

(GRIM REAPER)  
by  
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12/7/25

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FADE IN:

EXT. WAR-TORN CITY - NIGHT (AERIAL)

SILENCE.

A drone's eye view drifting over a metropolis that has been chewed down to the bone.

The skyline is a jagged EKG of broken concrete. Entire city blocks are flattened, reduced to grey dust and twisted rebar.

Fires burn in the distance—orange constellations scattered across a void of blackout darkness.

There are no lights in the windows. No movement on the highways. Just the hulking skeletons of buildings that once held thousands.

A single FLARE pops—a brilliant, harsh white star—descending slowly on a parachute, illuminating the devastation for ten seconds.

Then, the sound arrives.

A low, subterranean RUMBLE. THUD. THUD. THUD.

Artillery. Miles away, but heavy enough to vibrate the camera lens.

EXT. CHECKPOINT "ZERO" - NIGHT

Ground level. The air is thick, tasting of pulverized drywall and burning rubber.

A makeshift triage center has been set up in the lobby of a bombed-out bank. Marble floors covered in grit. Sandbags piled high against the shattered glass doors.

DR. LARA ESHKAN (22) is kneeling beside a SOLDIER on a stretcher. She uses a penlight to check his eyes.

Lara looks older than her years. Her face is smeared with dust, her medical vest is stained, and her hands—though steady—are chapped and raw.

LARA  
Follow the light.

The Soldier tracks it. Groggy.

SOLDIER

Am I... am I good, Doc?

LARA

You're concussed. And you're dehydrated. (She stands) But your head is still attached to your neck, so you're having a better night than most.

She marks a clipboard.

LARA (CONT'D)

(To a nearby Medic)

Get him a liter of saline. Keep him off patrol for twenty-four hours.

MEDIC

Major Keller isn't gonna like that. We're short on bodies.

Lara turns. Her eyes are fierce.

LARA

Then tell the Major he can patrol. This kid stays horizontal.

She walks away before the Medic can argue. She moves with a limp—favoring her left leg—but she moves fast.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Lara steps out of the bank lobby into the cool night air. She pulls a pack of cigarettes from her pocket. Empty. She crumples it and tosses it into a crater.

NURSE FARID (30s) is leaning against an ambulance, cleaning his glasses. He looks like a weary professor who got lost on a field trip.

FARID

You're out of smokes again.

LARA

I'm out of everything, Farid. Gauze. Morphine. Patience.

Farid reaches into his pocket and tosses her a single, bent cigarette.

FARID  
I'm hoarding. Don't tell the  
others.

Lara catches it. She smiles—a rare, genuine expression that softens the hard lines of her face.

LARA  
You're a saint.

FARID  
I'm an enabler. There's a  
difference.

She lights up, inhaling deeply. She looks at the distant flashes on the horizon.

LARA  
It's getting closer. The shelling.

FARID  
North district is gone. They're  
bracketing the grid. (A beat)  
Marlowe thinks we should pull back  
to the main base.

Lara stiffens at the name.

LARA  
Marlowe thinks a spreadsheet is a  
moral compass. If we move back, the  
civilians in the gray zone have  
nowhere to go.

FARID  
Lara... we're running on fumes.  
You haven't slept in two days.  
You're good, but you aren't a  
machine.

Lara looks at her hands. Just for a second, a tremor passes through her fingers. She clenches a fist to hide it.

LARA  
I sleep when it's quiet.

FARID  
It's never quiet.

WHIEEEEEEE—CRUMP.

A mortar lands. Close. Maybe three blocks away. The ground jumps. Dust rains from the lip of the building above them.

Lara doesn't flinch. She just checks her watch.

LARA  
That was short. Usually they fire  
in volleys of three.

FARID  
Maybe they're running out of ammo  
too.

SCREEEEEECH.

The second one comes in. Louder. A tearing sound like the sky  
ripping open.

Lara's eyes widen.

LARA  
INCOMING!

She tackles Farid, shoving him behind the engine block of the  
ambulance.

BOOOOOOM.

The shell hits the street fifty yards down. The shockwave  
shatters the remaining glass in the bank windows. A cloud of  
debris—stone, metal, fire—roars past them.

Lara covers her head. The sound is physically painful, a  
pressure wave that rattling her teeth.

Silence returns for three seconds.

Then—SCREAMS.

Lara is up instantly. Her ears are ringing.

LARA  
( (Shouting)  
Status!

FARID  
(Coughing)  
I'm good! I'm good!

Lara scans the street. The shell hit an apartment block down  
the road. The front facade has sheared off like a dollhouse.  
People are stumbling out of the dust.

LARA  
Grab the trauma kit! Move!

She sprints toward the impact zone.

EXT. IMPACT ZONE - CONTINUOUS

Lara runs into the fog of dust. It's chaos. Civilians—mostly families who refused to leave—are digging frantically into a pile of rubble.

A WOMAN screams in a dialect Lara barely understands, pointing at a twisted mess of concrete slabs.

WOMAN

My boy! My boy is under!

Lara slides down the debris slope.

LARA

(To the woman)

Get back! It's unstable!

She drops to her knees beside the slab. She shines her light into the gap.

Deep inside, trapped in a pocket of air formed by a collapsed beam, is a SMALL BOY (8). This is KAZEM. He isn't moving. Blood is matted in his hair.

Lara looks at the concrete slab on top of him. It weighs a ton.

LARA (CONT'D)

(To Farid, arriving)

I need a jack! We have to lift this.

FARID

It's too heavy, Lara. The whole structure is coming down. Look at the supports!

He points up. The rebar hanging above them is groaning, bending under the weight of the floors above.

LARA

I don't care! He's suffocating. Give me the airbag!

She grabs a pneumatic lifting bag from Farid's kit. She jams it into the crack beneath the slab. She pumps it. The bag inflates. The concrete groans. It lifts—an inch. Two inches.

Lara lies flat on her stomach, reaching into the darkness.

LARA (CONT'D)  
Come on... reach for me.

The boy doesn't move.

Lara crawls halfway in. The jagged rock scrapes her back.

FARID  
Lara, stop! It's going to collapse!

LARA  
( (Inside the hole)  
I've almost got him!

Her fingers brush the boy's collar. She feels his skin. It's cold.

She feels for a pulse.

...

Nothing.

Lara freezes. The noise of the outside world—Farid shouting, the mother screaming, the sirens—seems to fade away.

She is alone in the dark with a dead child.

LARA (CONT'D)  
No. Don't you do this.

She tries to pull him, but he's pinned.

LARA (CONT'D)  
Wake up. damn it, wake up!

She shakes him. His head lolls back. Dead eyes stare at the darkness.

Lara stops. The exhaustion hits her like a hammer. The lack of sleep. The stress. The futility. It all crashes down in this tiny, dusty grave.

She rests her forehead against the dirt.

LARA (CONT'D)  
( (Whispering)  
Please. Just let one of them make it.

The air in the pocket suddenly changes. The dust stops swirling. The heat of the burning building vanishes, replaced by a deep, subterranean chill. It smells like wet soil and ancient stone.

Lara lifts her head.

In the corner of the collapsed pocket—where there is no room for a man to stand—a MAN stands.

He is bent double to fit in the space, his spine curved against the crushing ceiling. He wears rags that look like rot. His face is hidden in shadow.

He isn't looking at Lara. He is looking at the boy.

He holds a pocket watch. The ticking is loud. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Lara blinks.

LARA (CONT'D)  
Who... who are you?

The Figure doesn't speak. He closes the watch with a metallic click.

THE REAPER  
( (Voice echoing in her  
skull)  
The account is closed.

Lara stares.

LARA  
Get away from him.

THE REAPER  
He is already gone, Doctor. The  
thread is cut.

Lara looks at the boy. Then back at the Figure. A desperate, irrational anger flares in her chest.

LARA  
No. I say when it's cut.

She grabs the boy's shirt with both hands.

LARA (CONT'D)  
(To the Figure)  
Give him back.

The Figure tilts his hooded head.

THE REAPER  
You ask for a transaction?

Lara doesn't know what she's saying. She just knows she cannot lose another one tonight.

LARA

Yes. Whatever it costs. Restart him.

The Reaper leans closer. The smell of cold earth is suffocating.

THE REAPER

The cost is high. Years for breath. Your years.

Lara looks at the dead child.

LARA

Take them.

The Reaper reaches out a skeletal hand. He doesn't touch the boy. He touches Lara's chest. Right over her heart.

SLAM.

Pain explodes in Lara's chest. Her vision goes white. She screams, but no sound comes out.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. COLLAPSED APARTMENT BLOCK - NIGHT

A deep, pulsing HUM grows in the darkness. Dust hangs suspended mid-air like time has thickened.

LARA gasps and sits upright—still inside the collapsed pocket. Her hands are trembling violently. She looks down.

KAZEM—the boy—COUGHS.

He COUGHS AGAIN, weak but alive.

Lara's breath catches. She pulls him toward her as best she can.

LARA

(whispering)

You're okay... you're okay... stay with me...

The air pressure in the pocket suddenly equalizes – WHOOMP – like the world snaps back into motion. Dust rains down normally again. Voices return.

