

PERSUASION

By

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Pilot

(Serious inquiries only - for production or representation consideration)

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PERSUASION

FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK ROUTE 30 - NIGHT

November lake-effect rain pummels a forested two-lane highway outside Buffalo. One dim headlight rounds a turn.

A rusty Ford Escort with a broken light speeds toward a lone road sign, "Trout River 5, Canada 5."

INT. MEL'S CAR - NIGHT

MELANIE "MEL" BORRELLI (33) steers white-knuckled under holey mittens. A worn parka hood obscures her pretty but exhausted face, tear-stained with mascara.

She squints past worn windshield wipers and hits the defrost.

Hellish GRINDING. She slaps it off. RED AND BLUE LIGHTS hit the dashboard.

She taps the brakes and checks the speedometer. Legal.

In the duct-taped rearview mirror, she sees an unmarked police S.U.V. with grill lights and two male OFFICERS inside.

MEL

Idiota!

She dumps out her purse and grabs a prescription pill bottle.

With one eye on the road, she yanks up the floor mat to reveal a huge rusted hole through the car floor.

She drops the pill bottle through the hole.

EXT. NEW YORK ROUTE 30 - NIGHT

The pill bottle rolls off the road onto the muddy shoulder. The police race past it and gain on Mel's car.

INT. MEL'S CAR - NIGHT

Mel watches the police in her cracked side mirror and weaves.

MEL

Shit.

Eyes ahead, she spots an overgrown farm road turnoff. She takes a deep breath and yanks her car onto the shoulder.

She bounces over gravel and rocks, straight toward a locked barbed-wire gate.

A dead-end turnaround. She STOMPS the brake. Too late.

EXT. TURNAROUND - NIGHT

Mel's car CRASHES through the fence and runs over the barbed-wire.

Her front tires BLOW OUT.

She grinds to a stop, stuck in deep mud, mere yards from the highway.

INT. MEL'S CAR - NIGHT

Mel lays her hands on the wheel.

MEL

I'm done.

She turns to see the police roar past, lights flashing, up the highway.

EXT. TURNAROUND - NIGHT

Confused, Mel steps out of her car, in too-tight jeans and cheap high-heeled boots.

She pulls off her hood and lets rain soak her grown-out roots.

She kneels by her front tire. Flat and shredded.

EXT. NEW YORK ROUTE 30 - NIGHT

On the shoulder, Mel looks up the empty highway, deserted from the storm.

She opens her spider-web cracked cell phone and makes a call.

MEL

(on phone)

Pick up, pick up, pick up, pick up.
... Dante, call me!

She hangs up. Calls another number.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (on phone)
 Lisa, I'm stuck. Where the hell are
 you?... Liar. ... Don't hang up!

The call disconnects. Mel calls back. Voice mail.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (on phone)
 Ungrateful little tramp.

She hangs up. WIND drowns out her sigh.

MEL (CONT'D)
 You spot it, you got it.

She looks around at endless trees. The wind dies down. Quiet
 isolation. Something catches her eye.

A dim light on the highway.

In a snap decision, she drops her phone in the mud and steps
 onto the asphalt.

Distant headlights approach.

She walks into the lane. She lowers her arms, clenches her
 fists, and freezes.

Dazzling halogen lights rush toward her. She shuts her eyes
 and stands firm to await her fate.

The headlights explode in size and merge into a blinding
 WHITE LIGHT.

CREDITS

UP FROM WHITE. Pixels race along a network of pathways and
 fuse into fast-changing images:

- Female prisoners sew lingerie.
- Malala Yousafzai & found Chibok girls
- A homeless pregnant tweaker rattles a change cup.
- Justice Sonia Sotomayor & Chancellor Angela Merkel
- Nurses break a Planned Parenthood picket line.
- Christine Lagarde & Oprah Winfrey
- A toddler girl prances in a beauty pageant.
- Prime Minister Theresa May & Taiwan's President Tsai
- A 'tween girl builds a robot.
- Serena Williams & Claressa Shields
- A teen girl starts a sexual video chat.
- Beyonce & Samantha Bee
- A one-armed female Army veteran holds her baby.

EXT. SOUTH BUFFALO - DAY

SUPER: 24 hours ago

A busy street in a rundown working-class neighborhood, lined with sooty brick dollar stores and lotto delis.

Pedestrians in construction boots, budget suits, and hijabs battle the afternoon wind between first and second shift.

School kids make their way home.

Two 'TWEEN GIRLS duck into a doorway to light a cigarette near Mel's car, parked off-kilter in haste.

Mel, in a cheap snug skirt-suit, slams the car door and eyes the smoking girls.

SMOKING GIRL

Take a picture.

The other Girl flips off Mel.

MEL

One world, bitch.

The Girls giggle.

Mel makes a beeline for the peeling front door of a ragged duplex beside the Buffalo Skyway.

INT. PATRICK'S DUPLEX - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Electronic dance music BLARES. Mel pushes her way through an INTOXICATED CROWD in their teens and early twenties.

The guys wear jeans and work boots. The girls wear skinny jeans and heels.

A couple grinds on the sofa as people swill cheap beer and pass a bong.

A young man pukes in the kitchen sink.

INT. PATRICK'S DUPLEX - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mel looks at each of the FEMALE PARTYGOERS. All strangers. She hears female LAUGHTER behind a closed door.

She tries the door. Locked.

INT. PATRICK'S DUPLEX - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the bedroom with motorcycle posters and cheap furniture, a young couple makes out on the bed.

LISA BORRELLI (16), pretty but insecure about it, wears a retro pin-up dress and makeup far too sexy for her age.

PATRICK (21), born-and-bred local in jeans, biker boots and a tight T-shirt, exudes tough-handsome and knows it.

