# Addiction

Written by

Katherine Vella

An upcoming college graduate faces her addiction to drugs and her toxic boyfriend and must save herself before her entire world is destroyed for good.

5 Bowden Lane
516-563-3865
Katherine.vella@purchase.edu

First reader: Tatiana Kougall-Hoell
Second Reader: Andrea Thome

INT. COLLEGE PARTY HOUSE - NIGHT

MELISSA (21) hovers around her boyfriend JOSEPH (22) within a loud house party. Melissa is kind and vulnerable. Joseph towers over her at a hight of 5’9, a charismatic but unstable individual. Other students chat, giggle and drink but Melissa makes a worried face. Joseph notices.

JOSEPH
Mel, what’s wrong?

MELISSA
Nothing, I’m just a little light headed is all.

JOSEPH
You act like you’ve never drank anything before!

MELISSA
Easy for you to say.

JOSEPH
Just drink up more. You’ll feel better. I promise.

Melissa picks up her mixed drink from the counter and takes another sip. Joseph pulls her in closer.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
See? I bet that felt great.

MELISSA
It did. I mean, I should definitely cut back on my consumption. With our last semester coming up in a few days I mean.

JOSEPH
Don’t be such a party pooper! Who gives a fuck? That’s like a whole two days away!

MELISSA
It’s never too early to start.

JOSEPH
Yeah, but does it have to be right now? I want to see you have fun. Do it for me please?

Suddenly BRI (21) appears. She has short brown hair, which has streaks of blonde throughout. She has a septum piercing and light blue eyes. She looks at Joseph with skeptical eyes.

BRI
Do what for him?

Melissa turns towards her and smiles. Joseph tightens his grip on her waist, making Melissa let out a cry of pain.

MELISSA
OUCH! What was that for?

JOSEPH
What? I didn’t do anything to you!

Bri grabs Melissa’s hand. She starts to drag Melissa away. Melissa reaches for her drink but spills it everywhere.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
That’s what you get for leaving me!

Melissa looks back at him and frowns. Bri pulls her towards the small bathroom through the crowd and locks the door behind them.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Melissa leans against the small marble sink blinking rapidly, adjusting to the light.

MELISSA
So, why did you drag me in here?

BRI
I just wanted to say hi. I’ve missed you.

MELISSA
Aww, you’re sweet. I miss you too.

BRI
You excited for class?

MELISSA
Do you really not know me after four years?

Bri laughs.

BRI
Okay, okay that should have been obvious.

Silence fills the room. Bri’s smile fades and she looks serious now.

BRI (CONT'D)
That’s not the only reason I got you in here. I was watching you.

MELISSA
(sharply)
What? You stalk me?

BRI
I was 5 feet away from you.

MELISSA
Weird I didn’t see you.

BRI
All your attention was on Joseph. As always.

Melissa shakes her head. Bri steadies her.

MELISSA
If it’s always on him, why did I come in here with you?

BRI
I dragged you in here. But I appreciate the willingness to chat.

MELISSA
You’re welcome.

BRI
I know you’re...happy and all but I’ve seen the way he looks at you.

MELISSA
(dreamy)
Oh, I know. He looks at me with love.

Bri shakes her head.

BRI
No. They’re the eyes I give when I see an all you can eat sushi bar.

MELISSA
So you’re saying he’s cheap and full of variety?

Bri puts her drink on the counter and looks at herself in the mirror.

BRI
No, you know what? I'll leave you for now because whatever I say goes over your head.

MELISSA
Blame it on the alcohol.

BRI
There you go again, shifting the blame. Alright, whatever, go have fun.

Bri reaches for the handle and sees Joseph standing there. Bri looks back at Melissa with wide eyes.

BRI (CONT'D)
Speak of the devil. Here's your prince charming.

Melissa looks at the open door and gives a flirtatious wave.

JOSEPH
I just came back here because I got worried.

BRI
So she can't even go to the bathroom without you getting worried?

JOSEPH
Lay off. She's had a lot to drink. I just wanted to make sure I was within arms reach if she needed me.

Joseph leads Melissa away. Bri stands there as the door closes.

SUPER: ADDICTION

SUPER: TW: Alcohol abuse, physical and mental abuse. It's okay to get help if you need it.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Cheery and light music plays in the background.

-- Joseph and Melissa leave the bar, smiling and giggling.

-- Joseph and Melissa sit down at dinner, smiling and laughing between conversation.

-- Joseph and Melissa make out on Joseph's couch.

-- Jospeh and Melissa watch a movie and cuddle.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph’s apartment walls are bare and pale, a color similar to milk. The brown leather couch is covered in a blanket that Melissa and Joseph sit on top of. They take shots of Pink Whitney, the bottle sitting on the coffee table in front of them.

JOSEPH
Isn’t this the perfect way to unwind?

Melissa snuggles deeper into his chest.

MELISSA
Absolutely. Best Friday ever.

JOSEPH
Good, glad you think so.

Melissa tries to stand up but then falls back onto the couch shifting her weight visibly. She giggles but then stops abruptly.

MELISSA
I’m done for the night. I need to start cutting back now.

JOSEPH
Cut back on what?

MELISSA
Alcohol. I’m tipsy.

JOSEPH
But you said two seconds ago that you’re having fun.

MELISSA
I am. But I have limits.

JOSEPH
(dark)
We all do and if you push them, you never know what’s going to happen.

Melissa glances at him squinting.

MELISSA
Excuse me? What did you just say?

JOSEPH
I said I agree.

MELISSA
Oh, okay.

She picks up her phone and pulls up her chat with Bri.

JOSEPH
Who are you texting?

MELISSA
Bri.

He hovers over her shoulder. She feels him breathing on her neck. She moves over.

JOSEPH
What?

MELISSA
What's up with you? You're being so close all of a sudden.

JOSEPH
I'm just protective, don't get it twisted.

MELISSA
Oh, I'm sorry I keep reading into things.

Joseph embraces her.

JOSEPH
It's okay. Not your fault.

MELISSA
I'm going to get some water. You want some?

She stands up and starts to walk towards the kitchen. Her balance is off. She makes it into the kitchen.

JOSEPH
Nah, I'm good. I'm shocked you don't want to stay like this. This is comfortable.

MELISSA
For you maybe.

Melissa's phone rings suddenly. It's Bri.

JOSEPH
Ugh. What could she want now?

Melissa picks her phone up and then glances at him.

MELISSA
Why are you so against her?

JOSEPH
She scares me.

Melissa stares at him blankly.

MELISSA
Okay...

She picks up the phone and raises it to her ear.

BRI (V.O.)
Hey, I just wanted to check in. You doing okay?

MELISSA
Yeah, I'm fine. Just drinking some water.

BRI (V.O.)
Good. Look, I support you okay? Whatever you want to do, I'm here for you okay?

MELISSA
Yeah, thanks. I needed to hear that right about now.

Joseph makes a confused face at her.

BRI (V.O.)
You're welcome. Call me if you need me.

MELISSA
Will do. Bye.

She hangs up.

JOSEPH
What did she want?

MELISSA
She wanted to check in with me, that's all.

JOSEPH
Okay. That doesn't scare me. She's a good friend.

MELISSA
Why does she scare you?

JOSEPH
No reason, never mind. I mean, she's a good friend and I guess thats why she scares me. She can influence you.

MELISSA
That's kind of her job though.

JOSEPH
I know. But that doesn't mean she's going to be a good one.

Melissa shrugs.

MELISSA
Either way, everyone is influenced. By everything and everyone around us. Why is she the one that you seem to have an attitude towards?

JOSEPH
She's just close with you. I guess I'm jealous. She seems like she knows you really well, that's all. I wish I was her.

MELISSA
You want a vagina, long hair and anger management issues?

Joseph laughs.

JOSEPH
No, I want the connection.

MELISSA
I think we have a close connection. It'll get stronger if that's what you want to work towards.

JOSEPH
I better hope so. I love what we have it means a lot to me.

MELISSA
Me too.

They make out for a few seconds before he pulls away.

JOSEPH
Well, I want our relationship to get better. I really do. It's the best relationship I've ever been in.

MELISSA
Me too.

JOSEPH
You make me a better person you know that right?

MELISSA
Yes, as do you.

Melissa rubs her fingers through his hair and melts into his chest. He wraps his arms around her into a tight hug.

JOSEPH
Thanks for being the best girlfriend I could have ever asked for. You make me the best version of myself. I hope I do the same thing for you.

Melissa laughs.

MELISSA
You do.

JOSEPH
I know.

He smirks. Then Melissa's phone blows up. Bri is spamming her phone. Joseph grabs it off the couch. He holds it, now a dark expression taking over his face. Melissa panics.

MELISSA
Joseph? What's wrong?

JOSEPH
(yelling)
Her! She's the problem! I can't stand her!

Melissa stands up and begins to shake visibly. Joseph is now standing up, glancing at the phone. His breath is heavy. Melissa walks towards him slowly.

MELISSA
Babe...put the phone down or give it to me.

JOSEPH
What? Why should I? You always give her all of your attention. What am I? Chopped liver?

MELISSA
No, not at all. You know I love you.

JOSEPH
No you don't! It's always about her and never me!

Melissa slowly moved towards him, still hesitant in her tone.

MELISSA
(shakily)
Can we just...talk about this?

Joseph runs towards her and pushes her backwards sending her flying back onto the couch.

JOSEPH
(yelling)
SHUT UP! There is no discussion to be had!

Joseph then takes the phone and smashes it to the ground. Melissa sits there still, frozen. She then bursts into tears. A few seconds later, he starts crying, realizing what he has just done to her.

MELISSA
(panicked)
No, no no!

Joseph embraces her and she rolls into a ball. They then cry together. After a few minutes, he lifts her chin took look at him.

JOSEPH
(whispers)
Shh, shh, shh. You're okay.

MELISSA
What...what was...that for?

Joseph sighs.

JOSEPH
I’m not sure. I think I got a little too carried away.

MELISSA
Clearly.

JOSEPH
You pushed me to do it though. If you has just listened, it would not have happened.

MELISSA
The alcohol too.

JOSEPH
Yes, you have a problem. But you’ll get better I promise.

MELISSA
I hope so.

JOSEPH
Stay there.

MELISSA
I guess, I made two things break in one week. The vase and then my phone. I feel terrible.

JOSEPH
I know. I would too.

Melissa sighs. Joseph picks up the broken phone off the ground and puts it on the coffee table.

MELISSA
I’m sorry again.

JOSEPH
You should be! I’m already injured and your outbursts aren’t helping.

Melissa bursts into tears again. Joseph now ignores her.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NEXT DAY

The next morning, Melissa wakes up to Joseph aggressively shaking her awake.

JOSEPH
Baby, time to get up.

MELISSA
Why? What time is it? You better give an actual answer this time.

JOSEPH
Yeah, well you don’t have a phone.

MELISSA
Why not?

JOSEPH
Wow you are going down a rabbit hole. Because you broke it.

Melissa reaches for it but then touches the glass but then winces in pain.

MELISSA
How drunk was I?

JOSEPH
Pretty drunk.

MELISSA
I can’t believe that I got that heated.

JOSEPH
I mean, yeah you did. I couldn’t believe it either. You went off the rails nuts.

MELISSA
That doesn’t sound like me. Are you sure?