Farid shouting in the distance.

FARID (O.S.)  
Lara! Lara!

Lara tries to respond, but her voice cracks.

She drags Kazem close and starts inching backward out of the hole.

EXT. IMPACT ZONE – CONTINUOUS

Farid spots her emerging and sprints over with two OTHER MEDICS.

FARID  
Holy– grab them, grab them!

They pull both out just as the upper floors groan, shift–

CRAAAAAACK–

The entire front wall collapses, pulverizing the pocket they were just in.

Farid pulls Lara away.

FARID  
You're insane. Absolutely insane.  
But–  
(sees Kazem breathing)  
–oh my God..

Civilians gasp. The boy's mother drops to her knees, crying, kissing Kazem's face.

But Lara doesn't watch the reunion – she's focused on something else:

Her hands are shaking uncontrollably. Her vision wobbles. She feels ROOTED to the spot as a cold ache radiates from her chest.

A PRICE PAID.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ZERO - NIGHT

Lara sits on a crate while Farid examines her. She looks drained, older somehow. Her skin has a faint pallor.

FARID  
Your pulse is fast. Pupils  
responsive. But you look like hell  
wrapped in hell.

Lara gives a hollow half-smile.

LARA  
That good, huh?

FARID  
And you're ice cold. Lara, what  
happened in there?

She hesitates. A beat too long.

LARA  
Adrenaline. Dust inhalation. I'm  
fine.

Farid doesn't believe a word, but chaos is unfolding – new wounded arriving, sirens blaring.

KELLER (40s), a hardened Major, storms over.

KELLER  
Doctor Eshkan! I heard you ran into  
a collapsing building again.

LARA  
He was alive. That's the job.

KELLER  
The job is triage – not suicide  
missions. You're benched for the  
next rotation.

Lara stands – sharply, defiantly – then stumbles. Her balance is off.

Keller sees it. His expression shifts.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
You're hurt.

LARA  
No. I'm not.

KELLER  
Then stop shaking.

Lara looks at her own hand – trembling out of her control.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ZERO – MAKESHIFT TENT – LATER

A temporary “quiet zone” tent. Dim lanterns cast soft, flickering light.

Lara sits alone on a cot, breathing heavily, forcing her hands to steady.

A SHADOW moves along the canvas.

She tenses.

The lantern flickers... then dims... then extinguishes.

The tent temperature drops instantly, frosting the breath in front of her.

THE REAPER (O.S., INSIDE HER SKULL)

A life restored.

A debt begun.

Lara turns. The Reaper stands in the corner, half-formed, like a silhouette made of dust and darkness. No one outside reacts – only she can see him.

LARA  
(under breath)  
Get away from me.

THE REAPER  
You invited me in.

LARA  
I saved a child. That's it. That's all.

THE REAPER  
You bartered years. Yours. They are taken.

Lara's breath hitches.

LARA  
How many?

The Reaper clicks open the pocket watch.

THE REAPER  
Time is not a currency you  
understand.

Lara steps toward him – anger cutting through her fear.

LARA  
Then teach me.

The Reaper's head tilts. Almost amused.

THE REAPER  
The first lesson:  
Every restored breath demands  
consequence.  
Suddenly–

A SCREAM outside.

Multiple screams.

Gunfire. Not distant – CLOSE.

Lara spins toward the tent flap.

When she turns back, the Reaper is gone.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ZERO – NIGHT

Chaos. Soldiers firing toward the northern perimeter.

CIVILIANS run for cover. MEDICS scramble.

Keller grabs Lara by the arm.

KELLER  
We've got movement in the grey zone  
– possible breach! Get inside! Now!

Lara pulls free.

LARA  
No. I'm not hiding.

She grabs a medical bag and runs toward the line of fire.

Farid chases after her.

EXT. PERIMETER WALL - CONTINUOUS

A FAMILY OF THREE is caught in open ground – they ran the wrong direction. Bullets tear the pavement around them.

Lara breaks into a sprint.

FARID

Lara! STOP!

She ignores him, sliding behind a burned-out truck for cover.

The family huddles thirty yards away – exposed, terrified.

Lara steels herself...

Her chest BURNS – like someone squeezing her heart.

She winces. Falters.

The Reaper's voice echoes faintly:

THE REAPER (V.O.)

Consequence...

But Lara grits her teeth, pushes through it, and dashes into open fire.

EXT. OPEN STREET - CONTINUOUS

A shell detonates near her. Shrapnel whistles past.

She reaches the family, throwing herself between them and the gunfire.

LARA

Go! Move! MOVE!

She pulls the youngest child into her arms and drives them toward cover.

Farid and two SOLDIERS lay suppressive fire.

Lara is almost to safety when–

POP!

A bullet grazes her side. She stumbles.

Another PRICE.

The Reaper's whisper is almost tender:

THE REAPER (V.O.)  
Breath... for breath...

Lara forces herself upright and pushes the family into safety behind the burned truck.

Farid grabs her, eyes wide.

FARID  
You're bleeding! Sit down!

LARA  
Later—  
(wincing)  
Is the line holding?

KELLER (O.S.)  
Barely!

Keller yells from down the barricade, firing bursts into the darkness.

Then — silence.

The gunfire stops. No movement beyond the smoke.

Everyone freezes.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
(whispering)  
Why'd they pull back?

Lara looks at the shadows beyond the perimeter.

And for the briefest moment...

She sees a figure standing motionless.

The Reaper. Watching.

Then he dissolves into the smoke.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ZERO - TRIAGE AREA - LATER

Lara sits while a medic cleans and bandages her side.

Farid watches her — concerned, studying her like a puzzle.

FARID  
Every time you push yourself past  
reason, something strange happens.  
You collapse. Or you freeze. Or the  
air just... changes around you.

Lara won't look at him.

FARID (CONT'D)  
Lara... what happened in that  
building?

Before she can answer—

KELLER  
We have orders.

Everyone turns.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
High Command is pulling us back to  
Base Echo.

We leave at dawn.

Lara's eyes flare with disbelief.

LARA  
No. Absolutely not. You pull out  
now, everyone in the grey zone  
dies.

KELLER  
They've made the call.

LARA  
They're wrong.

KELLER  
They're alive.

Lara steps forward.

LARA  
So are these people. They trust us  
to stay.

Keller's jaw tightens.

KELLER  
Pack your gear, Doctor. That's an  
order.

He walks off.

Lara trembles with fury, pain, and something deeper—

The knowledge that every life she saves now costs her pieces  
of herself.

Farid puts a hand on her shoulder.

FARID

Lara... what are you doing to  
yourself?

Lara doesn't answer.

Her eyes drift toward the far perimeter.

Toward the smoke.

Toward whatever she just invited into her life.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. ADMIN TENT - NIGHT

A single laptop flickers on a folding table. Maps, casualty reports, and coffee cups clutter the surface.

LARA stands in front of the screen, still bandaged, eyes hot with anger.

Onscreen: COL. MARLOWE (50s), crisp uniform, safe somewhere far from the front. The connection glitches, pixels tearing his face.

MARLOWE

I understand your concerns, Doctor,  
but the order stands. Checkpoint  
Zero is no longer strategically  
viable.

LARA

Strategically viable? There are two  
thousand civilians in the grey zone  
who only come to us because they  
trust we're not going to vanish  
overnight.

MARLOWE

We are consolidating assets at Base  
Echo. If they want safety, they can  
move south with you.

LARA

They can't "move south." Half of  
them can barely walk. The roads are  
mined. The other half will never  
leave their homes. You know that.

Marlowe's jaw tightens.

MARLOWE

We are not a charity. We are a mission. Missions adapt.

LARA

People don't "adapt" to artillery. They die under it.

A beat. Marlowe leans in.

MARLOWE

You've been awake how long, Doctor?

LARA

Two days. Maybe three. Who's counting.

MARLOWE

Stand down. Get some rest. At 0600 you're wheels up with the rest of the unit. That's final.

Lara's stare could cut metal.

LARA

Then the next report you get won't be from me. It'll be a body count.

He looks at her like she's a problem more than a person.

MARLOWE

Watch your tone.

The laptop time stamp GLITCHES – 02:11... 02:12... 02:40... 03:03... then snaps back to 02:13.

Lara notices. Her skin crawls.

LARA

Did you see that?

MARLOWE

See what?

LARA

The time. It just– jumped.

Marlowe glances off-screen, annoyed.

MARLOWE

Bandwidth lag. We're done here. Prepare your patients to move.

The call cuts.

The laptop screen goes black.

Lara stands there, heart pounding... feeling like something just stole forty minutes of her life and hid it behind the screen.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ZERO - COURTYARD - PRE-DAWN

Dark blue hour. The sky is bruised but not yet lit.

SOLDIERS move like ghosts, loading crates into trucks. ENGINES idle. Exhaust mingles with the cold air.

Lara moves through the chaos, her limp more pronounced. Farid walks beside her, carrying a clipboard and looking like he hasn't blinked in a week.

They reach KAZEM and his MOTHER, who huddle near an ambulance. The boy clutches a worn stuffed animal.

MOTHER

(pleading)

Doctor... they say we must go. But my husband is still in the city. If he comes back and we are gone-

LARA

(soft)

If you stay, you die. If you go, he has a chance to find you later.

Kazem looks up at her.

KAZEM

Are you coming with us?

Lara hesitates. Something in her chest tugs the other way-toward the broken skyline.

LARA

I'll be right behind you.

It's almost true.

Farid watches her closely.

MOTHER

Bless you. Bless you.

The woman pulls Kazem into the ambulance.

Farid lowers his voice.

FARID

That sounded a lot like a lie.

LARA

It's called triage. For the truth.

INT. SUPPLY TENT - PRE-DAWN

Stacks of medical kits, IV bags, morphine vials. The last of a collapsing lifeline.

Lara moves through the narrow aisle, stuffing extra supplies into a small duffel: chest seals, antibiotics, tourniquets.

Her hands shake less now. Maybe she's just too angry to tremble.

The tent lights flicker. The air temperature drops a few degrees.

Without turning, she knows.

LARA

If you're here to gloat, get in line. High Command beat you to it.

She turns.

THE REAPER stands at the end of the aisle, half-obscured in shadow, head nearly brushing the tent ceiling. Rags hang in tatters that never quite settle, like they're underwater.

THE REAPER

You are leaving your field.

LARA

Not my choice.

THE REAPER

All choices are yours. That is the burden of the living.

He steps closer. The medicines on the shelves seem to darken as he passes.

LARA

You said there's a cost. Fine. I get it. Years for a kid's heartbeat. But what good is any of this if an order can wipe out everyone I save?

The Reaper regards her. The pocket watch appears in his hand, ticking loud enough to feel in her teeth.

THE REAPER

You misunderstand our arrangement.

LARA

Enlighten me.

THE REAPER

I do not kill. I record. I balance.  
You, Doctor, tilt the scale.

LARA

By trading my life away one patient  
at a time.

THE REAPER

If you wish.

He tilts the watch; the hands spin backward for a moment, then stop.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)

Time is not coins, to be counted.  
It is probability. You have  
purchased deviations.

She steps closer.

LARA

What happens to the convoy?

A long silence. The Reaper's hood shifts as if he's listening to a far-off choir.

THE REAPER

There are many paths. Most end in  
fire.

Lara's gut clenches.

LARA

Then tell me how to bend it. You  
owe me that much.

THE REAPER

I owe you nothing. You signed  
without reading.

LARA

I didn't sign anything.

THE REAPER  
You said, "Whatever it costs."

He lets that hang between them.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
But I am.. curious.

Lara narrows her eyes.

LARA  
About what?

THE REAPER  
How much of yourself you are  
willing to burn to keep strangers  
alive.

He steps aside, revealing the flap of the tent and the  
forming convoy beyond.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
Walk your path, Lara Eshkan. I will  
keep the ledger.

He VANISHES – sucked out of the tent like smoke in reverse.

Lara stands alone with the duffel, breathing hard.

EXT. CONVOY STAGING AREA - DAWN

The horizon glows a dirty orange. A line of armored trucks,  
troop carriers, and two battered ambulances stretch across  
the road.

KELLER barks orders.

KELLER  
Truck One, you're point! Ambulance  
One, you sit behind the APCs. If  
you see anything that looks like a  
gift from God, assume it's the  
opposite and go around–

Lara approaches.

LARA  
We need more space in the medical  
vehicles. I've got criticals who  
can't handle that ride in the troop  
carriers.

KELLER

We're already overloaded.

Lara doesn't argue. She walks past him, opens the back of Ambulance One.

INSIDE: three critical patients and Kazem with his mother.

Not enough room.

She looks back at the civilians milling nearby, clutching small bags, eyes hollow.

Then she makes a decision.

LARA

(sharp, to nearby MEDIC)

You. Swap out that non-ambulatory in Truck Three. Transfer him here. Take two of the walking wounded out and put them with your squad.

MEDIC

We're full, Doc-

LARA

Then be fuller.

The Medic hesitates, then obeys. In war, tone outranks rank.

Farid appears, climbing into the ambulance.

FARID

I assume I don't get a vote in whether I ride in the death box with you.

LARA

You did. You missed it. Very narrow window.

He sighs, settling in, checking vitals.

FARID

Of course. My punishment for past sins is eternal residency at your side.

LARA

You're welcome.

Keller watches, frustrated but out of time.

KELLER

Mount up! We roll in two!

Engines REV. Metal GROANS as the convoy inches forward into formation.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF THE CITY - MORNING

The convoy moves through a corridor of ruins. Burned-out cars. Collapsed facades. The occasional corpse that no one had time to collect.

INSIDE AMBULANCE ONE - moving.

Lara rides up front in the passenger seat. A YOUNG DRIVER (19) grips the wheel too tight.

Farid is in back with the patients, visible in the rearview mirror.

DRIVER

You think they'll actually let us stay at Base Echo? I heard they rotate people out after three weeks. Ship 'em back home before they crack.

LARA

(staring ahead)

You planning your vacation already?

DRIVER

Just... thinking it'd be nice to sleep without things exploding.

She doesn't answer. Her eyes keep tracking the rooftops, the alleys, the windows.

Her fingers press unconsciously against the bandage at her side.

A faint, rhythmic TICKING starts. Not mechanical - inside her skull.

Lara winces.

LARA

(to herself)

Don't you dare.

She looks out the windshield-

Up ahead: the lead APC passes a section of road that looks... too clean. No debris. No shell craters. A fresh patch of asphalt like a bandaid.

Her chest seizes. Her breath cuts short.

THE REAPER (V.O.)  
(soft)  
Probability... converges.

LARA  
Driver. Slow down.

DRIVER  
We're supposed to keep pace—

LARA  
Now.

There's something in her face that brooks no argument. He eases off the gas.

Up ahead, the lead APC rolls directly over that suspicious patch.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A beat.

Then—

BOOOOOOM.

The APC ERUPTS in a column of fire and shrapnel. Shockwave slams back down the line.

The convoy skids to a halt. Vehicles collide.

INSIDE the ambulance, Lara's head cracks the dash. The driver screams.

From behind: another EXPLOSION as a truck hits a secondary IED.

Someone starts firing—return fire flashes in distant windows.

An AMBUSH.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Smoke. Fire. Screams.

Lara pulls herself out of the ambulance, ears ringing. Time feels slightly slowed – or maybe she's just operating faster now.

She takes in the scene:

- \* The lead APC is a burning husk.
- \* A troop truck is on its side, men crawling out.
- \* Bullets ping off armor from somewhere up in the ruins.

Keller, bleeding from a cut on his forehead, drags a RADIO OPERATOR toward cover.

KELLER

Contact left! Suppress and fall  
back! Go, go, go!

Lara looks at the overturned troop truck.

A SOLDIER inside is pinned beneath a twisted bench, legs crushed. He's bleeding out, eyes wild.

No one is going to reach him in time.

The ticking in her skull grows louder.

THE REAPER (V.O.)

One more thread... one more cut...

Lara staggers toward the wreck.

Farid grabs her arm.

FARID

Are you insane? They're bracketing  
us! We need to evacuate the wounded  
we have, not adopt new ones!

LARA

If he dies, the others in that  
truck lose their only gun. They're  
sitting ducks.

Farid glances at the man – clutching his rifle even as he bleeds.

Lara's eyes lock on the pinned soldier. Something like recognition passes across her face – not personal, but... strategic.

LARA (CONT'D)  
(quiet, to Farid)  
I think... I can get him back.

Farid stares at her, horrified and fascinated all at once.

FARID  
What are you talking about?

Bullets chew the pavement nearby.

KELLER (O.S.)  
Eshkan! Get down!

She doesn't.

EXT. OVERTURNED TROOP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Lara dives under the side of the truck, crawling up into the overturned interior.

Men groan, disoriented. One tries to raise his weapon.

LARA  
Save the ammo for the people trying  
to kill you.

She reaches the pinned soldier: HARRIS (25), pale, sweating, trying to be brave.

HARRIS  
Am I-

LARA  
Don't ask. Just breathe.

She checks his vitals. Not good. Very not good.

The ticking swells, deafening now.

The interior of the truck darkens. The air grows cold.

Lara knows he's here before she looks.

In the cramped, upside-down space, THE REAPER crouches like a spider, head twisted at an unnatural angle to avoid the ceiling.

The other soldiers don't react. They can't see him.

THE REAPER  
This one's strand is already  
frayed.

Lara swallows hard.

LARA  
Can I buy it?

The Reaper studies her. The pocket watch floats between his fingers.

For the first time, there's a hint of... admiration?

THE REAPER  
You offer years you do not know you own.

LARA  
That's everyone. All of the time.  
Answer the question.

A long beat.

THE REAPER  
(soft)  
Yes.

Lara looks down at Harris. His lips move in prayer or panic.

She places one hand on his bloody chest—and one hand over her own heart.

LARA  
Then do it.

INT. OVERTURNED TROOP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS - SUBJECTIVE

Sound drops out.

The world drains of color except for Lara, Harris, and the Reaper.

The watch opens. Instead of gears, Lara sees IMAGES inside:

- Her hands, older, covered in someone else's blood.
- A sunny room she's never seen, a child's laughter just off-camera.
- A hospital bed. Her. Alone.

Images flicker, then burn away like old film.

A ripping sensation in her chest.

The Reaper reaches forward and gently presses a finger over Lara's heart.

THE REAPER

A portion, then.

White HOT PAIN lances through her. She GASP-SCREAMS – no sound – and then–

EXT. OVERTURNED TROOP TRUCK – BACK TO REALITY

Lara slams back into the moment.

Gunfire roars. Men shout.

Harris suddenly SUCKS IN AIR like he's been underwater for a year.

Color floods back to his face. His pulse steadies under her fingers.

He looks at her, confused.

HARRIS

I... what happened?

Lara is drenched in sweat, breathing like she just sprinted miles. Her face looks subtly different – deeper lines at the corners of her eyes, a faint pallor.

LARA

You got... very lucky. Now pick up your rifle.

He does. The other soldiers scramble, repositioning.

Outside, Keller lays down suppressive fire.

Lara crawls back out of the truck.

Farid grabs her, eyes wide at her condition.

FARID

You look ten years older.

LARA

(flashes a grim smile)  
War ages you fast.

But even as she says it, she feels something sag inside her – as if a floor of her internal building just collapsed.

EXT. ROAD - AMBUSH SITE - LATER

The ambush is over. The attackers either retreated or got ground into the rubble - hard to say.

Smoke drifts. Bodies lie under hastily thrown tarps.

The convoy is reduced but still operational.

Keller oversees the last of the wounded being loaded.

He glances at Harris, now mobile and carrying his rifle again.

Then he looks at Lara - pale, exhausted, a thin streak of WHITE now visible in her dark hair at the temple.

He files that away.

KELLER

We lost two vehicles and seven men.  
Could've been a hell of a lot  
worse.

He looks around at the butchered road.

KELLER (CONT'D)

We're not stopping again until we  
hit Base Echo. Anyone falls behind,  
they're done. Clear?

Farid looks at Lara.

FARID

You heard the man. No more heroics.

Lara stares at the burning APC, at the scorched "clean patch" in the road.

She can still hear the echo of the Reaper's watch ticking under her pulse.

LARA

(quiet, to herself)  
No promises.

EXT. BASE ECHO - EVENING

A fortified compound carved out of an old industrial complex. High blast walls, guard towers, razor wire.

The convoy limps through the gates as they close behind them.

Inside, it almost looks like civilization. Floodlights. Generators. A mess tent. A chapel. A rec field.

The contrast feels obscene.

INT. BASE ECHO - FIELD HOSPITAL - NIGHT

New location, same chaos.

Lara moves through rows of cots, checking on patients transferred from the convoy.

Farid argues with a LOGISTICS OFFICER about supplies.

LOGISTICS OFFICER

We weren't scheduled for this many  
criticals. You blew the ratio.

FARID

Sorry, the artillery didn't read  
your memo.

Lara slips into a small side room: a break area with a cracked mirror above a sink.

She closes the door. For a moment, the noise outside muffles.

She grips the sink, breathing.

Looks up.

In the mirror, under the grimy fluorescent tube, she sees it clearly:

- The faint white streak in her hair.
- The deeper shadows under her eyes.
- The tiny tremor at the edge of her jaw.

She leans closer, almost daring her reflection.

LARA

How many of you did I give away?

Silence.

Then, in the mirror behind her - the Reaper's silhouette, standing in the doorway.

She spins.

The doorway is empty. No one there.

She looks back at the mirror.

He's gone from there too.

She laughs once – sharp, humorless – then splashes cold water on her face.

EXT. BASE ECHO – PERIMETER WALL – LATER THAT NIGHT

Lara stands alone on the wall, looking back toward the city. Distant flashes of artillery paint the horizon.

The wind whistles faintly over the blast barriers.

After a moment, another "shape" peels away from the shadows beside her: THE REAPER, leaning against the concrete as if he belongs there.

THE REAPER

The distance does not spare them.

Lara doesn't flinch anymore. She's too tired.

LARA

Yeah. I noticed.

THE REAPER

You think being here... behind higher walls... makes you less responsible.

LARA

Is this your version of small talk?

He watches the far-off explosions.

THE REAPER

There are ninety-three souls within your reach tonight who will die if events proceed as written.

Lara's throat tightens.

LARA

Within my reach. Meaning... if I went back.

THE REAPER

If you walked against orders.  
Against fear. Against... yourself.

She looks at her bandaged side, at her shaking hand, at the distant city.

LARA

And how many years would that cost?

The watch appears. Ticking. Always ticking.

THE REAPER

You bargain as if there is a fixed price.

(a beat)

You will not live as long as you might have. That is certain. But how you spend what remains... is still... negotiable.

Lara stares at the city until her eyes burn.

LARA

If you're keeping score, understand this: I'm not doing it for you. I'm not your errand girl.

THE REAPER

You are no one's.

He almost sounds approving.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)

Step back into the fire, Lara Eshkan, and you may save a few from my ledger. Step away, and you may save yourself.

She looks at him, really looks.

LARA

You keep saying that like saving myself is the point.

A long silence. The wind moans.

Lara makes her decision.

She turns away from the relative safety of the base and starts walking down the inner stairs with purpose.

THE REAPER (V.O.)

So noted.

He fades as she descends.

Off Lara, moving with grim determination toward a fight no one ordered her to join—

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE ECHO - MOTOR POOL - NIGHT

Floodlights hum over silent rows of armored vehicles. Most are locked down, tagged for inspection.

A LONE HUMVEE sits unattended, engine cold but keys dangling from the dash - someone got lazy during offload.

LARA approaches from the shadows, duffel slung over her shoulder, moving with quiet determination. She checks the windows. No guards nearby.

She opens the door-

VOICE (O.S.)

If you steal that, I'm absolutely telling on you.

Lara freezes.

FARID stands behind a stack of supply crates, arms crossed, glasses crooked, an expression that says he absolutely expected this.

LARA

Go back to sleep, Farid.

FARID

Sleep? Haven't heard that word in years. Now... are we going to have the argument, or are you going to pretend I didn't see you?

Lara climbs into the Humvee.

LARA

There's no argument. I'm leaving.

Farid approaches the door.

FARID

I know. Which is why I packed a trauma kit, three liters of saline, and the GOOD antibiotics in the back.

Lara blinks.

He climbs into the passenger seat without waiting for permission.

FARID (CONT'D)

You can thank me later. Preferably when we both survive.

Lara gives a micro-smile. It's gone almost instantly.

LARA  
You're an idiot.

FARID  
It's my most defining trait.

They share a look – the kind that confirms: They're in this together.

Lara starts the engine.

EXT. BASE ECHO – OUTER GATE – NIGHT

The Humvee rolls quietly toward the outer checkpoint. Two GUARDS approach the booth.

Lara lowers the window.

GUARD #1  
Orders?

Lara hands over a clipboard – a medical inventory sheet.

LARA  
Emergency supply run. Triage tent  
flagged shortages this afternoon.  
Command wants it fixed before  
morning rounds.

The guard scans it. Looks skeptical.

GUARD #1  
No one told us about this.

Lara leans forward, steely.

LARA  
Maybe ask yourself why command  
didn't trust you with the detail.

The guard stiffens reflexively, insulted.

Farid, deadpan:

FARID  
Also, if you delay a mission marked  
"critical," I'm required to perform  
a rectal exam on the nearest  
ranking officer.  
(beat)  
You're nearest.

The guard's face drains.

GUARD #1  
...Proceed.

Gate opens.

Farid gives a tiny bow as they pass.

EXT. RUINED HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Humvee crawls through the darkness, headlights off.  
Moonlight glints off broken concrete and twisted metal.

The city looms ahead - glowing intermittently as artillery  
flashes illuminate its skeletal remains.

Inside the cab, silence except the rumble of the road.

Farid finally speaks.

FARID  
You know the Reaper's probably  
enjoying this, right?

Lara tightens her grip on the wheel.

LARA  
This isn't about him.

FARID  
I didn't say it was. But you're  
burning the candle at both ends and  
then setting the table on fire. At  
some point, something's going to  
give.

LARA  
Good thing you came along to nag me  
about mortality while we rush into  
it.

FARID  
It's what I do.

The Humvee hits a patch of rubble - THUMP-THUMP - shaking  
them.

Farid glances at her bandage.

FARID (CONT'D)  
Side still hurting?

LARA

Like someone shoved a frozen knife  
in me and then left it there.

FARID

Charming.

Lara stares ahead, but she's sweating. Pale.

The ticking starts faintly... growing louder.

Farid notices.

FARID (CONT'D)

Lara... you hearing it again?

She swallows. Hard.

Suddenly, the HUMVEE LIGHTS FLICKER – the engine sputters.  
Electronics glitch.

LARA

Hold on–

The Humvee dies. Coasts to a stop.

EXT. RUINED HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The night goes unnaturally still.

Lara steps out, scanning the darkness. Farid follows,  
flashlight shaking in his hand.

FARID

If this is a mechanical failure, I  
want it registered that I blame you  
personally.

Lara ignores him. Something is off.

The wind stops. Dust hangs motionless.

Lara's breath fogs – a cloud in the cold.

LARA

(quiet)  
He's here.

Farid's flashlight flickers out.

FARID

Goddamn it–

He slaps it. Nothing.

Then a shape forms behind them.

THE REAPER.

Not hostile. Not friendly. Just inevitable.

THE REAPER  
Your path diverts.

Lara doesn't bother pretending she isn't terrified.

LARA  
You killed the engine?

THE REAPER  
Death halts motion. It is my  
nature.

Farid, trembling:

FARID  
Great. Fantastic. Physics with the  
Grim Accountant. Wonderful.

Lara steps forward.

LARA  
If you came to warn me off—save the  
poetry. I'm not turning around.

The Reaper clicks open the watch.

Inside, the gears glow faint gold — then flicker red.

THE REAPER  
Your next choice affects more than  
your years.  
(a beat)  
It affects mine.

Lara arches a brow.

LARA  
Yours?

For the first time, something in the Reaper's posture shifts  
— irritation? Frustration?

THE REAPER  
You are rewriting trajectories  
faster than I can reconcile.  
(MORE)

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
 (cold)  
 It is... inconvenient.

Farid whispers:

FARID  
 Oh God. She's giving Death an  
 administrative headache.

Lara ignores him.

LARA  
 If you don't want me saving people,  
 stop me. But you won't. Because on  
 some level, you want to see how far  
 I'll go.

The Reaper leans close. Face still hidden, but presence  
 crushing.

THE REAPER  
 I want balance, Lara Eshkan.  
 Nothing more.

LARA  
 Then stay out of my way.

Silence hangs like a blade.

Finally – the Reaper gestures.

The Humvee's lights flicker back on. Engine roars to life.

THE REAPER  
 Drive, then.

A beat.

Three breaths from now, everything changes.

Farid looks horrified.

FARID  
 Everything?!

THE REAPER  
 Three.

He dissolves.

Lara dives into the driver's seat.

THE REAPER (V.O.)  
 Two.

She slams the Humvee into gear.

THE REAPER (V.O.)

One.

EXT. APPROACH TO THE GREY ZONE - NIGHT

BOOOOOOOM.

A massive explosion ahead lights up the skyline.

The ENTIRE HORIZON briefly becomes white fire.

Lara jerks the wheel, stopping the Humvee atop a rise.

Farid climbs out, stunned.

FARID

...What in God's name—

In the distance, a huge plume of smoke billows upward. A neighborhood — one of the densest in the grey zone — is gone. Flattened.

LARA

They shelled it.

(her voice cracks)

They shelled the civilians' quadrant.

Her knees almost buckle.

Farid steadies her.

FARID

We get there. We do what we can.  
That's all we've ever done.

Lara wipes her eyes, furious.

LARA

He said ninety-three would die tonight.

She stares at the inferno.

He was wrong.

Farid looks at her, confused.

FARID

Lara...

She climbs back into the Humvee.

LARA  
Because I'm not letting a single  
one more die.

EXT. GREY ZONE - OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

The Humvee barrels down shattered streets, weaving around  
debris.

Smoke chokes the landscape; flames lick collapsed buildings.

Screams echo between the ruins - dozens, maybe hundreds.

Farid clutches the dash.

FARID  
Okay-this is... significantly worse  
than last time.

LARA  
Get ready. We're going straight  
into the center.

FARID  
We're both going to die.

LARA  
Probably. Grab the defib kit.

He groans loudly but reaches for the gear.

EXT. DESTROYED APARTMENT BLOCK - NIGHT

They arrive at ground zero.

The building is a smoking crater. Civilians wander in shock.  
Some cry. Some dig with bare hands.

Children scream for their parents. Parents scream for their  
children.

This is hell.

Lara jumps out, shouting-

LARA  
If you can walk, form a line! If  
you can't walk, shout your  
location! Farid - triage point  
there!

Farid sets up in the shadow of the Humvee, instantly surrounded by wounded.

A WOMAN grabs Lara's coat, frantic.

WOMAN

My husband—he went inside before  
the second hit! He hasn't come out!

Lara looks at the barely-standing skeleton of the inner structure.

LARA

Point me.

The woman gestures.

INT. COLLAPSED INTERIOR - NIGHT

Lara climbs inside — coughing through thick dust.

Half the building is missing. Steel rods hang like rib bones. Smoke curls along the ceiling.

She hears faint banging. A trapped survivor.

She moves toward it, weaving through the unstable wreckage.

Her flashlight beam catches—

A CHILD (7), half-buried, eyes wide.

Lara races to him.

LARA

Hey—hey—look at me. What's your  
name?

CHILD

Samin...

LARA

Okay, Samin. I'm going to get you  
out. I need you to stay very still.

She pulls debris away — but a slab is pinning his leg.

Ticking begins again.

She grimaces.

LARA (CONT'D)

Not now.

The Reaper fades into view at the end of the corridor, half-shrouded.

THE REAPER

The structure will fall in nineteen heartbeats.

Lara snarls.

LARA

Then hold it up!

THE REAPER

I do not intervene. I only measure.

Her fury flares.

LARA

Then measure this.

She digs deeper, throwing debris. She wedges a support beam under the slab.

THE REAPER

Sixteen heartbeats.

LARA

Shut up.

She pumps the jack. Concrete groans.

THE REAPER

Thirteen.

Sweat pours down her face. Her hands shake. She's losing strength.

A memory flickers – Zoe, from earlier images – no, someone else. A woman's voice:

VOICE (V.O.)

"Lara, everything ends. What matters is what you do before it does."

She roars, forcing the slab upward.

THE REAPER

Four.

Lara yanks the child free, scooping him into her arms.

She sprints for the exit—

## THE REAPER (CONT'D)

One.

The entire corridor gives way.

The ceiling collapses behind her as she leaps through a gap—

THOOMPH — a cloud of debris shoots out the doorway.

She barely makes it.

EXT. DESTROYED APARTMENT BLOCK — CONTINUOUS

Lara bursts out with Samin, covered in dust.

Civilians rush to her, taking the child.

Farid stares at Lara — stunned — because something is different:

A second streak of white now cuts across her hair.

And beneath the dirt, her skin looks slightly older again — like she's fast-forwarding through years one rescue at a time.

He whispers:

FARID

Lara... how much are you giving  
away...?

Lara watches the civilians gather around Samin — alive, crying, breathing.

Her voice is barely a whisper.

LARA

As much as it takes.

She looks back at the smoking ruin — then at the dozens still screaming inside it.

She picks up her medical bag.

Moves back toward the flames.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. GREY ZONE - MAKESHIFT TRIAGE - DAWN

First light seeps through a choking haze of dust and smoke.

A rough triage area has sprung up around the Humvee: tarps stretched over broken rebar, bloodied blankets on the ground, IV bags hanging from rusted poles.

LARA moves between patients like a ghost - exhausted, streaked with soot, hair now threaded with two distinct white streaks.

FARID works beside her, face gray with fatigue, barking orders at VOLUNTEERS and OLDER KIDS drafted into service.

FARID

(to a teenager)

Keep that pressure steady - you're holding his artery in, not fluffing a pillow.

The kid nods, trembling, doing as told.

Lara finishes stapling a ragged scalp wound on a middle-aged MAN.

MAN

(dazed)

You... you were inside when the building fell. How did you-

LARA

Don't move your head for twenty-four hours. Or ever. I'm not picky.

She gets up, limping toward the next screaming voice.

A WOMAN clutches her as she passes.

WOMAN

Doctor... they say you walked out of the fire with my neighbors' boy. They say you can't die.

Lara freezes for half a second.

She pulls free gently.

LARA

Everyone dies.

WOMAN

Not like the rest of us.

Lara forces herself to move on.

EXT. GREY ZONE - PERIMETER STREET - CONTINUOUS

Lara steps away from the triage for a moment, just to breathe.

The city around her is a bleeding ruin – buildings like snapped teeth, streets cratered, the sky a dirty bruise.

She leans against a half-standing wall, closing her eyes.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Doctor Eshkan?

She looks up.

A YOUNG MAN (20s), civilian, dusty but intact, holds out a cup of steaming tea.

YOUNG MAN  
We boiled the water. It's... probably  
only half toxic.

She takes it, surprised.

LARA  
Thanks.

YOUNG MAN  
They're saying...  
(awkward, but sincere)  
They're saying you pulled people  
back from the dead.

She stares at him, unreadable.

LARA  
People say a lot of things when the  
world's ending.

He nods, embarrassed – but his eyes never leave her. Awe mixed with fear.

As he walks off, Lara watches him join a group of survivors. They glance back at her, whispering.

She's become a story.

EXT. BASE ECHO - COMMAND TENT - SAME TIME

A large digital map glows on the table. Red and blue icons blink across the city.

COL. MARLOWE studies it, tight-lipped.

KELLER stands opposite, uniform dusty, forehead stitched.