He kisses her neck. They make out with a vengeance. He kicks off his boots.

The DOORKNOB shakes.

PATRICK

Get lost.

POUNDING on the door. His hand moves up her skirt. CRACK. The door bursts open.

MEL

Get off my sister.

Patrick jumps up. Lisa fixes her dress.

PATRICK

You broke my door.

MEL

I'll break more.

Mel punches his arm over and over. He takes it.

LISA

The fuck is your problem?

Lisa pulls Mel off Patrick.

MEL

(to Patrick)

She's sixteen, so you're a rapist.

LISA

You're a joke.

Mel steers Lisa to the door and sees a mirror and credit card on the dresser.

MEL

Stay away from her, shitbag. If you know what's good for you.

He laughs.

PATRICK
You know some guys, right?

MEL
Yeah. Cops.

Lisa laughs.

PATRICK
Call SWAT, I don't care. Use my
phone.

He hands her his cell. She slaps it away and pushes Lisa out the door.

Behind Mel's back, Patrick makes a call-me gesture to Lisa.

INT. PATRICK'S DUPLEX - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mel steers Lisa out of the party with an iron grip on her elbow.

LISA
Get off me. You're embarrassing
yourself.

Lisa tries to pry off Mel's hand.

MEL
That's my dress.

LISA
Sluttiest thing I could find.

Two YOUNG MEN laugh at Mel and Lisa.

A handsome kid who oozes charisma and dumb self-confidence, MURPH (21), grazes Mel's butt with his hand.

He blocks her exit, looks her square in the eye, and smirks. Palpable chemistry.

MEL
Move it.

MURPH
McCaffrey's tonight?

MEL
I don't care what you do.

But Mel lingers a second before she pushes Lisa out the front door.

EXT. PATRICK'S DUPLEX - DAY

Mel grips Lisa's arm and walks fast toward the car.

MEL
Stop pissing your life away.

LISA
I'm living my life. Unlike you.

Lisa pulls away.

LISA (CONT'D)
Maybe if you lightened up, you limp rag, your boss wouldn't have shit-canned you.

Mel catches her. Lisa punches Mel's arm. Hard.

MEL
Ow!

Mel slaps Lisa's face. Instant regret.

LISA
I hate you. You bipolar freak show.

Mel tries to touch her. She runs away to the car.

EXT. SOUTH BUFFALO - DAY

Mel drives Lisa past vacant industrial buildings along the Buffalo River.

INT. MEL'S CAR - DAY

Mel parks at a shabby strip mall and scrapes her bumper on the curb. Lisa CLAPS.

LISA
Bravo.

Lisa eyes the keys in the ignition. Mel yanks them out.

MEL
Wait here.

EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

Mel tries the locked door of a storefront with a sign
"Buffalo Correctional Education."

She knocks on the window of the cluttered fluorescent office.

At an outdated computer, DANTE FARINA (31), rumpled handsome
in jeans and a Buffalo Sabres T-shirt, looks up.

His male BOSS (60) looks up too, a self-assured fireplug in
khakis with neck tattoos.

Annoyed, Dante walks outside to see Mel.

DANTE

You're early.

She leans in for a kiss. He evades and pats her shoulder.

MEL

Tell him we gotta eat. As a family.

Dante nods to Lisa in the car, who stares at her phone.

DANTE

He won't let me.

MEL

You don't wanna come home.

DANTE

I gotta work. I'll take the bus.

MEL

I wanna spend some time with you.
Lisa does, too.

DANTE

Wish I had the luxury.

MEL

Tell him the day's over.

DANTE

You lost your job. Don't blow mine,
too.

MEL

That's low. I made a mistake.

DANTE

Go home, before you get me fired.

Upset, Mel wants to kiss, hug, or slap Dante.

When she moves toward him, he turns away from her and walks inside.

EXT. MEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Mel and Lisa cross the packed dirt yard in front of cheap, worn-out apartments built like a budget motel.

They dodge broken toys and a soiled diaper.

Mel walks behind Lisa, who CLOMPS her heels up the exterior stairs.

INT. MEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mel and Lisa walk into a cramped but neat two-bedroom with a faded carpet and chipped furniture.

Mel opens the blinds. Still dreary.

MEL

You hungry?

LISA

Leave me alone.

Lisa walks straight down the hall to her room.

INT. MEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

On the sofa, Mel turns off the TV and listens. Silence.

INT. MEL'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - EVENING

Mel taps on Lisa's closed door.

MEL

Finish your homework?... You awake?

Silence.

INT. MEL'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Mel grabs her coat. Careful to be quiet, she opens the front door.

INT. MEL'S APARTMENT - LISA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Lisa texts on her bed surrounded by red walls and black-light posters. Piles of clothes and cheap shoes litter her floor.

She hears something and sits up. The soft click of the FRONT DOOR LOCK.

She grabs her jacket and purse.

EXT. MEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Lisa leaves.

INT. COUNTY REST HOME - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mel walks down the windowless institutional hall decorated with brown crepe streamers and dust bunnies.

All doors look the same, except for the magic-marker names on faded Thanksgiving construction-paper hand-turkeys with pilgrim hats.

The next turkey reads "Carla Borrelli," beside a roommate's name-turkey.

Mel looks in.

MEL

Grandma?

INT. COUNTY REST HOME - NONNA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mel walks into the small, dark room. She leaves her coat on.

MEL

It's freezing.

She stops at the first bed, empty and unmade.

A drawn curtain obscures the roommate's far bed, in the window half of the room.

From behind it, a female GURGLE, COUGH and GROAN.

MEL (CONT'D)

Nonna?

Mel listens outside the closed bathroom door. RUNNING WATER.

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