JOSEPH
I never lie to you do I?

MELISSA
No, I guess not.

Joseph laughs.

JOSEPH
Exactly.

MELISSA
Shit, I’m sorry, I think the alcohol really is screwing with me. I need to stop.

JOSEPH
I’ll be right here encouraging you you to make better decisions. Now let’s get you ready to get that phone fixed.

Melissa smiles at him, leaps off the couch and embraces him. He embraces her back.

INT. MALL - DAY

Melissa walks hand in hand with Joseph who carries a brown bag, which holds Melissa’s phone. They walk up to an Apple store employee named JESSICA. She smiles at them.

JESSICA
Hi can I help you?

MELISSA
Hi, yes. I broke my phone yesterday. I’m not sure if I’m going to need an entire new phone or if it can be repaired within a few short hours.

JESSICA
Let’s see it. I can give you an answer right now.

Joseph slides the phone out carefully. Jessica gasps.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Oh, that’s going to need a full replacement. Let me see if we have anyone available right now.

She scrolls on her iPad. She smiles.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Yes, alright head over to the waiting section. They’ll be there shortly.

MELISSA
Thank you.

Melissa sits down on a wooden block looking anxious. Joseph sits next to her. She sets her hands in her lap.

JOSEPH
Hey, calm down. It’s going to be okay.

MELISSA
I hope so. I hope it’ll be alright.

JOSEPH
I promise it will be.

MELISSA
Okay.

She smirks at him. bguviuvoiiThen a young man walks over to them. He’s wearing a name tag that says JACOB.

JACOB
Melissa?

MELISSA
Yes hi!

He guides them to a table.

JACOB
So, what’s going on?

MELISSA
I broke my phone.

JACOB
Okay, let’s see it.

Joseph slides the phone out of the bag reluctantly. Melissa bites her lip.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Whoa, did y’all get into a fight?
Cause Jesus Christ this is-

JOSEPH
(aggravated)
No. We didn’t. She just got really drunk and uncontrollable.

Melissa looks at him confused.

JACOB
Oh. Sorry for asking I-

JOSEPH
Yeah I bet you are.

Jacob shifts uncomfortably. Melissa bits her lip and hugs herself.

MELISSA
Alright how much will this cost?

JACOB
I think by the looks of it you may just need a new phone.

MELISSA
No, really?

JACOB
Unfortunately yes.

MELISSA
Shit, okay.

Melissa pulls out her credit card and almost taps to pay but then pauses. Her eyes look to Joseph, his filled now with hope.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
Wait a second, why don't we split the cost?

JOSEPH
I didn't break it. Why should I have to?

MELISSA
I mean, because we're a team aren't we?

JOSEPH
Yes, but your damage is your damage. You need to deal with it on your own.

MELISSA
(exhales)
Fine.

She taps the card and it gets approved.

JACOB
Alright, I'll be back with the phone. Just a minute.

Jacob walks away. Joseph waits until he's out of ear shot. Then he whispers into her ear.

JOSEPH
(whispers)
Thanks for covering for me.

MELISSA
What? How?

JOSEPH
I broke your phone.

Melissa's jaw drops.

MELISSA
Are you serious right now?

JOSEPH
Yeah, I just didn't want to pay.
Your phone, not my responsibility.

Melissa starts to panic again and balances herself on the table. Joseph rubs her back.

MELISSA
I-

JOSEPH
Hey, you're getting a new phone now
right? So that's what matters!

MELISSA
But-

JOSEPH
Shh, he's coming back! Don't say
anything.

He glares at her. Jacob places the phone in front of her. She smiles at him.

MELISSA
Thanks again!

She runs out of the store and Joseph nods at Jacob before walking away confidently.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa sits on the couch with her laptop and Joseph sits next to her looking over at the screen.

JOSEPH
Drugs and behavior huh? Seems
educational.

MELISSA
It's a college course, of course
it's educational.

JOSEPH
Yeah, but I mean you seem to be taking a step in the right direction.

MELISSA
What does that mean?

JOSEPH
Self-evaluation. You're becoming more aware of your own substance abuse. That's great.

MELISSA
I mean I guess you're right.

JOSEPH
I usually am about most things.

Joseph pulls her in. He kisses the top of her forehead. She sighs, leaning into his chest.

MELISSA
I love you. Thank you for supporting me.

JOSEPH
Anytime, that's my job after all.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Melissa awakes and stretches, she rubs her temples. Joseph walks out of his room, fully dressed and freshly showered. Melissa searches for her phone, now panicked.

JOSEPH
(sarcastically)
Morning love, you clearly slept well.

Melissa darts a look at him.

MELISSA
(yelling)
WHAT TIME IS IT?

Joseph walks into his small kitchen. Melissa is still frantic. She starts tossing all the sheets and pillows off the couch, and knocks over a vase in the middle of the coffee table. It shatters.

JOSEPH
My angry princess needs some coffee.

He takes a cup out of the cabinet above him and starts a Nespresso machine. He walks out of the kitchen and sees the broken vase.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Fuck, Melissa! Stop being so careless! You

MELISSA
Me? Careless? What about you? You don’t even care to tell me something as simple as the time!

Joseph leans down and starts to pick up the broken glass then lets out a yell.

JOSEPH
FUCK!

He drops the glass on the floor, and revels a small open wound. Melissa drops to her knees and grabs his hand. She begins to cry.

MELISSA
Fuck, I’m so sorry. This is all my fault.

Joseph stands up and rushes to the sink leaving Melissa on the ground, clearly distressed. She’s still crying. Joseph lets out a loud sigh. Melissa finally sees her phone below the couch. She reaches for it and tries to turn it on but it’s dead.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
Fuck! My phone is dead!

JOSEPH
(yells)
Oh, that sucks! But you don’t have an open wound do you?

Melissa freezes. Her breathing slows.

MELISSA
No, I’m sorry. You’re right. You have bigger issues to deal with right now.

She stands up and sits back on the couch, gripping her phone in her hand. He comes out of the kitchen with his hand wrapped in a paper towel.

JOSEPH
Hey, hey. It’s not your fault.

Melissa shakes her head in disbelief. She lays back and sighs, giving up. He rubs her shoulder with his good hand. A tear slides down her cheek.

MELISSA
I shouldn’t have burst out like that. I’m sorry. I’m just so scared. I feel like I’m getting worse.

JOSEPH
You’re gonna get better.

MELISSA
You really believe that?

Joseph nods. He kisses her on the forehead. He gets off the couch and then brings the cup of coffee back out for her. He places it on the coffee table.

JOSEPH
Here, have this. I know it’s the first day of classes but take the day off. You need it.

MELISSA
I may. I need a second.

JOSEPH
Take your time. I’m off to class. Can’t miss the first day.

He heads out the door without another word. Melissa reaches for the cup and smells it. She takes a sip. She licks her lips after realizing how good it tastes.

INT. LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Bri sits in the lecture hall for Drugs and Behavior. She looks around nervously, a worried expression on her face. She takes out her phone and messages Melissa

ON SCREEN: Where are you? Class starts soon!

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Melissa is just awakening again after a short nap. The sound of a key lock awakens her. Joseph enters. He laughs as he enters.

JOSEPH
Passed out again? How tired are you?

Melissa looks at her now plugged in phone. She sees the text from Bri.

MELISSA
I thought that coffee would have helped me stay awake but I guess not.

Joseph smirks at her.

JOSEPH
That’s weird. I heard that coffee isn’t the best after a hangover but I forgot because you had me all over the place this morning.

Melissa starts to run her fingers through her hair.

MELISSA
What? I thought it wasn’t my fault. You said it wasn’t.

JOSEPH
Oh, no it was. You’re not thinking clearly. You caused it.

Melissa rubs her temples.

MELISSA
Alright, I’m gonna shower.

JOSEPH
Go for it.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Melissa brings her phone into the bathroom. She locks the door behind her. Bri calls her phone.

MELISSA
Hi, what’s up?

BRI (V.O.)
Dude, where are you?

MELISSA
Joseph's. About to hop in the shower. Why?

BRI
You missed class today. Are you sure you're okay?

MELISSA
Yea, I Just wanted to skip a day, what's the problem?

BRI
Um, hate to break it to you but attendance is worth 20% of your grade.

MELISSA
(chuckles)
There's no way.

BRI
Why would I lie to you? One, I never lie and two about something as serious as attendance?

MELISSA
I guess you wouldn't. But it's still add drop week.

Melissa turns the water on.

BRI
You really think that's an excuse? You're not dropping the class, you and I both know that. You can't afford it.

MELISSA
Okay, but I missed it already. Can't do anything about it now.

BRI
You're not listening, as always. But what else is new?

MELISSA
Nothing.

BRI
Argh, whatever. Don’t come crying to me when you start failing.

She hangs up. Melissa places the phone down and looks in the mirror. There’s a knock on the door.

JOSEPH
(muffled)
Hello? Melissa? Are you okay?

Melissa opens the door ajar.

MELISSA
Yes, fine.

JOSEPH
Oh, okay. I got worried, your voice got a little elevated there.

MELISSA
Sorry my bad.

Joseph’s footsteps are heard, getting farther from the door. Melissa looks at her reflection in the mirror, emotionless.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa gathers her stuff, getting ready to leave the apartment for the night. Joseph watches her from the couch as she picks up her bag.

MELISSA
Alright I’m off. Thanks babe.

Joseph nods.

JOSEPH
Anytime. Where you headed off to now?

MELISSA
Bri wants to hang out, I haven’t spent much time with her recently.

JOSEPH
Okay, what? Is it about the bruise? Or the phone?

MELISSA
No, neither. She just wants to catch up.

JOSEPH
Okay, have fun. But promise me one thing?

MELISSA
What?

Joseph stands in front of her, his face now serious.

JOSEPH
Don't tell her anything too personal. She doesn't need to know everything about our relationship.

MELISSA
Okay, I guess.

JOSEPH
Melissa, I'm not joking.

Melissa looks up at him keeping eye contact.

MELISSA
Alright.

She begins to walk backwards towards the door, slowly, still looking at Joseph.

INT. BRI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bri reaches for the door handle and opens it. Melissa stands there, looking tired.

BRI
Ugh, it's about time you got here.

Melissa closes the door behind her.

MELISSA
Sorry, didn't realize I was supposed to operate around your schedule.

Bri turns to her shocked.

BRI
You know that's not what I-

MELISSA
Whatever. What did you want to talk about?

Bri leads her into the living room where there is a nice dinner set up of lasagna and salad. Melissa sits down.

BRI
Looks good right?

MELISSA
Absolutely.

Melissa and Bri serve themselves. Bri observes her. Melissa takes a few bites. She gazes at Bri.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
So how was class?

BRI
Good I guess. Would have been better if you were there.

MELISSA
This again?

BRI
You were the one that brought it up.

MELISSA
I know. So...how was it?

BRI
Good, but you would know more if you actually bothered to show up.

Melissa places her fork down in aggravation. Bri shrugs as Melissa shoots her an annoyed look.

BRI (CONT'D)
What? What else do you want me to say? I’m not the professor.

MELISSA
I never said you were.

BRI
Attendance is worth 20% of your grade! Don’t forget that little detail.

MELISSA
I know, that’s crazy.

BRI
So you can’t afford to skip any more classes.