A LOGISTICS OFFICER and a RADIO TECH linger nearby.

RADIO TECH

Humvee Seven left the motor pool at  
0200 on an unscheduled supply run.  
Never checked back in.

Marlowe taps a tablet - pulls up a still frame from a security camera: Lara and Farid in the Humvee.

MARLOWE

How far out?

RADIO TECH

Last ping was just inside the grey  
zone perimeter, then it went dark.

KELLER

She stole a truck and went back  
into the kill box. Of course she  
did.

Marlowe glances up at him.

MARLOWE

You're not surprised.

KELLER

Honestly, sir, I'm surprised it  
took her this long.

Marlowe exhales slowly.

MARLOWE

Doctor Eshkan is not combat  
personnel. She's a civilian  
contractor. If she dies out there,  
we wear it.

KELLER

With respect, sir, if we drag her  
back here in cuffs, we wear that  
too. With two thousand civilians  
screaming our name.

Marlowe's jaw clenches.

MARLOWE

You think I care about optics right now?

KELLER

I think you care about morale. And right now she's the only one they talk about like she's not a walking funeral.

A beat.

Marlowe stares at the map – the grey zone blinking like an infected organ.

MARLOWE

Assemble a retrieval unit. Small, fast, low profile. You lead it.

Keller nods.

KELLER

Rules of engagement?

Marlowe looks sharply at him.

MARLOWE

Bring her back alive. And if she's turned that place into an unauthorized outpost, you shut it down.

Keller doesn't like the second part, but salutes anyway.

EXT. GREY ZONE – TRIAGE AREA – LATER (DAY)

The sun is an anemic glare through the smoke.

The triage is busier. Word has spread. More CIVILIANS gather with makeshift stretchers, carrying wounded from surrounding blocks.

Lara moves through the chaos, checking pulses, stitching wounds, calling for fluids.

Farid joins her, shoving a protein bar into her hand.

FARID

Eat. Or I start inserting calories intravenously.

She eyes it like it's a personal insult, then takes a bite.

LARA  
Status?

FARID  
We're out of morphine. Down to  
local lidocaine and creative lying.  
Saline is half gone. I'm pretty  
sure that last IV bag was actually  
dish soap.

Lara wipes sweat from her brow.

She spots a SMALL ALTAR on a nearby crate: candles, a few  
religious icons – and in the center, a hand-drawn sketch of a  
woman with a stethoscope surrounded by flames.

It's crude, but unmistakably her.

She walks over, staring at it.

LARA  
What is this?

A YOUNG WOMAN fussing with the candles looks up, startled.

YOUNG WOMAN  
We... we made a place to say thank  
you. For the ones you brought back.

Lara's jaw tightens.

LARA  
Blow those out. It's a fire hazard.

The young woman looks hurt.

YOUNG WOMAN  
But–

LARA  
(blunt)  
I'm not a saint. I'm a very tired  
doctor with a stolen truck and a  
questionable relationship with  
painkillers. Don't pray to me. Pray  
for more gauze.

The young woman hesitates, then slowly blows out the candles.

Farid watches, eyes sharp.

FARID

You realize you just shut down your own cult.

LARA

Good. Last thing I need is people thinking I can decide who lives.

She walks away, but her face is tight.

EXT. GREY ZONE - ALLEYWAY NEAR TRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Lara steps into a narrow alley, away from eyes.

She braces a hand against the wall, breathing hard.

The ticking begins again – faster, more insistent.

LARA

(under her breath)

Don't. Not now.

The alley darkens as if a cloud passed overhead, but the sky is clear.

THE REAPER appears at the far end, half-silhouetted by the smoky light.

THE REAPER

They build shrines. They whisper stories. They shift probability with belief.

Lara doesn't turn to face him.

LARA

I didn't ask them to.

THE REAPER

You altered the pattern. The pattern responds.

She finally looks at him, eyes blazing.

LARA

Your pattern is broken. Somebody had to do something.

He tilts his head.

THE REAPER

You believe I write the pattern.

LARA  
Don't you?

THE REAPER  
I read it.

He steps closer. Her breath frosts.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
But where you walk, the ink smears.

Lara's voice is tight.

LARA  
Good. Let it smear.

A long beat.

THE REAPER  
Every life you deviate generates...  
turbulence. For you. For me. For  
others.

LARA  
Then help funnel it. Or get out of  
the way.

He seems to consider that.

THE REAPER  
The ledger does not care what the  
living think of you. But they will  
not stay satisfied with miracles.  
They will ask why you did not save  
the ones you let go.

That one lands.

Images flash in Lara's mind:

- The boy she didn't reach in time.
- The patients she had to tag as expectant.
- The faces of the dead.

Her jaw tightens.

LARA  
I already live with their ghosts.  
You're just new decoration.

She steps around him, back toward daylight.

THE REAPER

(softly)

You are not the first to bargain,  
Lara Eshkan.

A beat.

You might be the first to argue.

She stops – just for a fraction.

Then keeps walking.

EXT. BASE ECHO – MOTOR POOL – DAY

KELLER checks gear on a small armored patrol vehicle –  
lighter than an APC, heavier than a Humvee.

Three SOLDIERS strap in:

HARRIS (the resurrected rifleman), VEGA (30s, sniper), and  
ROWE (20s, driver).

Harris slams a fresh mag into his rifle.

HARRIS

Permission to speak freely, Major?

KELLER

No. Do it anyway.

Harris glances up.

HARRIS

If Doctor Eshkan's out there, those  
people... they might actually have a  
shot. Should we really be dragging  
her back?

Keller looks at him for a long moment.

KELLER

I don't like this any more than you  
do. But command needs their medic,  
not a martyr with a fan club.

Harris hesitates, then:

HARRIS

Respectfully, sir... she brought me  
back when there was nothing left to  
bring back.

Keller studies him, a flicker of something troubled.

KELLER

She gave you a second chance. Don't waste it arguing with me.

He climbs into the front.

KELLER (CONT'D)

We retrieve her. We assess the situation on the ground. After that...

(beat)

...we improvise.

Harris nods, satisfied enough.

The engine ROARS to life.

EXT. GREY ZONE - TRIAGE AREA - AFTERNOON

The worst of the morning rush has passed. For the moment, there is a lull.

Lara sutures a gash on a teen girl's leg. The girl bites on a strip of cloth, eyes watering.

Farid sits on an overturned crate, finally taking a second to drink water.

A LOCAL MAN in his 50s, wearing an improvised armband that marks him as some kind of neighborhood organizer, approaches.

LOCAL MAN

Doctor. We're setting up lookouts on the roofs. If the shelling comes again, we need a plan.

Lara nods, finishing the stitch.

LARA

You get any warning, you move the non-ambulatory down into basements. Spread the rest out. No clusters. No lines. You make it hard for them to hit more than five at once.

He nods, impressed.

LOCAL MAN

They speak of you already. They say the soldiers tried to take you away but you ran back into the fire.

She shrugs, annoyed.

LARA  
They're bad at keeping me where  
they put me.

LOCAL MAN  
(smiles)  
We've been bad at that, too. For  
years.

He moves off.

Farid watches her.

FARID  
You know the revolution always  
starts with someone who didn't plan  
to become a symbol.

LARA  
I'm not a revolution.

FARID  
Tell that to the altar.

Before she can retort—

A low RUMBLE builds. Not artillery this time.

Engines.

They both look up.

EXT. GREY ZONE - APPROACHING STREET - CONTINUOUS

The RETRIEVAL VEHICLE appears through the smoke — the light armored patrol truck led by Keller, flanked by two smaller escort jeeps.

They roll slowly, guns scanning rooftops.

Civilians freeze. Some panic. Others just stare.

EXT. TRIAGE AREA - CONTINUOUS

Lara's posture tightens. She recognizes the silhouette of the vehicle instantly.

Farid mutters:

FARID

Ah. The adults have arrived.

The truck stops just short of the triage. Soldiers dismount, weapons at low ready but not pointed.

Keller steps forward, helmet off, trying to project calm authority.

KELLER

Doctor Eshkan.

Lara doesn't salute. Obviously. She wipes her hands on a bloody towel instead.

LARA

Major.

Around them, CIVILIANS edge closer, protective of "their" doctor.

Keller takes in the makeshift clinic, the crowd, the scars on Lara's face, the new streaks in her hair.

He looks older just seeing it.

KELLER

You stole government property, disobeyed a direct order, and established an unapproved forward aid station in a hot zone without support.

Farid raises a hand.

FARID

Technically, I stole the good antibiotics. She just stole the truck.

Keller ignores him.

KELLER

I'm here to escort you back to Base Echo.

The civilians murmur, uneasy.

Lara's voice is low but firm.

LARA

These people have nowhere else to go.

KELLER

We're arranging transport corridors  
from the south-

LARA

They won't make it. They can't even  
make it to the next street without  
someone bleeding out.

Keller's jaw tightens.

KELLER

Doctor, I don't have the luxury of  
feelings. I have orders.

A CHILD nearby - Samin - clutches his mother's hand and pipes  
up, small but clear:

SAMIN

You can't take her.

Everyone goes silent.

Keller looks at the kid, then back at Lara.

KELLER

I am not here to hurt anyone.  
(a beat)  
But if this place takes a direct  
hit again and we're not here to  
support it, every life in this  
square is on our conscience.

Lara steps closer.

LARA

You mean yours.

That stings.

EXT. TRIAGE AREA - CONTINUOUS - WIDER

The Reaper stands at the edge of the crowd, invisible to all  
but Lara.

He watches the standoff like a spectator at a chess match.

His voice drifts coolly:

THE REAPER (V.O.)

Two forces. Duty and defiance. The  
board tilts.

Lara's eyes flick toward where he stands... then back to Keller.

LARA

You bring me back, you pull the only doctor out of a bleeding artery.

(gesturing)

You want me at Echo so your casualty reports look cleaner. You want me here so your conscience does.

Keller doesn't snap back. He looks... tired.

KELLER

I want you alive.

They hold each other's gaze.

Farid clears his throat.

FARID

If it helps, I would also like to vote "alive" on the Doctor Eshkan question.

Keller glances at him, then at the civilians.

Something in his stance softens.

KELLER

We can't fortify this place. We don't have the manpower. We can spare ammo and supplies, maybe a small detail for a short time. That's it.

Lara seizes on that.

LARA

Then do that. Rotate a squad. Drop crates. Give them a radio that actually works. Don't turn your back on an entire district because the spreadsheet says "non-viable."

He looks at her, frustrated – because she's right and they both know it.

EXT. TRIAGE AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Keller paces, thinking, while Vega and Harris watch the perimeter.

VEGA eyes the civilians, then Lara.

VEGA  
(quiet, to Harris)  
That her? The miracle doc?

Harris nods.

HARRIS  
Last time I saw her, I was dead.

Vega gives him a sidelong look.

VEGA  
You sure you're not just bad at diagnosis?

He doesn't answer. His eyes are haunted.

Nearby, the Reaper drifts past Harris, pausing. He inclines his head, studying him like a misfiled document.

THE REAPER (V.O.)  
Out of sequence. Interesting.

Lara senses it - turns sharply, eyes locking on the empty space near Harris.

Keller finally stops pacing.

KELLER  
Okay. Here's what I can authorize.

He points:

KELLER (CONT'D)  
We leave one jeep, two soldiers, and a crate of supplies. They help you stabilize this position for twenty-four hours. After that, they rotate out. No promises beyond that.

Lara considers.

LARA  
And me?

KELLER

You come back to Echo. You resupply. You rest. And then we talk about how this...  
(gestures around)  
...can exist without you dying in the process.

Her expression hardens.

LARA

You think I haven't already started dying?

Keller looks at her – really looks – seeing the accelerated wear, the streaked hair, the tremor she hides.

It rattles him.

KELLER

I think whatever you're doing to yourself... you're not done yet.

A long beat.

Farid leans in.

FARID

Lara... we could actually use more supplies. And maybe medical staff who don't talk to invisible auditors.

She gives him a look.

He shrugs.

FARID (CONT'D)

What? If we're negotiating with warlords in uniforms, may as well aim for more bandages.

The corner of Keller's mouth twitches. Almost a smile.

EXT. TRIAGE AREA - LATER

A small compromise in action.

SOLDIERS help erect sturdier tarps. A crate of ammunition and medical supplies is unloaded.

Locals work alongside them, forming bucket brigades for rubble clearing.

Lara updates a hand-drawn map with Farid, marking damage clusters.

Keller watches, talking quietly with Vega and Harris.

VEGA

We're really leaving them here,  
sir?

KELLER

We're not leaving. We're dividing.  
There's a difference.

Harris looks at Lara – at the way civilians gravitate toward her.

HARRIS

Feels like... I don't know. Like the  
front line moved and no one told  
us.

Keller glances at him.

KELLER

The front line is wherever people  
are bleeding and no one's writing  
it down.

He looks back at Lara.

KELLER (CONT'D)

Right now, that's here.

EXT. TRIAGE AREA – EDGE OF THE SQUARE – SUNSET

The sky bleeds red through the smoke. For the first time all day, the guns are quiet.

Lara stands at the edge of the square, looking out at the shattered streets beyond – the city still full of people she hasn't reached.

The Reaper stands beside her like a dark reflection.

THE REAPER

You chose to divide your defenders.

LARA

I chose to multiply our chances.

He studies her.

THE REAPER

You bargain with soldiers as you  
bargained with me.

LARA

Difference is, they get to argue  
back.

He almost sounds amused.

THE REAPER

Do you think you are winning?

She watches a small cluster of kids chasing a salvaged soccer  
ball between rubble piles – laughing, somehow.

LARA

I think I haven't lost yet.

A long silence.

THE REAPER

The ledger is not simple, Lara  
Eshkan. Lives saved here ripple  
elsewhere. A soldier who does not  
die today kills many in another  
tomorrow. An old woman spared in  
this street births a child whose  
war will be worse.

She closes her eyes, pained.

LARA

If I try to do math like that, I  
stop moving.

THE REAPER

Perhaps you should.

Her eyes snap open.

LARA

I'm not a god. I'm not a prophet. I  
can't see the grand design. I can  
only see the hole in a kid's chest  
and the time it takes him to bleed  
out.

Her voice cracks.

LARA (CONT'D)  
 So I'll keep putting my fingers in  
 the leaks, one by one, until I run  
 out. If you want to call that  
 imbalance, go file a complaint.

He regards her for a long time.

THE REAPER  
 You accuse me of cold arithmetic.  
 Yet you, too, choose who receives  
 your hands and who receives your  
 silence.

She flinches – because it's true.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
 Tell me, Lara Eshkan... how will you  
 live with the ones you did not buy?

Her eyes glisten.

LARA  
 Same way I live with the ones I  
 couldn't save before you. Badly.

She turns away from him – back toward the square, toward  
 Farid, Keller, the patients.

LARA (CONT'D)  
 You keep the ledger. I'll keep the  
 names.

The Reaper's hood angles downward, as if in grudging respect.

As she walks away, he fades into the lengthening shadows.

Off the square – a fragile little island of defiance in a sea  
 of death, holding for now–

FADE IN:

INT. ENEMY FORWARD COMMAND - NIGHT

A dark, reinforced room buried under sandbags and concrete.

Maps pinned to boards. Old computers. A weathered radio bank.  
 The air is thick with cigarette smoke.

GENERAL RAZIM NADER (50s) stands over a table, studying  
 aerial RECON PHOTOS. Hard eyes. Precise movements. A man who  
 views cities as equations.

An AIDE (30s) hovers nearby, nervous.

On the photos:

- The GREY ZONE before the last strike.
- The same area AFTER the strike, a crater.
- And now, new images: a cluster of tents, vehicles, and ant-like figures.

A growing TRIAGE CAMP.

AIDE  
Satellite confirms new activity in  
Sector Delta-Seven.  
(points)  
Here. Civilian concentration.  
Tents. Vehicles. Heat signatures  
beyond expected.

Nader flicks ash into an overfull tray.

NADER  
They were shelled yesterday.

AIDE  
Yes, sir. Casualty models projected  
eighty to ninety percent fatality.

Nader taps the photo.

NADER  
And yet...

He picks up a printed report.

NADER (CONT'D)  
(interested)  
"Survivor density exceeds  
projection by a factor of three."  
(beat)  
Someone's keeping them alive.

The aide is unsettled.

AIDE  
Humanitarian doctors, perhaps. Or-

NADER  
No. This pattern is... persistent.  
(points at multiple  
circles)  
(MORE)

NADER (CONT'D)  
 Every time we clear a grid, this  
 cluster reappears. Like mold.

He straightens.

NADER (CONT'D)  
 Mark this as a priority target. Not  
 just to break bodies. To break...  
 morale.

AIDE  
 Understood, sir. Full battery?

NADER  
 No. Something... precise. Enough to  
 erase this anomaly without wasting  
 shells.

He studies the photo of the triage – a tiny rectangle amid  
 ruins.

NADER (CONT'D)  
 Whoever is disrupting attrition  
 there...  
 (a slight smile)  
 ...I want them gone.

EXT. GREY ZONE - TRIAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

The square is calmer. Lanterns glowing. Wounded sleeping.  
 Occasional coughs, muffled sobs.

LEILA (30s, Samin's mother) organizes a line of WOMEN filling  
 canteens from a salvaged water tank.

YARA (17, the girl with the stitched leg) limps between cots,  
 delivering blankets.

KAREEM (30s, thin, tired, holding a baby) helps Farid lift a  
 wounded man onto a pallet.

Lara checks a few patients, then steps back, just... observing.  
 Seeing the system start to work without her hands on every  
 piece.

For a second, she looks almost... proud.

EXT. GREY ZONE - SIDE STREET NEAR TRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Farid and Kareem haul a makeshift stretcher away from the  
 main square.

On it: a MAN in tattered military uniform, late 20s, pallid, clutching his side. Bandages soaked with blood.

He bears the insignia of the enemy artillery corps.

They duck into a partially collapsed SHOPFRONT.

INT. COLLAPSED SHOPFRONT - CONTINUOUS

Dim. Dust motes swirl in shafted moonlight.

Farid and Kareem set the stretcher down.

The wounded man, QASIM (28), grits his teeth.

QASIM  
(weak, accented)  
Should've left me. My commander...  
he'd shell this place twice if he  
knew you dragged me in.

Farid kneels, checking the wound.

FARID  
Good news: he doesn't know. Bad  
news: you're bleeding like it's on  
trend.

Kareem hovers, wary.

KAREEM  
He's one of them.

Qasim tries to sit up, pained.

QASIM  
Not anymore.

Farid shoves him gently back.

FARID  
Saving lives is above my paygrade  
for moral sorting. You're bleeding,  
I patch. That's the contract.

Farid digs into his kit, working.

FARID (CONT'D)  
Who were you with?

Qasim hesitates. Sweat beads his brow.

QASIM  
 Artillery. Third battery. Under  
 General Nader.

Farid's hands slow.

FARID  
 Nader.  
 (a beat)  
 The one who shelled this sector  
 yesterday.

Qasim nods, breath ragged.

QASIM  
 He thinks this district... harbors  
 fighters. Says civilians are...  
 necessary sacrifice.

Kareem's jaw clenches.

KAREEM  
 My wife died in that "sacrifice."

Qasim won't meet his eyes.

QASIM  
 I objected. Once.  
 (weak laugh)  
 Now I am here.

Farid tightens a bandage – Qasim winces.

FARID  
 You deserted.

QASIM  
 I ran when the second volley hit.  
 Shell landed short.  
 (he gestures to his side)  
 Friendly fire. Poetic.

Farid weighs something.

FARID  
 What does Nader know about us?

Qasim closes his eyes.

QASIM  
 He has pictures. Listens to  
 intercepted calls. There was talk  
 of... a doctor... in the ruins.  
 (MORE)

QASIM (CONT'D)  
One who keeps casualties from  
"settling" the numbers.

Farid's face hardens.

FARID  
A "doctor in the ruins." Great.  
She's officially a glitch on the  
enemy spreadsheet.

QASIM  
He says he'll erase your camp.  
Completely. No time for rescue. No  
time for screams.

Kareem stiffens.

KAREEM  
You need to tell Lara.

Farid shakes his head.

FARID  
If I tell her, she'll walk into the  
shells to try to catch them.  
(beat)  
We need intel. How, when, from  
where.

Qasim's breath grows shallower.

QASIM  
Battery moves often. Harder to  
find. But...  
(struggling)  
...they like patterns. Same angles.  
Same arcs. They think...

He coughs, blood flecking his lips.

Farid leans closer.

FARID  
They think... what?

QASIM  
They think God is on their side.

Farid snorts bitterly.

FARID  
God must have lousy aim.

Qasim grabs his wrist.

QASIM

If Nader knows survivors cluster here... he will not leave you a place to cluster.

He slumps back, breath shallow.

Kareem swallows.

KAREEM

If this is true—

FARID

It's true enough to scare me.  
That's all it needs to be.

He finishes stabilizing Qasim as best he can.

FARID (CONT'D)

We keep him here. Quiet. Away from soldiers.

(to Kareem)

You... watch him. If he crashes, you shout. Loud.

Kareem nods.

KAREEM

And Lara?

Farid hesitates, then:

FARID

If the bombs start falling, she'll know. She always does.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

Lara stands atop a broken COLUMN, addressing a small group: Leila, Yara, Kareem (back from the shop), and a few OTHER LOCALS.

A hand-drawn MAP of the immediate blocks is spread over a crate.

LARA

If shells hit again, we move on three paths: here, here, and here. Basements, subway access, sewer tunnels—whatever holds a ceiling.

Leila points.

LEILA

This building... it floods when it rains.

LARA

Then nobody goes there. Cross it off.

Yara limps forward.

YARA

The rooftop two blocks east—good sightline. I can go. If they start lining up artillery, we see the flashes.

Lara shakes her head.

LARA

Your leg's half sutured and you still owe me three days of bedrest.

Yara lifts her chin, stubborn.

YARA

And you owe yourself a month. But here we are.

Lara's lips twitch. She gives a tiny nod.

LARA

Fine. You go. But you take a spotter and you come down at the first whiff of incoming.

Yara grins — proud to be useful.

Kareem speaks up, baby asleep against his chest.

KAREEM

People are scared, Doctor. They hear rumors. Some say the shelling is punishment because you defy what's "meant to happen."

Lara's jaw tightens.

LARA

It's not punishment. It's tactics. You're not sinners. You're targets.

Leila looks at her.

LEILA

And you?

Lara holds her gaze.

LARA

I'm just the idiot who stayed.

Leila nods slowly.

LEILA

Then we stay too.

Around them, heads nod. A fragile consensus. A small rebellion.

Off to the side, at the edge of torchlight—

THE REAPER watches, arms folded in his tattered rags, like a judge at a trial no one else can see.

His watch ticks faster.

INT. BASE ECHO - COMMAND TENT - SAME TIME

Marlowe stares at a fresh intel packet.

A liaison officer from higher command, CAPTAIN DYKSTRA (40s), stands stiff at attention.

DYKSTRA

Enemy movements indicate a concentration of artillery barrels repositioning north by northeast. Vector aligns with—

MARLOWE

Sector Delta-Seven.

Dykstra nods.

DYKSTRA

Grey zone. Same one that took yesterday's hit.

Marlowe's eyes flick to Keller's last report on his tablet: "UNOFFICIAL FORWARD TRIAGE ESTABLISHED. LOCAL COOPERATION HIGH. CASUALTY REDUCTIONS SIGNIFICANT."

He exhales.

MARLOWE

Lara...

Dykstra continues.

DYKSTRA

Higher is concerned about resource drain. They recommend "non-interference" with enemy attempts to reclaim contested zones.

Marlowe looks up sharply.

MARLOWE

"Non-interference."

DYKSTRA

We don't broadcast locations. We don't reinforce with additional hardware. We accept losses where the map is already red.

Marlowe's jaw works.

MARLOWE

Doctor Eshkan and my Major are in that red.

Dykstra's expression doesn't change.

DYKSTRA

Then they are aware of the risks.

Marlowe stares at him for a long beat.

MARLOWE

Patch Keller through.

EXT. GREY ZONE - OUTSKIRTS, KELLER'S POSITION - NIGHT

Keller stands by the parked jeep, radio pressed to his ear. Vega and Harris keep watch.

MARLOWE (V.O.)

(over radio, filtered)

...do not attempt to extract unless you are already in motion when the barrage starts. We will not cover you.

Keller's eyes go cold.

KELLER

So we leave them?

MARLOWE (V.O.)  
We... do not impede enemy fire. That  
is the language they used.

Keller hears the subtext.

He looks out toward the faint glow of the triage camp.

KELLER  
Copy, sir.

He lowers the radio, jaw tight enough to crack.

Harris watches him.

HARRIS  
What did they say?

Keller stares a moment longer.

KELLER  
They said the map doesn't care  
about names.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LATE NIGHT

Everything feels... on edge.

Lara stands in the center of the square, looking up at the  
sky.

The air feels thicker. Charged.

Farid approaches, dark circles under his eyes.

FARID  
The deserter's stable. For the  
moment. He has a charming  
personality and a bullet wound that  
disagrees.

Lara turns.

LARA  
Deserter?

Farid realizes he just stepped in it.

FARID  
...Surprise?

She studies him.

LARA  
Where?

INT. COLLAPSED SHOPFRONT - MOMENTS LATER

Lara kneels beside Qasim, studying his bandages, his face, the insignia.

LARA  
Artillery?

Qasim nods weakly.

QASIM  
You are... the doctor who should have left.

Lara gives a humorless smile.

LARA  
You deserters always this good at PR?

He coughs, grimacing.

QASIM  
Your name is on the radio. They call you... disruption. An anomaly. Nader. He... does not like anomalies.

Lara's eyes narrow.

LARA  
Good. I don't like war criminals.

Farid shoots her a look.

FARID  
He also said the quiet part: Nader will try to erase us completely. No near-misses, no half-collapses. Just... gone.

Lara looks back at Qasim.

LARA  
How would you do it?

Qasim forces his eyes open.

QASIM  
Wait until you think today's strikes were the worst.

(MORE)

QASIM (CONT'D)

Then hit at night, when the wounded  
are still. Sleep makes for cleaner  
counts.

Lara's jaw clenches.

LARA

Sweet.

QASIM

Nader believes in... clean lines. No  
survivors to tell stories.

Lara stands, mind racing.

LARA

Then we don't sleep.

Farid pinches the bridge of his nose.

FARID

Of course not. Why rest when we can  
flirt with psychosis as a group  
activity?

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - PRE-DAWN

A restless stillness.

Civilians doze lightly, boots on, bags packed. Kids nest in  
corners.

Sentries on rooftops, including YARA and another YOUNG MAN,  
scan the horizon.

Leila sits with other women, prepping bandages from torn  
sheets.

Keller's jeep is parked on the edge, engine off, