --

OWEN (CONT'D)

Fuck you, fair! I've been patient with you. Ever since you got back I really have. But your affair --

MEL

This isn't about Connor.

OWEN

Of course it is.

(then)

You can't let him go.

Mel doesn't argue. Owen's right. Then again, quieter --

OWEN (CONT'D)

You can't let him go.

(beat)

That's exactly what got you here in the first place. It's why you're going to jail for ten years.

(almost breaks down, then)

Just go to bed.

Owen lies back down on the couch. Closes his eyes. We stay with Mel. Her eyes stare at his phone. Something's been awakened inside of her.

The determination in her eyes is the last thing we see before we cut to --

EXT. MEL'S BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Mel's on the phone as she crosses her backyard --

MEL

(into the phone)

Hey. I don't care if you believe me or not. I'm going to prove I was right. Stay away from Ellis until... just stay away from him.

She hangs up as she approaches her shed. Opens it. Grabs a shovel from the back wall, never pausing to look at the memories of her time with the team.

She heads straight back to the middle of the yard. To the spot of her nightmares. With the shovel in hand she steps to the spot and begins to dig.

Methodically, unrelentingly, she goes. She digs and digs and digs until finally --

Her shovel connects with something.

She gets down on her knees. Starts clearing dirt by hand. Digging like a dog so as not to wreck what she's unearthing.

Finally she's fully excavated it. Pulls it out, revealing --

A DUFFEL BAG.

Large. Standard Navy issue. Camouflage colors.

Filled with something.

Mel picks it up. It's heavy. She slings the strap over her shoulder and stands there for a beat. Feeling the weight.

Then she heads towards her house, leaving a massive open hole in her backyard.

INT. MEL'S CAR - VICTOR CENTER PARKING LOT - MORNING

A PHONE ALARM GOES OFF. Mel jolts awake in her car in the middle of the VICTOR Center parking lot. She takes her phone, shuts off the alarm, and takes a moment to get her bearings.

She grabs the duffel from the passenger side seat and exits the car, walking in the direction of the building.

INT. DR. BERENSON'S OFFICE - VICTOR CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Mel is led into Berenson's office by an assistant. Berenson doesn't look up from her computer screen.

DR. BERENSON

Last stop before you report?

The aide leaves. Mel places the duffel bag on the table. Berenson looks at the duffel -- covered in dirt.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

(wary)

What's that.

MEL

You didn't believe our AARs could be wrong but I *know* they are.

The two of them square off.

MEL (CONT'D)

I'm going to tell you what happened in that house.

DR. BERENSON

I know what happened. We've shown it to you over and over again.

MEL

I mean what really happened.

DR. BERENSON

I'm not doing this again, Mel. Leave.

MEL

You don't have the whole story.

Mel looks to the bag.

DR. BERENSON

(exasperated)

Then enlighten me.

Mel grabs the zipper, rips the bag open and reveals --

A SHITLOAD OF HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

Berenson's eyes scan the bag in shock --

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

How much --

MEL

2.6 million exactly.

Berenson is confused.

MEL (CONT'D)

I know our AARs aren't true because *I lied in mine*.

Berenson looks up to her.

MEL (CONT'D)

All of us said we found 2 million dollars in that house. That's not true.

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

(beat)

We found 15 million.

Berenson's eyebrows raise -- *holy shit*.

MEL (CONT'D)

Everyone wanted to split it, except for Connor. He said he'd turn us in as soon as we got back to base if we did. No one was happy about it, but he won out...

She trails off.

MEL (CONT'D)

I don't think some random ISIS fighter killed Connor.

She exhales deeply.

MEL (CONT'D)

Ellis did it. So that we could take that money.

(convinced)

He must have.

A huge moment of catharsis.

DR. BERENSON

(slowly)

What happened after Connor went down?

MEL

I ran into the room. Ellis was already there, checking on him. Price, Bryant and Johnny were standing next to the ISIS fighter.

(struggles to admit...)

I'm not sure any of us believed that fighter killed Connor, but --

(steadies herself)

But everyone agreed that if he was already dead, no one was going to report us.

Berenson processes.

She sees something in Mel's eyes -- the beginnings of acceptance.

Berenson stands. A poignant beat, then --

DR. BERENSON
What do you want me to do?

MEL
Let me go through the simulation again. One last time. I'll tell you what to change.

Berenson nods.

Off Mel, scared but determined --

INT. HOUSE - AFGHANISTAN - LATER

Mel is back in the simulation.

The door flies open and the guys's avatars charge in. They clear the house in the exact way as always --

POP POP.

Ellis is first in. Then Bryant.

Johnny, Price and Connor are last in. They're the only ones who toss their grenades into the next room.

A couple of explosions (not the same cacophony without Ellis and Bryant's grenades) and the guys continue.

Mel follows Johnny. He SHOOTs the ISIS Fighter. This time, the fighter drops and stays there. Dead.

JOHNNY
Clear!

Mel looks at the dead body on the ground. No grenade clipped to his belt.

Mel continues to follow her Sim into the main room where there's now --

Mountains of cash. 15 million dollars worth.

A sharp intake of breath. *This is matching Mel's memory.*

The Sims stand around, wordlessly arguing.

DR. BERENSON
Since we don't have the audio, this is the best I can do --

MEL
It's fine. I remember...

CLOSE ON: Mel stares at them, going back --

And as we slowly pan back to the scene --

We're back on the day. Her memory.

A FURIOUS CONNOR, center of the room --

CONNOR
We're not keeping any of it.

ELLIS
Do you know how much we get paid
man?

Bryant pulls Connor aside. Almost pleading.

BRYANT
I have a one year old. Parisa needs
me at home. I need this. We need
this.

JOHNNY
The government don't need this.

Ellis steps in front of Connor.

ELLIS
No one's ever gonna know.

And we pan back to Mel --

BACK IN THE SIMULATION.

The Sims' argument ends. Connor's familiar line breaks the
silence --

CONNOR (OVER COMMS)
TOC, we're gonna need an extra
vehicle for exfil --

All the Sims go to their respective rooms to set a perimeter.
Mel's own Sim is about to leave the room. Unaware that her
life is about to fracture.

Mel wants to warn her Sim -- to comfort her Sim -- but
instead --

Mel follows Ellis --

Who heads straight after Connor, in silent pursuit.

Suddenly Mel cocks her eyebrows --

MEL
That's not right.

The simulation pauses.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
How?

MEL
Ellis didn't follow Connor. At least... not at first. I saw him leave the money room in the other direction. Run it again.

The simulation resets to the argument in the money room. Pauses.

A moment as Berenson codes a new simulation, and then --

It resumes. All the guys finish arguing and go off to their respective rooms. Mel again follows Ellis, who leaves in his original direction.

Ellis sets up by a back window of the house. The second wave of enemies arrive and the fighting starts. --

POP POP --

Ellis repels a few oncoming fighters. As soon as the assault slows down, Ellis TAKES OFF -- sprinting through the room next to his, taking a shortcut to Connor's room, but --

MEL (CONT'D)
Pause!

Ellis stops, mid sprint, and we realize --

He's running through the room where MEL'S SIM is.

MEL (CONT'D)
He couldn't have gone this way. I would have seen him.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
Well then something's wrong with your theory. The only way he can get from his position to Connor's fast enough to toss that grenade is if he takes a shortcut through your room.

MEL
That doesn't make sense...

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
 I'm sorry, that's what the reality
 is based on where Connor died.
 Either Ellis was behind him when he
 left the money room, or you're
 wrong.

"Behind him." The words echo in Mel's mind as she stares at
 the grenade clipped to Ellis' belt. Suddenly --

She jumps up.

MEL
 Go back to the breach.

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
 What?

MEL
 The start. Rewind.

Berenson does.

Mel's back at the entrance. And --

MEL (CONT'D)
 Play it.

Berenson obliges. The door flies off its hinges. Ellis storms
 in, followed by Bryant.

As Mel looks at him, she realizes --

MEL (CONT'D)
Bryant was second in.

DR. BERENSON
 So?

MEL
*So he didn't toss his grenade
 either.*

The simulation continues as Mel stays close to Bryant.

After the argument in the money room, Mel follows Bryant to
 his room. It's right next to Connor's.

MEL (CONT'D)
 Berenson?

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)
 I'm doing it.

The world pauses. Berenson tinkers. Finally --

DR. BERENSON (V.O.)

Ready.

MEL

Show me.

Mel waits with Bryant as --

CONNOR (OVER COMMS)

TOC, we're gonna need an extra
vehicle for exfil --

Bryant stands at the window. The second wave arrives. The fighting starts. Mel watches as Bryant rebuffs the enemy's advance, and then, as the fighting ends --

He takes a look at Connor through an open door. Stares at him, as if deliberating. Weighing something heavy.

Then Bryant takes out a grenade from his belt. Takes a step towards the door. Sets the grenade. And finally, lobs it towards Connor --

Clink. Clink.

Connor's Sim has time to turn around at the sound.

CONNOR (CONT'D)

Fuck --

BOOM.

The timing is perfect.

Mel inhales sharply.

It was Bryant.

INT. VR SPACE - VICTOR CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Mel's comes out of the simulation. Takes off the equipment as Berenson enters.

They stare at each other for a beat.

DR. BERENSON

What are you going to do?

MEL

Go to the cops.

DR. BERENSON

If you turn him in, you'll have to
admit what you did.

(beat)

You'll be confessing to a war
crime.

Mel starts moving towards the door.

MEL

I know.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

Mel walks out of the VICTOR center with the duffel bag in
tow. She gets to her car, pops the trunk. Deposits the bag in
it. Closes the trunk.

And suddenly freezes.

MEL

Bryant?

She turns around slowly to see Bryant, gun pointed right at
her stomach.

BRYANT

Get in the car.

INT. MEL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Mel gets in the front seat. Bryant gets in the back. He
levels his gun at her head.

BRYANT

Drive.

Mel does as she's told. In silence, they exit the parking
lot.

MEL

What happened to Johnny?

He doesn't answer, just says --

BRYANT

Left up here.

Mel takes the left. They drive for a long while until --

BRYANT (CONT'D)
Right at that light. Then in about
six miles, you'll pull off. I'll
let you know where.

Mel looks at the surroundings. Heading towards the National
Forest.

MEL
This is where you guys go camping.

BRYANT
You can't make me feel guilty about
this.

Mel keeps driving. But something's clearly eating at Bryant.
He needs her to understand...

BRYANT (CONT'D)
I did it for all of us.

MEL
Don't lump us in with you. We're
not the same.

BRYANT
Yeah we are.

MEL
We never knew you killed him.

BRYANT
But once he was dead, you all took
advantage of it just like me.
(beat)
I gave you the opportunity. Not my
fault if guilt got in the way of
you living a good life.

Mel grips the steering wheel tight. Bryant isn't looking at
her.

MEL
You have a family.

BRYANT
Because of this. That money saved
my family.
(pained)
We were on the ropes. When I was
away, Parisa was too scared to pick
up the phone. Always waiting for
that call. Then when I was home she
blamed me for leaving.

(MORE)

BRYANT (CONT'D)

For going back. And I get it.

(beat)

This money allowed me to get out.

It's the only reason my life is
worth living right now.

Mel looks at Bryant in the rearview mirror. He still can't meet her gaze.

MEL

So you're just gonna kill me?

BRYANT

I'll do anything to protect the
life I've built.

Mel sees a massive pine tree up ahead. Glances back at Bryant in the rearview --

He's not looking. Suddenly --

MEL RUNS OFF THE ROAD AND STRAIGHT INTO THE FUCKING TREE.

THUMP. CRASH.

Her seatbelt holds her in place, but Bryant lurches past her, smashing his head on the dashboard.

A moment of silence. Mel looks dead. But finally --

She jolts up. She sits upright. Then starts frantically undoing her seatbelt. She sees Bryant next to her. Unmoving.

She scrambles out the door and onto --

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Mel falls out of the car.

Starts crawling away from the wreck. But then, from behind her, she hears --

The passenger door open. Bryant falls out. She looks at him through the gap between the car and the ground.

She sees blood drip from his head onto his face, as she MEETS HIS EYES.

Mel starts to scramble away, but Bryant follows. Gives chase. He reaches her. Grabs her foot. Pulls her towards him.

Both of them are panting. Unable to fully move, but fighting for their lives.

Bryant pulls back and CLOCKS Mel in the face. TEETH FLY OUT. He keeps hitting her, somehow she's still conscious and trying to fight back --

He could kill her, one or two more punches might do it --

But she grabs a SHARP ROCK next to her and HOOKS it across his face.

Bryant reels back. Mel rolls away and spots --

HIS GUN.

It lies on the forest floor beside Bryant. He hasn't noticed it yet.

She makes a quick decision. Charges straight at him. He's on his back on the ground.

He follows her gaze -- behind him -- spots the gun --

And wriggles his body towards it, but --

Mel summons all of her remaining strength and --

DIVES OVER HIM.

Lands on the gun. Bryant quickly falls on top of her. A major struggle, but finally she turns over and --

MEL
(coughing)
Stop!

Bryant feels it. He looks down. Sees the gun pressing into his chest.

He limply rolls off Mel. Lies next to her. She crawls away and levels the gun at him.

His head is bleeding bad.

MEL (CONT'D)
I'm turning us in.

BRYANT
(forceful)
No!

He struggles to sit up.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
You can't tell anyone we took that
money. They'll take it back.
(MORE)

BRYANT (CONT'D)
My family will have nothing.
Parisa. Dee. They'll be ruined.
They don't deserve that.

She looks into his eyes. Conflicted.

BRYANT (CONT'D)
(heavy beat)
I'd rather die.

MEL
I'm not killing you.

Mel's eyes swirl with pain, anger, torment.

BRYANT
Then I'll do it.

He extends a hand -- asking for the gun.

MEL
That's insane.

She stares at him -- it's impossible to tell if it's a trap or not. He breathes heavily. She's frozen.

Bryant makes a sudden GRAB and wrenches the gun from her.

BRYANT
Gotta keep your gloves up.

She looks at him, thinking she's about to die. But then --

Bryant turns the gun on himself and pulls the trigger.

POP.

Mel goes over to him. His body is limp, lifeless.

A beat, then, she collapses on him. Starts to cry.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

We come in on --

MEL, sitting at the edge of her hospital bed. Ugly bruises all over. Helped to standing by a NURSE. She collapses back down. The car crash and the fight did a number on her.

MEL
Again.

NURSE

Let's just take it slow --

Mel silences her with a glare.

DR. BERENSON (O.S.)

Guess the crash didn't knock the stubborn out of you.

Mel looks up to see Berenson standing in the doorway.

MEL

(glances at a clock)

Right when you said you'd be here.

The Nurse quietly exits. Berenson moves forward. Sits in the chair across from Mel. Inspects her. A poignant silence. Then.

MEL (CONT'D)

I was a bitch to work with, huh?

Berenson laughs.

DR. BERENSON

Yes. You were. Definitely the worst of my patients.

(beat)

And probably the strongest.

Mel appreciates it, but doesn't respond. Berenson crosses her legs.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

I had a talk with Judge Perez.

Mel nods, resigned to her fate.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

I wanted you to face your demons, and you've done that. I told the judge that you successfully completed our program.

(beat)

That's all I told the judge.

Mel's eyes widen. Berenson, pointedly --

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)

Patient-Therapist confidentiality.

Mel's reeling from the news.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
I think you've suffered enough.

MEL
(speechless)
I...

DR. BERENSON
You don't need to say anything.

She gets up, reaches out a hand. They shake.

DR. BERENSON (CONT'D)
But don't blow it.

Mel nods. As Berenson turns to leave --

MEL
Wait. I got you something.

DR. BERENSON
Hmm?

Mel gestures to the corner of the room.

MEL
Feels less like a bribe now.

DR. BERENSON
Is that a 30 rack? I don't drink
beer.

It is, indeed, a THIRTY RACK. Berenson inspects it.

MEL
It's seltzer. Owen picked it up.

Berenson shakes her head, and gives Mel a smile. Then pulls out a can and cracks it open. Sips. Lets out a big sigh of happiness.

DR. BERENSON
This might even last me the week.

She raises the can to Mel, and leaves.

EXT. MEL'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Mel stands in her backyard next to a metal trash can. Bandaged up. An EMPTY CAN OF LIGHTER FLUID next to her.

Then she --

Lights a match. Tosses it into the trash can.

As the contents of the can catch on fire, we rise up to see --

THE DUFFEL BAG. Ablaze. Still full of the money.

Owen comes out the back door. Sees her and the fire.

OWEN

What's going on?

MEL

Fresh start.

He doesn't press her. Just joins her at the flames. They watch together for a beat before --

MEL (CONT'D)

We've been together for a long time.

OWEN

Twenty years. A whole life.

Mel turns to look at him.

MEL

There's a lot left.

(then, painfully)

We don't have to hold each other back anymore.

Owen's crushed. But he doesn't disagree.

Mel takes his hands gently. Owen lets her. A beat, then --

Owen sighs. Like a weight's been lifted. From both of them.

OWEN

(sincere)

I really hope you get better.

MEL

I'm trying.

He turns and goes back into the house.

We stay with Mel and watch as the flames dance in her eyes.

EXT. FORT ROSECRANS CEMETERY - LATER

A clear day overlooking the ocean. Sweet chirping in the background. Price and Ellis stand next to Connor's grave.

Mel places A HOMEMADE MARKER (taped sticks in the shape of a cross, same as Johnny's) into the ground for Bryant.

Price cracks open six beers. Keeps one, one to Mel, one to Ellis, one in front of Connor's grave, and one each in front of Johnny and Bryant's markers.

Mel stands there for a moment, then puts her beer on the ground next to Connor's, squeezes Price and Ellis on their shoulders, and leaves.

INT. BOXING GYM - DAY

Weeks later now. Mel's mostly healed. She sits next to the ring. Wraps her hands. We see the heavyweight from before, Jorge, eye her with fascination as he heads towards the ring.

JORGE

Trying to get back in with me *loca*?

Mel SMILES. Genuine. First time in forever. Shakes her head.

MEL

I'm good. Think I'll stick to the bags for a while.

Jorge grins back. Hops into the ring and starts practicing. Mel heads over to the heavy bags, hands wrapped.

THUMP. Mel throws a punch. But instead of continuing to hit with abandon, she relaxes. Takes it easy.

THUMP. Starts rocking. Getting back into a rhythm.

THUMP. Feeling good. Keeping her gloves up. And we --

CUT TO BLACK as the sounds continue.

THUMP.

Beat.

THUMP.

Beat.

THUMP.

Not frantic. Not wild. Just steady.

THE END