MELISSA
Who said I was going to?

BRI
Once you make it a habit, it won't stop. You...do that a lot.

MELISSA
Do what?

BRI
You have habits and they're not good ones either.

MELISSA
Are you done?

BRI
With?

MELISSA
Being mean.

BRI
Mean and honesty are two different things.

MELISSA
What?

BRI
Honesty.

Melissa shrugs.

MELISSA
Okay.

BRI
Melissa I'm trying here. I care about you more than you realize.

Melissa walks out. Bri begins to tear up.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa walks into her own dorm room, and plops down on her bed. She gets a call from her mother SADIE (54). Sadie is loving but emotionally distant. She sighs and reluctantly picks up.

MELISSA
Hi mom.

SADIE (V.O.)
Hey, how's it going?

MELISSA
Eh, it's okay. It just started and I'm already stressed.

SADIE (V.O.)
You're almost done! Just hang in there for a little while longer okay?

MELISSA
I'm trying.

SADIE (V.O.)
How's Joseph? And Bri?

MELISSA
Pretty good. I'm dealing with a lot from both of them. They're both stressing me out.

SADIE (V.O.)
I'm sorry. I know it's hard. Just keep pushing.

MELISSA
I just want it to get easier.

SADIE
Have you been going back to your old ways?

Melissa freezes. She bites her lip, hesitantly.

MELISSA
I kind of have.

SADIE
Look honey, I know it seems like the easy way out sometimes but it's not. Isn't there someone you can talk to about this?

MELISSA
I thought I could talk to you about it.

Sadie goes silent.

SADIE
I mean, you can but I'm not the most useful person. Try a counselor on campus. I got to go. Bye honey.

Sadie hangs up leaving Melissa defeated.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Melissa walks into the lecture hall with Bri. They sit together, with Bri glancing at Melissa with a disapproving stare. Just then the professor DR.PATEL begins talking to the class. Dr.Patel is a charismatic motivator.

DR. PATEL
Good morning class- as a reminder from last class, please be aware that this is a challenging course that will require a lot of intensive work, so as add-drop week wraps up please keep that in mind. Now if you're just joining us, I have extra copies of our syllabus. Please raise your hand if you would like one.

Dr. Patel begins to hand out copies of the syllabus to those raising their hand. Melissa scans the papers.

MELISSA
This class should be fun.

Bri is silent.

BRI
Oh so now you're actually excited to be here?

Melissa sighs.

MELISSA
What? You know I'm excited to learn about myself through this class.

Bri shakes her head.

BRI
Clearly Joseph is more important than your sobriety journey.

MELISSA
C'mon-

BRI
What? Whatever I say doesn't seem to matter.

MELISSA
Bri I-

Bri just shakes her head. Suddenly Dr.Patel begins talking.

DR. PATEL
I know it's the end of the week and many of you must be tired, so you'll be happy to know that today is just the introductory course.

Melissa glances at the syllabus again.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
Drugs! What are drugs? Drugs are substances or chemicals that alter the way our minds and bodies work. They can oftentimes used for medical purpose, prescribed by doctors who also closely monitor their use and affects. But they can also be used recreationally--

Melissa scans the syllabus, not staying focused on anything specific. Melissa looks at Bri who is taking notes vigorously beside her.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
I hope you have a successful semester and please don't hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns!

Melissa smiles to herself.

MELISSA (V.O.)
Maybe there is hope for me. I can become a better person.

EXT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

The students flood out of the lecture hall with Bri and Melissa among them. Melissa stares at her phone.

BRI
Hey, how was your first class?

MELISSA
Fine, why?

BRI
I just wanted to check with you especially considering the fact that you saw the attendee is worth 20 percent. That's kind of a lot.

MELISSA
Yeah, that scared me. I can't really afford to miss class again can I?

BRI
No, but you said it not me. So I'm proud of you. You're starting to reprioritize the right things. Your future rather than your pastime.

Melissa starts walking away and Bri walks alongside her, making her presence known.

MELISSA
I have good pastimes, what are you going on about?

BRI
The only pastimes I see you engage in are drinking and being delusional.

MELISSA
Delusional? I'm not delusional.

BRI
That's exactly what a delusional person would say.

Melissa crosses her arms defensively. They walk slower now, Melissa initiating the speed.

MELISSA
I mean, don't they say how that can sometimes be the solution?

BRI
Yes, but not all the time. Look, especially with the fact that graduation is coming up and classes-

MELISSA
I know, I know okay? I won't let my delusions or whatever get in the way. Anyway, I'm going to see Joseph now. See ya.

She begins to walk away but Bri calls after her.

BRI
(loud)
Delusion is not the solution!

Melissa looks back and makes a face.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Melissa holds her new phone in her hand and looks down at it anxiously. Bri eyes her.

BRI
Are you okay? I don't think I've seen you stare at an off phone for so long. Are you finally understanding the negative effects of handheld technology?

Melissa places the phone down.

MELISSA
No, it's new.

Bri grabs it.

BRI
Oh shit, it is. What did your mom buy it for you?

MELISSA
No, I bought it myself.

BRI
Oh, but why? There was nothing wrong with your other one right?

MELISSA
Well Joseph kinda broke it.

BRI
(raised)
He what?!

Melissa grabs her arm.

MELISSA
(whispers)
Not so loud.

BRI
Sorry. Oh my god. You're lying.

MELISSA
No. I wish I was believe me.

BRI
Fuck dude that’s terrible, I’m sorry.

Melissa stares at her.

BRI (CONT'D)
Dude, why are you still sticking around for him?

MELISSA
He wants to go on this journey with me. I refuse to do it without him.

BRI
But what about me? Do I mean nothing?

Dr.Patel claps his hands.

DR. PATEL
Welcome students! I hope you had a wonderful weekend. I know drinking can be fun but it’s also important to be self aware. Raise your hand if you drank or consumed some form of substance this weekend.

Everyone’s eyes wander around the large lecture hall. They look at each other nervously.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
Ha, it’s okay. I know you guys consume substances. Now that you know I’m not going to rat you out, try again.

Students raise their hands including Melissa. Dr. Patel nods around.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
Alright who wants to talk about that experience? Melissa?

Melissa blinks.

MELISSA
Oh, um. It was really good.

DR. PATEL
Were you drinking by yourself or with someone else?

MELISSA
I was with my boyfriend.

Bri looks at Melissa, carefully studying her expressions.

DR. PATEL
Ah, nice. Did you feel good during that drunk encounter? Or did you feel more distant to your reality?

MELISSA
Distant in a way. It made me feel like he was a different person. I saw a different side of him.

DR. PATEL
Okay, that's my point for today. Let me give you a scenario. If you and your partner drink a lot, your vision of reality and the relationship may become distorted.

Melissa looks down at her phone.

BRI
(whispers)
You okay?

Melissa just nods.

DR. PATEL
Now, sometimes in these situations, the partner wants control. That's their goal. How do they get it? Substances.

Melissa jots down in her notebook.

MELISSA
(whispers to herself)
Dependency equals control.

Bri glances over.

BRI
I think you're getting the hang of it.

Melissa looks over at her confused. Bri smiles at her. She grabs her hand and squeezes it.

EXT. CAMPUS PATHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Melissa walks down the path towards her dorm building when her phone rings again. Expecting a call from Joseph, she fishes it out of her pocket quickly. She sighs when she sees her moms name on the screen.

MELISSA
Hey mom. Nice to hear from you.

SADIE (V.O.)
Hey honey. Did you get an email from an AA group? Like within the last 5 to 10 minutes? I signed you up for an appointment.

MELISSA
Uh, I haven't checked. Wait, you did what?

SADIE (V.O.)
I know, I know I should have checked with you first but I've just been so worried recently and thought it couldn't hurt.

Melissa stops walking and looks around.

MELISSA
Okay, thanks. Are you sure about this?

SADIE (V.O.)
Yes. Look, you've been silent recently. I barely hear from you anymore.

MELISSA
I explained that to you. I'm under stress. Classes are picking up. And my mental health is kind of in the shitter.

SADIE (V.O.)
I know but you need to make sure you're taking care of yourself too. Check your email okay? I'll talk to you later.

MELISSA
Okay bye.

Melissa hangs up and then finds the email.

ON SCREEN: Melissa Abel, confirm your appointment down below.

Her finger hovers over the confirm button.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
I guess my journey really does start now.

She confirms it and then head towards the parking lot. She unlocks her car and calls Bri. Bri picks up. Melissa reverses the car.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
Hey.

BRI (V.O.)
Hey, what’s up?

MELISSA
My mom signed me up for a support group.

Bri shrieks.

BRI (V.O.)
Oh my god! That’s amazing news! Are you going to tell Joseph?

Melissa looks ahead at the road and sighs.

MELISSA
Maybe not yet. I want him to see progress in me first. I feel like if I don’t give him a reason he’ll say I’m lying. You know how he is.

BRI (V.O.)
Oh don’t I know it. Why does everything have to revolve around him? You do things for him but never yourself.

Melissa rolls her eyes.

MELISSA
Thanks Bri, I’ll call you later okay?

Melissa hangs up.

INT. WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa walks into a colorful waiting room which is packed with older people. She walks up to the window where a cheery woman sits at a computer. She gazes up at Melissa and smiles.

MELISSA
Hi, my name is Melissa Abel and I have a 6 o’ clock appointment.

WOMAN
Yes, let’s see here.

She types on the keyboard.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Okay, you’re all set. Dr. Lawson will be out any moment.

MELISSA
Thank you.

She then walks over to a seat. A few minutes pass and a man in a doctors coat steps out.

MAN
Melissa?

Melissa stands up and walks over. They exchange friendly smiles.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The man opens the door and lets Melissa in. He is tall standing at about 6'1 and intelligent and observant. There is a table with a computer and a seat across from it. The man motions for her to sit. He takes a seat behind the computer and starts typing.

DR. LAWSON
Hi Melissa, my name is Dr. Lawson. I hope you know that this is a safe and confidential space for you. Now, what brings you in today?

MELISSA
I’m trying to break free from the hold that alcohol has had on me for years.

DR. LAWSON
Oh I see. I just want you to know how brave it is of you to come here. You're starting a long and worthy road to recovery. Mind telling me a little bit about your relationship to alcohol?

Melissa breathes slowly and holds her hands, trying to steady them.

MELISSA
Well, I've been addicted since I was about 12. My parents were getting a divorce so they weren't around much. They always left alcohol out. Whenever my mom was alone, I saw her drinking and drowning in work.

Melissa stops, now teary eyed. Dr Lawson stops typing and grabs her hands.

DR. LAWSON
It's okay, take your time. No rush.

MELISSA
(shakily)
And...she became the only one I had. I looked up to her even when she was at her worst. I idealized her, no matter what state she was in. My dad moved out and I heard her crying every night.

DR. LAWSON
Hmm. I see.

MELISSA
Whenever I was stressed like her, I knew where the alcohol was so I took a few small sips. Nothing too bad.

DR. LAWSON
And as time went on it got worse?

MELISSA
Yes, for her and me. I took the bottles into my room to hide the reality of my mom's pain. It hurt me so much to see her like that. The alcohol became my escape.

Dr. Lawson nods his head. Melissa looks at him, tears rolling down her face.

DR. LAWSON
I understand the motivation behind that. You were motivated by the fear of the unknown, not only for yourself but your mother too.

Melissa nods unable to speak.

MELISSA
It hurt me. More than I'd like to admit. I just love her and wanted to save her.

DR. LAWSON
I understand. Currently, is there any other person in your life who influences you in a negative way?

Melissa shifts in her seat.

MELISSA
My boyfriend Joseph. He seems to be supportive at least right now.

DR. LAWSON
Oh? In what way?

MELISSA
In the way that he supports my journey. He knows I want to get better.

DR. LAWSON
I see. Anyone else in your life?

MELISSA
My best friend Bri. She also supports me.

DR. LAWSON
That's great to hear. I'm glad. I just want to tell you one thing: the closest to us are often the best maskers. Now I'm not saying that there's no genuine support there but it is very easy to mistake love for sabotage.

Melissa stares and then nodes.

MELISSA
Thank you. I will keep that in mind.

They end their session and Melissa looks at her phone, now flooded with messages from Joseph.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Melissa dials Joseph as she pulls out of the parking lot. Joseph has a loud and angry tone when he picks up the phone.

JOSEPH (V.O.)
Melissa! Why weren't you answering? I was worried sick about you!

MELISSA
I just took a drive.

JOSEPH
Why didn't you ask me to go with you?

MELISSA
I just needed to be on my own okay? Is that not allowed.

JOSEPH
(aggressive)
I never said that! Stop putting words in my mouth!

MELISSA
Whatever, you implied it.

Joseph sighs aggressively. He swallows something and then speaks again.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
What are you drinking?

JOSEPH
Oh wouldn't you like to know?

MELISSA
Yes I-

JOSEPH
Well you're not here with me. You went for a drive because that was better than hanging out with me I guess.

MELISSA
(aggressive)
Now you're putting words in my mouth Joseph!

Suddenly Melissa slams on the breaks. She breathes heavy after being launched back against her seat.

JOSEPH
What was that?

MELISSA
I'm fine. Just a little distracted, I gotta go.

JOSEPH
(aggressive)
Fine, bye.

He hangs up. Melissa pulls up her playlist and presses shuffle. The song COMING DOWN by The Weekend comes on.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph welcomes Melissa inside after a warm hug. He shuts the door behind her and smiles.

JOSEPH
It took you forever to get back here!

Melissa laughs. She guides him over to the couch and they sit down next to each other.

MELISSA
Hey, so I need to tell you something.

Joseph's eyes widen and Melissa looks at him with soft eyes.

JOSEPH
What? Did Bri say something? Your mom? What what?!

Melissa laughs again and rubs his hands.

MELISSA
Calm down. No, it's nothing about them. It's about me.

Joseph grabs her hands, raising his tone. She shakes free. He looks at her with desperate eyes. She raises a hand to his cheek and strokes it.

JOSEPH
Oh, then are you okay? What's going on?

MELISSA
I'm getting help. I'm starting a program off campus where I talk to someone. I'm starting to really dive into this health journey!

Joseph embraces her in a hug. She giggles at the comfort.

JOSEPH
Oh my god, that's amazing! I'm so happy for you!

He releases her and pulls her towards the kitchen. She skips behind him. She notices the open bottle of Pink Whitney and the shot glasses that are sitting there.

MELISSA
Um, Joseph?

JOSEPH
What's up?

Melissa grabs the shot glass and fiddles with it while looking at him.

MELISSA
I just told you how I'm starting my recovery journey. Why are you forcing me to drink?

Joseph shakes his head in disbelief. He motions to the shot glass that she is holding.

JOSEPH
This was in your hand. You want it. I didn't do anything.

He places the cup down on the counter and pours two shots. Then he looks at her hand.

MELISSA
Just because I-

JOSEPH
You wanted it. That's what that means. Stop denying it.

MELISSA
This will only hurt me.

Joseph slides the shot back towards her.

JOSEPH
Take it. It’s only one.

She looks down at the shot, expressionless. She gazes back up at him and sighs.

MELISSA
Fine.

He smiles at her. She takes the shot. She places the shot down and shoves it towards him. He picks up the bottle and starts to fill the glass again.

JOSEPH
You want another one?

MELISSA
No, I wanted to just get it out of my reach. I’m good.

He side eyes her. He fills up his glass too. He turns to face her again and then holds them both up.

JOSEPH
So I should take them both? Is that what you’re implying?

She looks at him.

MELISSA
I’m just reiterating my goals and values because you seem to have forgotten them.

He grabs the shot glasses and dumps them down the sink. He then slams them down on the counter and shoots her a dark expression, one filled with despair.

JOSEPH
Look what you made me do! Made me dump perfectly good alcohol! You’re lucky I don’t ask for money back from you!

Melissa’s fists ball up in frustration.

MELISSA
I don’t owe you shit Joseph! I’ve been everything you’ve wanted me to be up until this point!

Joseph stands there stunned.

JOSEPH
How dare you! Get out now!

Melissa turns without another word. She gathers her stuff quickly, noticing everything's placement and shoving her stuff into her bag. Joseph stands over her as she moves.

MELISSA
Go away Joseph! Why are you so close if you don't want me around?

Joseph laughs.

JOSEPH
I'm just making sure you don't leave anything behind. Is that wrong to do within my own apartment? I rent this place. Your mom still pays for everything!

Melissa shoves past him and flings the door open. She slams it behind her.

INT. DORM ROOM - NEXT DAY

Melissa arises in her dorm room, her room still dark. She grabs her phone and the screen glows. She sees the time is 5:30AM and she has several missed calls from Bri and Joseph. She ignores them and gets out of bed.

BEGIN MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

Melissa showers and gets dressed for the day.

She walks along the sidewalk, looking disoriented.

She sits in the library, attempting to get her work done, but struggles to stay still.

She then gets in her car and pulls into the parking lot of the local liquor store Beer and More.

She sits on her bed, crying in front of her laptop, her face red with stains. She takes sips directly from the bottle of vanilla vodka.

END MONTAGE SEQUENCE

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph dials Melissa's number and she does not pick up. He then sends her a text.

JOSEPH
(text)
I’m sorry I went off on you. I didn’t mean it. Are you okay?

MELISSA
(text)
I don’t like the way you spoke to me, that’s why I stormed out.

JOSEPH
(text)
I know. You okay?

MELISSA
(text)
I’ve been better. I relapsed yesterday. Bought vodka.

JOSEPH
Why would you do that?

MELISSA
I mean you act like it’s easy for me. It’s not gonna happen overnight.

JOSEPH
(text)
If I was with you I could have stopped you from relapsing. But you decided to distance yourself from me.

MELISSA
(text)
I’m alive aren’t I?

JOSEPH
(text)
Yes, but it wouldn’t have happened if I was there with you.

Joseph dials her number, now slouched on his couch. She picks up.

MELISSA (V.O.)
(aggravated)
What could you want to talk to me about right now that you can’t just text me? I’m a little slammed right now.

JOSEPH
I know, I'll make this quick. Do you think a tattoo would help?

MELISSA (V.O.)
What? How on earth would that help?

Joseph smirks. He lets out a small giggle followed by a cough.

JOSEPH
I want you to have a reminder of me that I'm always there in times of doubt. So we should get matching ones. Equal pain and equal intention.

Melissa becomes silent on the other end. When she continues her tone is more relaxed.

MELISSA (V.O.)
Do you really think I should get it?

JOSEPH
I mean, I think we should remind ourselves of how much we love each other. Want me to hit up my guy? He's cheap.

MELISSA (V.O.)
Sure, I guess.

JOSEPH
Great I'll call him right now.

They hang up. Joseph dials the artists number.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Hey Tony! Look, I need an appointment for Friday morning? You got me? Alright bet thanks man.

He lowers the phone and looks up some designs. He scrolls down to an infinity one.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Perfect.

INT. JOSEPH’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa looks in the mirror against the wall examining her body. She looks at her legs and Joseph watches from the couch.

MELISSA
I’m not sure where I would put it.

Joseph stands up and walks over to her, now hovering in the mirror.

JOSEPH
I would put it...

He grabs her arm and turns it upward so her forearm is facing up. He rubs her wrist.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Here or your forearm.

Melissa gazes up at him.

MELISSA
I’m not sure. It seems a bit impulsive. I don’t think that me getting this is the best idea.

Joseph grabs both of her hands and squeezes them.

JOSEPH
Look, we deserve this. Our relationship seems to get better as the days go on. Even if we have a fight or something, we have each other forever.

Melissa smiles at him.

MELISSA
That would be really cute. But are you sure?

Joseph kisses her on the forehead.

JOSEPH
Look you’re just tired. I know that this is something that you want. It’ll stay there forever even if I’m gone one day.

Melissa shakes her head in disbelief.

MELISSA
Don’t say that. I don’t want to let this go.

Joseph chuckles.

JOSEPH
I was kidding. I’m not going anywhere. I don’t plan on it anytime soon.

Melissa hugs him panicked.

MELISSA
(serious)
No Joseph, I’m being dead serious don’t joke like that.

JOSEPH
Okay, okay sorry. Didn’t mean to scare you.

She pulls up the email confirmation from the tattoo place. She scans it and her eyebrows raise.

MELISSA
Hey, why does it say the appointment’s at 10:30?

Jospeh smirks.

JOSEPH
Why? Because that’s when I booked it.

MELISSA
Oh, um you forgot didn’t you?

JOSEPH
What? Some other thing happening at that time tomorrow?

MELISSA
I mean, yea. My drugs class.

Joseph shrugs nonchalantly.

JOSEPH
You can’t just take an absence?

MELISSA
No, the absences are worth 20 percent of the grade! I can’t go tomorrow Joseph.

JOSEPH
Well, then no permanent marking of our bond for you.

MELISSA
What? There’s no other day?

Joseph shakes his head and crosses his arms, now leaning against the wall.

JOSEPH
No, he leaves on a long ass vacation tomorrow.

Feeling defeated, she sits on the couch again. He sits next to her and shakes his head.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Don’t make me look like an idiot okay? I don’t want to waste this guys time.

MELISSA
I thought you were close with him?

Joseph tilts his head and raises his eyebrows.

JOSEPH
What does that have to do with anything?

MELISSA
Ask him if there is another slot or-

JOSEPH
Jesus! I told you that was your only option okay! You’re going! Non-negotiable.

Joseph pushes himself off the couch. Melissa grabs his hand in a hurry.

MELISSA
Alright, alright, I’ll go.

Joseph squeezes her hand and lowers himself down to his level.

JOSEPH
Thank you.

He kisses her.

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - DAY

A dark room with graffiti designs all around. A buff and heavily tatted individual, TONY, stands behind the counter looking through a design book. He is a passive aggressive yet soft person. Melissa opens the door with Joseph following her close behind. The man looks up. A smile forms when he looks at Joseph.

TONY
Hey man! How are you? It’s been so long!

JOSEPH
Hey Tony nice to see you buddy! Oh yeah I know. I’ve been busy! With school but also this amazing young lady who wants to get her tattoo.

Melissa looks around at the room, distracted. Joseph grabs her shoulders sending her into a little jump. She turns to face him.

MELISSA
What? I was just looking.

JOSEPH
I know what you’re getting.

MELISSA
Okay, but it’s my tattoo.

TONY
We can also talk it out. Get some ideas going.

Joseph looks at her with wide eyes.

JOSEPH
Don’t be scared, I know him. You’ll be completely fine.

Melissa looks at him with slight concern.

MELISSA
Are you sure?

Joseph nods and grips her arms, putting a little more pressure on her. He closes in on her ear.

JOSEPH
(whispers aggressively)
I told you, don't be a baby and back out now. This guys gonna think I'm a joke and up charge me!

Melissa sighs.

MELISSA
Alright.

Joseph smiles at her and lets go. He walks towards Tony who leads him to the back of the shop. Melissa gazes at the door which is now flooded with sunlight. She looks at her forearm.

JOSEPH
(yells)
Melissa!

He approaches her emerging from the back, now impatient.

MELISSA
I don't want to get it. I'm still in an impulsive state of mind!

Joseph stops in his tracks, now shocked.

JOSEPH
You do! I know you do.

MELISSA
I don't I know-

JOSEPH
Stop the bullshit Melissa.

He walks towards her, and his fists are now balled up. She notices and winces. She gets dragged into the room, her wrist becoming red.

INT. TATTOO ROOM - LATER

Melissa looks at her finished tattoo, an infinity loop. Joseph looks at her with kind eyes.

JOSEPH
It means 'forever strong.'

Joseph holds his forearm next to hers. He giggles.

MELISSA
I guess this is pretty cute.

JOSEPH
I knew you'd come around.

He kisses the top of her head. She leans into his chest.

TONY
Don't touch it, it needs to be wrapped.

Joseph looks at her and smiles. As she gets wrapped, Joseph holds her other hand.

JOSEPH
I hope you love it as much as I do.

Melissa looks down at it, now freshly wrapped.

MELISSA
I do. You were right. It looks great.

JOSEPH
I knew you would think that!

Joseph shakes Tony's hand on the way out.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa looks down at her tattoo with concerned eyes. She's sitting on the couch on the far left side, while Joseph sits on the other side. Joseph eyes her.

MELISSA
Did I really do that today?

JOSEPH
Do what?

MELISSA
Get a matching tattoo.

JOSEPH
Yes and I have the matching one and I couldn't be more honored to be receiver.

Melissa laughs.

MELISSA
Me too. But are you sure we should have done this?

JOSEPH
How many times do I have to tell you yes?

MELISSA
Okay, sorry. I guess I’m just having second thoughts because what if?

Joseph darts a look at her.

JOSEPH
What? What are you talking about.

MELISSA
You know the what if’s of us.

Joseph walks over to her and now looks her dead in the eyes. His eyebrows arch and his smirk fades. He leans down to her and puts his hands on her legs.

JOSEPH
(serious)
Don’t...you dare...say that.

Melissa leans back against the couch.

MELISSA
Why?

JOSEPH
Because it’s not true. Nothing will happen to us and I will make sure of that.

Melissa gazes down at her leg to see Joseph pinching her. She holds her breath.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
Don’t talk about this relationship ending. Never speak of it again.

He lets go suddenly. She breathes again. Now panicked, she grabs her phone and hurries to the bathroom. She locks the door and calls Sadie.

SADIE
Hi honey, is everything okay?

MELISSA
Yeah, I’m just struggling right now.

Melissa wipes her forehead. She puts her phone on speaker and splashes some water on her face. Looking in the mirror, she stares emotionless.

SADIE
I know it’s hard to deal with everything right now. All I can say is just hang in there. How did the meeting go?

MELISSA
Good I guess.

SADIE
That’s good. Why did you call me?

MELISSA
Well, I’m scared. Joseph is kind of being pushy and has been for a while.

SADIE
In what way?

MELISSA
I mean, he’s just very demanding. I’m not sure how to handle it.

Melissa runs her fingers through her hair and then yanks out some. She shudders and puts it in the garbage.

SADIE
He’s probably just stressed like you. Balancing a relationship and school isn’t easy. But I have confidence that you guys can work it out.

MELISSA
You and dad never could.

Sadie stays silent. Sadie hangs up. She sighs in frustration and looks down at her arm again. Her eyes begin to become watery again.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Fuck.

Joseph knocks on the door. He rattles the door handle.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
(loud)
What do you want now Joseph?

JOSEPH
I just want to talk. Okay?

MELISSA
Why? I don't want to talk to you for a while I just need space.

JOSEPH
So you can drink your problems away like you always do?

Melissa looks at herself in the mirror.

MELISSA
I don't do that.

She opens the door. Joseph stands there now blinking away tears.

JOSEPH
I didn't mean that.

MELISSA
Then why did you say it?

JOSEPH
Uh, I'm not sure. Look we're both out of it. Okay?

MELISSA
That's not an excuse for you saying that to me.

Joseph wraps her in a hug. She breaks out of it. She marches towards the door. Slamming it behind her, Joseph locks it.

INT. BRI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa runs to the door and pounds on it. Bri opens it a few seconds later and gasps.

BRI
Oh my god. Are you okay?

Melissa tears up again. She walks inside and plops on the couch. She rubs her forearm. Bri wraps her in a side hug.

MELISSA
(quietly)
I'm so stressed.

Bri rubs her back. Melissa holds her head in her hands.

BRI
I know, it’s a lot, it’s not easy.

Bri notices the tattoo. She gently grabs Melissa’s forearm.

MELISSA
Yeah, that happened today.

BRI
What? Girl are you crazy? You got a fucking tattoo?

Melissa nods, unable to speak.

MELISSA
I did.

Bri looks around nervously.

BRI
Well, why?

MELISSA
I got a matching one with Joseph. But I regret it.

BRI
You’re joking right now.

MELISSA
No, I wish I was.

Bri shakes her head.

BRI
Girl, is this the final straw?

MELISSA
For what?

Bri rubs Melissa’s palm. Melisa grabs her hand.

BRI
Him. You can’t let him push you around anymore.

MELISSA
No, I wanted the tattoo. I agreed with him that I needed a reminder of our relationship.

BRI
I know you Melissa. I know it’s something you don’t want to admit but, I know the real you. Relationships can change people. You’re also in a very fragile headspace right now.

Melissa nods her head in agreement. She slowly raises her head.

MELISSA
I just don’t understand why it’s so hard.

BRI
Well, it’s like anything else. You are the only one that can save yourself but it’s up to you when you think that time has come. I just want you to be safe, that’s all.

MELISSA
I know. But this tattoo really awoke something in me I guess.

Bri raises an eyebrow.

BRI
What?

MELISSA
It was the first time I realized I let him control me but the difference was, there was raw evidence. Now it’s too late to do something about it.

BRI
You know theres something called tattoo removal right?

Melissa laughs lightly.

MELISSA
I mean, yea but that hurts a lot more than getting an actual tattoo. But also I feel like it’s too late.

BRI
Too late? For what?

MELISSA
I want to be able to fix things. But can I really?

BRI
You can only fix yourself. Not anyone else.

MELISSA
I just feel like he doesn't have anyone other than me. I feel bad.

BRI
He got what he wanted then.

MELISSA
What? How? What did he even want?

BRI
You.

MELISSA
No, shit I'm his girlfriend.

BRI
Yes, but he wanted you. Like more than that. Not to sound weird but kind of like a father daughter relationship.

MELISSA
Ew that's gross.

Bri nods slowly.

BRI
I'm also gonna be honest with you right now. I've waited for you to want to hang out and want to spend time together. But the call never came. You were always with him.

Melissa looks at her with a sympathetic look. Melissa grabs Bri's hand and squeezes it.

MELISSA
I had no idea. I'm so sorry.

Bri hangs her head. Melissa wraps Bri in a hug and she begins to cry. They hold onto each other for a few seconds and then release and hold hands.

BRI
I know you are. But look, there's nothing you can do to change the past. You can only change how you go forward in this situation. It's all up to you now.

Melissa smiles.

MELISSA
You're a good friend.

BRI
Thanks I try.

INT. DR. LAWSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Melissa sits and Dr. Lawson observes her on the other side of the table. She avoids eye contact.

DR. LAWSON
Melissa, you okay?

MELISSA
Yeah, yeah, I'm okay. I'm just a little overwhelmed.

DR. LAWSON
I see. Do you think you know what can be contributing to it?

MELISSA
Joseph. He forced me to get a tattoo.

She raises her forearm to show him and he frowns.

DR. LAWSON
Well, that's pretty intense.

MELISSA
I know. I'm not sure why I went through with it.

DR. LAWSON
You're scared of him.

Melissa now makes eye contact, her eyes wide and alert.

MELISSA
Scared? I mean I guess that's how you could describe it.

DR. LAWSON
Does he tend to act irrationally when you say no to his demands so to speak?

MELISSA
Yes, a lot actually.

DR. LAWSON
He’s degrading you. Do you drink with him?

MELISSA
Yes.

DR. LAWSON
Does he know about your problem?

She nods.

MELISSA
He does. He said he’s trying to help me quit though.

DR. LAWSON
Melissa, you don’t need to defend him right now he’s not here. I know you feel that way though.

She nods.

MELISSA
I feel like I can’t tell Bri about anything either. And she’s my best friend.

DR. LAWSON
I know, that’s hard. You don’t want her to be concerned.

MELISSA
She’s been concerned for a while.

Dr. Lawson smiles.

DR. LAWSON
Keep her around, you’ll need her now more than ever.

Melissa nods and smiles. Dr. Lawson gives an encouraging smile in return.

MELISSA
Thanks.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Melissa sits down next to Bri and puts her hand on her shoulder. Bro looks up at her with kind eyes.

MELISSA
Hey, I just wanted to say, I think you're right.

BRI
Oh, I am? Are you being serious?

MELISSA
Yes, I am. I had a meeting with Dr. Lawson yesterday and he said that I'm scared.

BRI
You are. I just hate to see you scared of him. That's not healthy.

MELISSA
I know. Now I'm trying to fix it.

BRI
Wait, fix him or fix you?

MELISSA
Me.

BRI
I'm glad.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph opens the door and sees Melissa now lookin angry. A small smile forms across his lips.

JOS
Hey. Wasn't expecting you here tonight.

She pushes past him. She turns around in the living room.

MELISSA
We need to talk Joseph. Like seriously.

Joseph walks towards her slowly and smirks. He does jazz hands.

JOSEPH
(sarcastically)
Ooo. Not the we need to talk conversation starter. I'm so scared.

MELISSA
Joseph stop it.

He turns around and goes back into the kitchen. He comes back with the nearly fresh bottle of Pink Whitney.

JOSEPH
Stop what? I'm not doing anything.

He opens the bottle and starts to pour the liquor into the glasses.

MELISSA
Yes, you are. I'm sick and tired of your games Joseph.

She shakes her head. He looks confused.

JOSEPH
What? You don't want your remedy?

MELISSA
I don't have or need a remedy!

JOSEPH
I know what you need. You need it to fuck you up so bad that you never want to look at it again.

Melissa looks at him with wide eyes. She raises an eyebrow at him, now confused.

MELISSA
What?

JOSEPH
You should just drink more.

MELISSA
Why? What is that gonna do?

JOSEPH
You gotta go for it.

MELISSA
Uh...

JOSEPH
Damn, isn't it obvious? The way to get rid of your addiction is to scare yourself out of it.

MELISSA
That's the worst advice I've ever heard.

JOSEPH
I mean, hey take it or don't. I'm not gonna tell you what to do but-

MELISSA
You just did.

JOSEPH
Fine whatever. But you should be embarrassed.

MELISSA
Why?

JOSEPH
Because you can't enjoy yourself without alcohol so it's only a matter of time before you overdose.

Beat.

MELISSA
What? You think I'm gonna overdose?

JOSEPH
I mean, you're kind of already on the way there. You feel like you can't talk to me.

MELISSA
Because I can't trust you anymore. You've hurt me too bad. I've been realizing a lot recently and it's not healthy.

JOSEPH
What? Healthy? You can't talk about health while you're drowning your sorrows. You're a complete mess. Stop denying.

Melissa hangs her head in sorrow.

MELISSA
I (sobs) know.

JOSEPH
But you can get better, I promise.

He rubs her cheek swiping away a tear that's falling. She looks up at him with pain in her eyes.

MELISSA
I want to give up on this journey. It's too hard.

JOSEPH
Drink up then, they're not going to drink themselves.

Melissa grabs the shot glass. She begins to take shot after shot.

MONTAGE - MELISSA RUSHED TO HOSPITAL

-- Melissa takes shot after shot and Joseph eyes her with a mischievous grin.

-- Melissa passes out on the couch, becoming unresponsive.

-- Joseph grabs her phone and dials Bri, pacing nervously and looks visibly panicked.

-- Bri rushes into the room and runs over to Melissa and starts crying.

-- Joseph carries Melissa's body out the door.

-- They rush into the hospital panicked.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa lays unresponsive in the bed. Joseph sits in a nearby chair and Bri paces nervously.

JOSEPH
I don't understand how this happened.

Bri stops in her tracks.

BRI
Are you serious right now?

JOSEPH
What? All I said is I don't understand how it happened.

BRI
Are you sure? You seem pretty sober.

JOSEPH
Just cause I'm sober doesn't mean that I can remember anything.

BRI
And you don't see anything wrong with that?

JOSEPH
What? No, am I supposed to?

BRI
Yes, if you were self aware, which you are not.

JOSEPH
What? I'm not self aware?

BRI
Not really no.

JOSEPH
If I'm not self aware then how did I know to call you?

BRI
Because you somehow have something that's called common sense.

JOSEPH
Wow thanks for the compliment.

Bri rolls her eyes. Suddenly Melissa’s eyes start to open again. Bri darts to her side without hesitation. Joseph stays seated. Melissa gazes around the room and Bri grabs her hand.

MELISSA
Oh hey.

Bri just looks at her with great concern. Then Melissa’s eyes move towards Jospeh. He smiles at her.

BRI
I’m so sorry Melissa.

MELISSA
For?

BRI
You’re in the hospital because of what he did.

MELISSA
What?

BRI
Joseph is an idiot.

JOSEPH
Oh am I?

BRI
Yes.

Joseph smirks. Bri looks at him disapprovingly. Melissa leans back and closes her eyes.

BRI (CONT'D)
I still can't believe this happened. Melissa-

JOSEPH
Why? Why is it so hard to believe? It happened and you can't change it. Just live with it.

BRI
Are you even sorry? At all?

Joseph just gives Bri a neutral stare.

JOSEPH
Yes of course I care and I'm sorry this happened.

Bri shakes her head and looks at Melissa, whose eyes are still closed.

BRI
Poor girl. She couldn't stop could she?

JOSEPH
Nah, she just kept drinking. I tired my best to stop her but I couldn't and now this is where we are.

BRI
I knew she had a problem but I thought that as her boyfriend you would have taken more charge.

JOSEPH
I couldn't really stop her, she pushed me out of the way. I got pushed back into the counter. And you haven't even bothered to ask if I'm okay.

Bri rolls her eyes.

BRI
First of all, you're not the one in the fuckin bed. And two, you look fine so I didn't feel the need to ask.

JOSEPH
So you care about her more than me?

BRI
Of course I do, what kind of question is that?

JOSEPH
I was just asking but okay thank you I guess.

BRI
She could have died. Do you realize the condition she's in right now?

JOSEPH
I do. But I feel like I deserve a little more empathy from her best friend.

BRI
For what?

JOSEPH
I kinda watched the whole thing unfold in front of my eyes. It was really scary. I had never seen her like that before. She was like raging.

BRI
Raging?

JOSEPH
Yeah, yelling. Going off the rails. And then I had to watch it all, so where's my sorry from you?

BRI
You don't deserve one. She does. When she wakes up I'm going to tell her that.

JOSEPH
It's always about her isn't it?

BRI
Oh, I'm, sorry that your girlfriend being in the hospital means you can't get attention for an hour or two.

JOSEPH
Bro, calm down.

BRI
Me? You're the one who's here tying to make their girlfriend's life or death situation about themselves.

JOSEPH
I mean yes, I like attention but you also do.

BRI
Not from you.

Silence fills the room.

JOSEPH
Yeah, I never liked you. I'm being honest here.

BRI
I knew that. That was obvious.

JOSEPH
It's sad how her phone had to take the girth of that.

Bri eyes him.

BRI
So you broke her phone because she was talking to me? Over you?

JOSEPH
Yeah, and I'd do it again.

Bri's eyebrows raise.

BRI
I'm never letting her near you again.

JOSEPH
I was just kidding. I'm not the reason her phone broke.

BRI
No you are. You said it and you can't take it back. I feel terrible.

JOSEPH
You should. You should have been a better friend to her.

BRI
I couldn't because she was always with you! I couldn't get a moment with her!

JOSEPH
Agh, whatever.

BRI
Also, if she pushed you into the counter, you would have bruises so-

JOSEPH
I do, they're just still forming. They don't form right away.

BRI
But it's marble. You should have some mark.

Bri approaches him and he quickly holds the back of his upper arm.

JOSEPH
Ouch. You talked about it and now it hurts.

Bri shakes her head.

BRI
Look, Melissa may have been delirious but I'm not. I knew you always wanted her to yourself. I advise you get treated.

Bri turns her head to Melissa and covers her mouth. She rushes to Melissa's side, seeing a large bruise on her arm. Joseph looks at her with a smile.

JOSEPH
Alright, I pushed her.

Bri looks over at him with angry eyes. She breathes more deeply now, still holding Melissa's arm. She raises it to her lips, kisses it and then rests it back on the bed.

BRI
Why? Why did you push her?

JOSEPH
She was being so rowdy.

BRI
Because of you! You pushed her to the edge Joseph! I can't believe you put your hands on her. How could I not have seen that?

JOSEPH
We got into a fight and I pushed her to get her to stop talking.

BRI
It's always gonna be about power to you. That's never gonna change.

JOSEPH
I can change. I want to.

BRI
Stop the lies I see right through them.

Melissa begins to open her eyes again. They both stare at her, with nervous glances on their faces.

MELISSA
(slowly)
Where's my mom? Did she come to see me?

BRI
Yeah, she's on her way. I don't think it should be much longer.

Joseph's body tenses up. He shoves his hands in his pockets and bites his lower lip. Melissa gives him a look.

MELISSA
What's wrong?

JOSEPH
I didn't realize Sadie was coming.

Bri and Melissa look at each other.

BRI
What? Of course Sadie's coming.

JOSEPH
That would have been nice to know before I came here.

MELISSA
Why?

JOSEPH
I don't want to be around her.

BRI
So you don't want to be around Melissa's main supporters?

JOSEPH
Nope.

Melissa's face drops. Bri frowns at her before turning back to Joseph.

BRI
I never liked you.

JOSEPH
I never liked myself either. It's okay.

Bri rolls her eyes. He walks out of the room without another word. Bri turns back to Melissa and takes both of her hands.

BRI
Now, that were alone, you saw that didn’t you?

MELISSA
Yes, so what’s your point?

BRI
Oh my god. How delirious did he make you?

MELISSA
I mean the alcohol actually-

BRI
No. No, Melissa this isn’t the alcohols fault. This is his and his alone. He did this to you.

Bri starts to blink and her eyes begin to water. She quickly swipes at her eyes.

MELISSA
Aww, Bri.

BRI
I’m sorry. I’m just so hurt. Hurt for you I mean. I just wish I could have been there more and-

MELISSA
Hey hey. It’s okay. Trust me.

BRI
You could have died.

Bri starts to cry. She frantically shakes her head and then lowers her head down leaning into Melissa’s chest.

MELISSA
It’s okay, let it out.

Bri bolts back up.

BRI
I’m supposed to be comforting you, not the other way around.

MELISSA
I know. It's okay. I haven't been there for you.

BRI
I love you.

MELISSA
I love you too.

She looks at her arm and gasps.

BRI
Yeah, how much do you remember?

MELISSA
Not much.

BRI
You had gotten into a fight with him and it got physical. He hurt you Melissa. I can't even understand how I let it happen. I’m just happy you’re alive. Losing you is the scariest thought in the world to me.

MELISSA
I know. It’s the same here.

BRI
I should have been there more. I’m just mad I didn’t pry. I just thought you were okay. But now looking at it, you clearly weren’t.

Melissa sniffles.

MELISSA
I wasn’t okay. But it got so bad to the point where I didn’t know what was real or fake, it all became a big blur.

BRI
I know. Also I called your mom so she should be here soon.

Just then Sadie runs through the door all disheveled. She runs over to Melissa and wraps her in a big hug.

MELISSA
Hi mom.

Sadie begins crying.

BRI
Aw.

INT. DR. LAWSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Melissa and Dr.Lawson sit in the office in their usual set up. Melissa has a depressed expression on her face.

DR. LAWSON
I talked with your mother about what happened. I’m not sure what else to say other than I’m sorry.

Melissa nods at him.

DR. LAWSON (CONT'D)
What you experienced must have been traumatic. I know that’s true.

MELISSA
It was. He made me feel insane. I wasn’t sure how to feel about anything anymore.

DR. LAWSON
Partners like that make it their goal to make you feel like you’re in the wrong to make themselves feel better.

MELISSA
I don’t feel like myself anymore.

DR. LAWSON
You’ve lost touch with reality. But, what are you going to do going forward?

Melissa bites her lip thinking. The silence stretches on for a moment. Dr.Lawson observes her, deep in thought.

MELISSA
I just hope that it gets better.

DR. LAWSON
It will, you just need some time for yourself, now that you know what’s really going on. I suggest blocking him and avoiding him at all costs at this point.

Melissa nods in agreement.

MELISSA
I just hope that I can actually survive and break free.

DR. LAWSON
You’re trying right now and that’s what matters.

Melissa smiles.

MELISSA
I know I am. I’m really trying.

MONTAGE
-- Melissa blocks Joseph and smiles to herself.

-- No caller ID shows up on her phone while she's in the library studying, she ignores it.

-- Melissa sits on her dorm bed watching Netflix on her laptop. No caller ID again. She ignores it and signs.

-- No caller ID shows up again, this time with Bri next to Melissa. Melissa silences it and Bri smiles and nods in approval.

END MONTAGE

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Melissa sits looking put together with her laptop out. Bri looks at her with pain but also joy. Melissa smirks and gives her a look.

MELISSA
What? Why are you looking at me like that?

BRI
Because you look...how do I put this? Healthy perhaps?

MELISSA
Really?

BRI
Yea, it's amazing how much healthier you look when you're away from him. I'm just really happy that you were able to finally get away from him.

Melissa smiels.

MELISSA
I guess it does feel good.

BRI
I knew it! Not to say I told you so but I told you so.

Melissa rolls her eyes.

MELISSA
I get it.

Dr. Patel claps his hands together as usual. Bri grips Melissa's hand she squeezes it.

BRI
(mouths)
I’m so proud of you.

DR. PATEL
Hello students! I hope you’ve had a great week. Today’s topic is going to be How abusers trigger self doubt to gain control.

Melissa’s eyes gaze at Bri with concern and she gazes back with warmth.

BRI
It’ll be okay, I’m right here.

Melissa nods. She faces back to Dr.Patel and takes a deep breath, bracing herself.

DR. PATEL
Okay, so sometimes people tend to put themselves on a higher pedestal than they truly deserve. There is a sense of entitlement over you.

QUICK FLASHES - JOSEPH AND MELISSA RELATIONSHIP MOMENTS

-- Melissa breaks the vase, Joseph scolds her, she sits on the couch looking defeated.

-- Joseph hands her a paper cup.

-- Joseph yells and smashes her phone. They cry together.

BACK TO SCENE
Melissa’s expression becomes more tense. Her eyebrows raise slowly.

DR. PATEL
These people are often insecure within themselves and often project that onto you to make you feel the same way they do.

Melissa nods slowly, her expression slowly changing from understanding to fear. She looks over at Bri and nods that she’s going to leave the room for a second. Bri nods.

Melissa gets up and heads to the door in the back of the lecture hall. With every step, her pace gets faster and her breath increases in volume and pace.

EXT. LECTURE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Melissa pushes the door open, her face expression tense and her smile no longer visible. As she walks, her head is kept down. She suddenly slams into someone who is much taller than her. She stumbles backwards, rubbing her head.

MELISSA
I'm so sorry I-

She stops talking when she looks up and sees Joseph standing there, hands in pockets and looking impressively dressed.

JOSEPH
Hi.

Melissa stares at him. He stares back at her. He puts his hand on her shoulder but she flinches away. She tries to push past him but he blocks her path.

MELISSA
(aggressive)
What the hell do you want?

JOSEPH
You. And only you.

She looks up at him and locks eyes with him. She shakes her head and bites her lip aggressively, unable to speak.

MELISSA
No, not happening.

Jospeh moves closer to her. She tenses up.

JOSEPH
You thought so it was easy to get away from me huh?

Melissa is now frozen but now looking down at her feet.

MELISSA
I knew it wasn't going to be but that's not an open invitation to come here and stalk me.

JOSEPH
I know where your classes are and where you live. To be honest I'm shocked you even tried in the first place.

MELISSA
I tried because my eyes were opened.

JOSEPH
Opened? By what? This bullshit class you're taking?

Melissa looks back at the door. Then she turns back to him, still avoiding eye contact.

MELISSA
It's not bullshit-

JOSEPH
Yes it is. There's no way. If that class is what so called opened your eyes then, you clearly are delirious.

Melissa takes a deep breath. She tries to move past him. He grips her shoulders tightly, causing her to wince.

MELISSA
Let go Joseph. I mean it.

He shakes his head at her and stares at her.

JOSEPH
This conversation isn't over.

MELISSA
Well it should be. Joseph I mean it.

Joseph looks at her with sad eyes.

JOSEPH
I love you, you know that.

MELISSA
You have a funny way of showing it.

JOSEPH
So do you, with your ghosting and not giving me a real reason.

MELISSA
I don't owe anything to you Joseph. You're the one stalking me.

JOSEPH
I mean I know your schedule by now. You act like that's a shock.

Melissa looks back at the door again.

MELISSA
I gotta go Joseph.

She starts to walk towards it and he steps in her way again. She sighs in aggravation.

JOSEPH
I mean it Melissa. You can't leave me.

MELISSA
I have free will. I had to ghost you for myself.

JOSEPH
So you can ghost me but you can't ghost your addiction to alcohol?

Melissa stands there stunned.

MELISSA
What the hell? You act like that's so easy.

JOSEPH
It should have been. You never learn do you?

MELISSA
I'm learning from this class. So back off.

JOSEPH
I know. But what's your grade?

MELISSA
I think like an 80? Around there?

JOSEPH
Wow. You would think that because your such an addict you would be acing the course.

MELISSA
What the hell is wrong with you?

Melissa starts to tear up.

JOSEPH
Besides, you forgot what you did and have done to me.

MELISSA
Tell me whatever I did to you. Unlike you I can take accountability.

JOSEPH
You never apologized for making me cut my hand because of the vase that you broke. During your manic episode you had.

Melissa rubs her temples.

MELISSA
I can’t even tell what’s real anymore Joseph I really can’t.

JOSEPH
How is that my fault?

MELISSA
You feed me one thing and then something completely different. On top of that, you always suggest alcohol.

JOSEPH
I know I do. But that doesn’t mean I’m not trying to help you.

MELISSA
How on earth is that helping me?

JOSEPH
Remember how I said that pushing people to their limits can be dangerous?

MELISSA
Yeah but-

JOSEPH
There you go. You see what I did there?

MELISSA
No, what-

JOSEPH
I made you never want to touch it again didn’t I?

Melissa looks up at the ceiling.

MELISSA
I mean, you made me more aware. But you didn’t have the proper motive.

JOSEPH
I did what I had to. Made you sick of it.

MELISSA
You made me have an overdose Joseph! Do you not realize how serious that is?

JOSEPH
I do. But it worked. Now you’re stuck with me. Our tattoos say so.

MELISSA
This is too much. I’m gonna get back to class. Goodbye Joseph.

She walks around him and walks back into the lecture hall.

INT. BRI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa and Bri sit eating Chipotle. They look at each other.

BRI
Interesting lecture huh?

Melissa looks at her and nods, slowing her chewing down. She swallows.

BRI (CONT'D)
Also, why were you in the bathroom for so long? Dining hall food get to you?

MELISSA
No, it’s nothing I’m fine.

She leans back in her chair. Bri hangs her head in frustration.

BRI
Don’t do this again. Look, I know you don’t know much about what to do or where to go from here but like I said I know you. You can’t hide anymore.

Melissa gazes up and puts her shoulders on the table. She puts her head on her hands, looking sorrowful.

MELISSA
I know, I know and I'm not trying to. I'm just not ready to face the truth yet.

BRI
Please don't tell me that you're even considering going back to him.

MELISSA
No, I mean I don't think I would ever get back with him.. He's a little crazy.

BRI
A little is an understatement.

MELISSA
Okay, yeah agreed. But no, I'm fine. I just saw Joseph.

Bri chokes. She grabs her water and then swallows. Once she's done, she raises her eyebrows.

BRI
So the dude goes from one extreme to the next? Jesus Christ.

Melissa shakes her head.

MELISSA
I left the class because it actually hit me. I had an epiphany I guess. Everything came into my brain at once. I had a revelation.

BRI
I'm so happy you realized it on your own.

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
I mean, it wasn't easy.

BRI
Tell me about it.

Melissa picks up her fork again and shoves it in her mouth. There is a thoughtful look on her face.

MELISSA
I'm nervous. Because he stalked me out. I'm not sure what else he's capable of.

Bri's eyes widen.

BRI
I agree. I'm a little scared too.

Melissa gazes at her, now curious.

MELISSA
Are you? I mean, that was kind of a joke.

BRI
When it comes to Jospeh, nothing is a joke Melissa. Maybe before but not now and not ever again. He transformed.

MELISSA
I mean, I did too.

BRI
Please for the love of God stop defending him!

MELISSA
Sorry, habit.

BRI
I know. It's gonna take you a while to break the habits. But you know that I'm here for you like I've always been.

MELISSA
I know and I appreciate it. I haven't been the best friend to you have I?

BRI
If you want honesty then no you haven't but I'm not gonna hold it against you. There's no point in that.

Melissa nods in agreement. Bri looks at her and smiles.

MELISSA
I mean, you can't blame me right? At least tell me that much. '

BRI
I can't. He's an asshole and you deserve so much better.

MELISSA
I know I do.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Melissa sits at her desk, beneath dim lighting. She writes in her journal, moving the pen across the page in a fast motion, barely stopping. She pauses when she gets a call from Sadie.

MELISSA
Hi mom.

SADIE (V.O.)
Are you okay honey?

MELISSA
I'm fine. Why are you now concerned?

SADIE (V.O.)
It's been a while since we've spoken for one and two, I heard you and Joseph broke up.

Melissa sighs.

MELISSA
We did. But he didn't take it well.

SADIE (V.O.)
I know I didn't expect him to. He loves you.

MELISSA
Yeah, well he has a funny way of showing it.

Sadie coughs on the other end.

SADIE (V.O.)
What does that mean?

MELISSA
Nothing, why all of a sudden are you so interested in my life. You've never put in effort and now some switch went off?

SADIE (V.O.)
Baby, you're my daughter. I'm always going to be interested in what's happening. It's whatever you chose to tell me that I'll know.

MELISSA
So how did you know that me and Joseph broke up?

SADIE (V.O.)
I knew because Bri called me about it.

Melissa's jaw drops. She wraps her hair around her finger loosely.

MELISSA
Oh, I didn't realize that she even called you.

SADIE (V.O.)
Oh, she didn't tell you?

MELISSA
No. So I guess everyone's keeping secrets from me now huh?

Sadie's mom sighs on the other end.

SADIE (V.O.)
You wonder why I never ask. Because when I do all you do is get defensive. You never let me in.

MELISSA
I don't try to get defensive. It just happens because you hid away from me when I was younger.

SADIE (V.O.)
I was going through a divorce! You were just a kid I couldn't be around you! Exposing my daughter to something as traumatic and devastating!

MELISSA
I know but you could have tried to be a better mother.

SADIE (V.O.)
I did Melissa! I really did! Can you get out of your own shoes for one second?

MELISSA
Why should I? You never tried to put yourself in mine!

Sadie is silent.

SADIE (V.O.)
I tried. It’s not my fault you can’t see it that way.

Sadie hangs up. Melissa throws her phone down onto the bed and lays back. She stares up at the ceiling.

INT. DR. LAWSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Melissa sits breathing deeply. Her hands are folded in her lap.

DR. LAWSON
Take your time. There’s no rush.

Melissa exhales and opens her eyes.

MELISSA
I know my mom has been supportive as much as she can thus far. But I guess I’m mad that she couldn’t see the problems as much as Bri could.

DR. LAWSON
Wasn’t Bri the one to tell her that Joseph was a danger to you?

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
She was but I just wish my mom stepped in a little more. Maybe called more.

DR. LAWSON
But why didn’t you reach our first if that’s how you felt?

MELISSA
It’s always been hard to talk to her. I also don’t like getting her into my business.

DR. LAWSON
Out of fear?

MELISSA
I guess. If that's the label we want to put on it.

DR. LAWSON
I can understand. Growing up you never understood how to go to her because of her avoidant coping mechanisms.

MELISSA
I never felt involved. I guess my drinking was a way of escaping as much as it was hers.

DR. LAWSON
Maybe it was your attempt to understand her. Kids want to feel connected to their caregivers. You were pulling at strings.

MELISSA
I know. But now I need to quit. I'm trying.

DR. LAWSON
Like I said before, it's by no means going to be a quick fix. And the sooner you accept that, the better off you'll be.

Melissa shows off her tattoo to Dr.Lawson. He looks at it and his eyebrows raise.

MELISSA
He made me get this. (beat) We have matching ones.

Dr. Lawson holds his breath for a second.

DR. LAWSON
Okay, that's not good. Let me guess, he used it as an excuse as to why you couldn't leave him?

Melissa nods, unresponsive.

MELISSA
It felt like I was being held hostage. Him forcing me to drink was also intense.

DR. LAWSON
He used your weaknesses against you. Luckily, you made it out alive. Some people...don't.

Melissa's face falls and her eyes water with tears. A tear rolls down her cheek.

MELISSA
That's scary.

DR. LAWSON
I know. I'm sorry I didn't mean to scare you.

MELISSA
No, no it's okay. You didn't mean to.

DR. LAWSON
How are you going to make sure he stays away from you going forward?

Melissa wipes her cheek.

MELISSA
I'm not really sure. I already blocked him on everything but I feel like he won't be able to take no for an answer.

DR. LAWSON
If he comes to your door or god forbid Bri's don't hesitate to call UPD? Okay?

Melissa nods.

INT. BRI'S APARTMENT - DAY

Melissa sits on Bri's bed, clutching her journal in her hand. Bri sits next to her, sitting straight up. Melissa glances over and slowly hands the book over to Bri. She takes it.

MELISSA
Here. Read this.

Bri rubs her hand over the cover of the book.

BRI
What is this?

MELISSA
My thoughts. While I wasn't being vocal.

BRI
Are you sure?

Melissa nods. Bri opens the book to the first page. The page is crinkly, covered in tears. Bri looks at her, pain showing on her face.

MELISSA
I realized I wasn't the best friend. I want to let you in now.

Bri puts the book to the side and pulls Melissa into a hug. Melissa digs her head into Bri's shoulder.

BRI
You're okay now. I'm right here as I've always been.

MELISSA
He made me so scared. I wasn't sure what was happening. He said to not tell you much.

BRI
I know that was obvious. But look, you're safe now okay? I'm going to make sure he never fucks with you again.

MELISSA
I guess love really is blind.

BRI
It really is.

Bri picks up the book again. She skims the pages. The room fills with silence. Bri squeezes her hand. Then there's a knock on the door. Melissa freezes. Bri glances towards the door.

MELISSA
Who-

BRI
Shh, shh!

Bri leans forward and a muffled voice is heard in the distance.

MELISSA
Bri..

Bri’s eyes dart towards the bathroom.

BRI
Bathroom now.

Melissa nods and runs into the bathroom locking the door behind her.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Her breathing becomes heavier. She puts her hand over her chest. She leans against the door in attempt to hear better.

BRI (O.S.)
What? No, she’s not here.

Melissa’s eyes widen.

BRI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Joseph, get out of here! I told you I don’t know where she is.

Melissa covers her mouth. She looks at her arm.

BRI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Joseph no!

There is a loud bang against the door, sending Melissa back in shock. She steadies herself again against the wall.

BRI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Melissa! Stay put I-

Silence fills the room. Melissa darts towards the door and flings it open. She sees Bri against the couch, Joseph towering over her. He turns around. Bri begins to shake.

BRI (CONT'D)
Joseph...

Joseph darts towards the bathroom door, Melissa closes it and locks it just in time. Then there is silence. The front door is locked. Melissa peers out. Bri stands there. She looks at Melissa.

BRI (CONT'D)
He took your book.

Melissa shakes her head aggressively. Bri races up to her and hugs her. Melissa begins to cry again.

BRI (CONT'D)
We’re gonna get it back okay? Together.

Melissa nods.

EXT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Melissa and Bri speed walk down the hall. Once they arrive at the door, Melissa reaches to knock but Bri stops her.

BRI
I got this. Stay over there.

Melissa rushes around the corner and Bri knocks on the door once she’s out of sight. Melissa lingers and eavesdrops.

BRI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hi...no she’s not with me. What did you do with it?

JOSEPH (O.S.)
I’m going to burn it. She betrayed me. Never went to me about anything. Hid everything. She made the relationship fail! I didn’t do anything.

BRI (O.S.)
You made her O.D and made her problem worse!

JOSEPH (O.S.)
She’s always been fucked up. That has nothing to do with me. Her problems are her responsibility. At least I tried to help her.

BRI (O.S.)
How? Quite honestly she’s so much worse now than she was before. No thanks to you.

JOSEPH
As her best friend you would think you have been better help to her.

BRI
You don’t know what I’ve done for her.

Melissa peers out from behind the corner. She then marches and appears next to Bri, making Joseph do a double take.

JOSEPH
Ha, I knew you were lying.

BRI
Yea because you know the art of lying better than anyone I've ever met.

JOSEPH
Thanks, it's a gift.

Melissa pears around him.

MELISSA
Give me my book back.

JOSEPH
Then get back together with me.

Bri shakes her head at him.

MELISSA
Why should I?

JOSEPH
Because you owe me. You put me through so much distress. Distress that I didn't deserve.

MELISSA
We all go through distress. Mind you, you also broke my phone.

JOSEPH
I did, but it was because of her.

He points at Bri, who chuckles.

BRI
Is he for real?

MELISSA
Yeah, it was because of our closeness.

BRI
That's crazy. But alright. The man can't handle you being with anyone else can he?

MELISSA
I mean I guess not. This tattoo proves it.

JOSEPH
It proves loyalty, don't get it twisted. It stays there forever so I expect the same of you and me.

Melissa shakes her head.

MELISSA
Whatever Joseph. I'm not getting back with you. I would have to be absolutely crazy to put myself through that roller coaster all over again.

She walks away. Bri looks at him and he smirks back.

BRI
You need help.

He snorts.

JOSEPH
Whatever you say.

He closes the door and Bri holds up the middle finger to the door.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Dr. Patel claps his hands.

DR. PATEL
Good morning students. I hope you're all doing well. Today we're going to cover the topic of Breaking Free from Addiction. Next week we will switch topics to Hallucinogens.

Melissa smiles.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
It's a very long journey and you may have relapses. But don't give up. There's something very powerful about that first step of realizing you have a problem.

Dr. Patel writes on the board.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
Now an addiction by definition is a feeling or yearning for a harmful substance such as alcohol or substances such as weed and cocaine. But there are several other addictive substances too.

Melissa smiles to herself.

DR. PATEL (CONT'D)
What are some more steps that people can take to combat their drug use?

Melissa raises her hand and Dr.Patel nods towards her.

MELISSA
Someone may decide to go to AA, or therapy. Or even talk to a trusted relative or friend to move forward in the journey.

Dr. Patel nods in agreement and begins to write on the board. Bri leans in towards her and whispers into her ear.

BRI
That’s my girl.

Melissa smiles.

INT. GRADUATION HALL - DAY

Melissa sits amongst the other graduates, smiling to herself. Bri sits in front of her. Bri turns around to her.

BRI
You made it Melissa, you really did.

Melissa nods. She grips Bri’s hand and squeezes it.

MELISSA
I’m ready for the journey ahead.

She smiles to herself.

ANNOUNCER
Here’s to the class of 2025!

Melissa moves her tassel and smiles. She stands up with everyone else and tosses her grad cap. Bri wraps her in a hug.

EXT. GRADUATION HALL - DAY

Bri and Melissa run towards Sadie and wrap her in a hug. When they release, Sadie hands Melissa a bouquet of flowers. Melissa's eyes wanter up. Sadie wraps her in another hug, Bri watching in awe.

MELISSA
I love you mom.

SADIE
I love you too honey.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Melissa sits around a table with her mom, and Bri with her family. Baked clams get placed in front of them in the middle of the table.

SADIE
This looks amazing.

Melissa nods. She picks up a spoon and places a clam on her plate.

BRI
I know I keep saying this but I really am proud of you.

Sadie nods towards Melissa.

SADIE
I agree. Honey, you should be so proud about how far you've come.

Melissa smirks and blushes.

MELISSA
Aw, stop you guys.

SADIE
No, honey, I know you're still in denial about what you deserve but...you're here. You get stronger every day.

Melissa looks at her arm, where the tattoo still rests.

MELISSA
This will forever be a part of me.

Bri rubs over it with her thumb, while lightly gripping Melissa's arm.

BRI
No it won't.

MELISSA
What do you mean?

BRI
Your mom and I have agreed to let you either get it removed or make it so that it has a whole new meaning for you.

Melissa frowns.

MELISSA
Oh, are you sure?

SADIE
Yes, I know you need it.

MELISSA
I do. Thank you guys.

Sadie reaches across the table and her daughter takes it.

SADIE
You're so strong. I see you being the version of myself that I never could be. You're so amazing Melissa.

Melissa takes a sip of water.

MELISSA
Thank you.

INT. DR. LAWSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Melissa sits in the office, Dr. Lawson notices her happy disposition.

MELISSA
I'm finally free from Joseph.

A wide smile forms on Dr.Lawson's face. He places his hands on his lap.

DR. LAWSON
Oh, that's great! But that must have been so hard.

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
It was, he made me feel like I was crazy and tried to use my weaknesses against me.

DR. LAWSON
Yeah, Joseph doesn’t seem like he was a right match for you.

MELISSA
He was not. No denial from me about that.

DR. LAWSON
You’re safe now.

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
I know. It’s just a big adjustment.

DR. LAWSON
Like any adjustment, it’ll take a minute. Don’t rush it though. It won’t be easy either. You’re coming out of your constant state of fight or flight.

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
I believe I remember talking about that in my Drugs and Behavior class. I did really well in it. Got a B plus.

Dr. Lawson nods his head.

DR. LAWSON
I am impressed.

Melissa smirks.

MELISSA
Thank you! It was complicated but I feel like it really helped with what I went through. I had a few moments where I my eyes were opened but I didn’t act on them.

DR. LAWSON
Would you say it was out of fear?

Melissa nods.

MELISSA
It was for sure. I guess I was scared more than I'd like to admit.

DR. LAWSON
Well I can understand that. It's okay. Your healing journey starts now.

Melissa lightly touches the tattoo with her thumb. She nods down at it. She looks back up at Dr.Lawson, smiling. He smiles back at her.

MELISSA
Thank you.

DR. LAWSON
Anytime.

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - DAY

Melissa, Bri and Sadie stand in the same tattoo shop as earlier. Tony sees Melissa, a shocked look forming on his face.

TONY
Melissa? Was there a problem with the tattoo?

Melissa looks at Sadie who just stares back.

MELISSA
Not with the tattoo specifically, but rather the symbolism. I'd like to have it redone if that's okay.

Tony nods.

TONY
Yes of course follow me to the back.

Bri rubs her shoulder. Melissa smiles at her.

INT. TATTOO ROOM - LATER

Tony takes a a paper towel and rubs over Melissa's tattoo. It is now a butterfly.

MELISSA
It means 'rebirth'.

She smiles and a tear runs down her cheek. Bri and Sadie look at her with admiration. She smiles back at them.

MELISSA (CONT'D)
Freedom is worth the wait.

Melissa stares at her arm in awe.

FADE TO BLACK.

END.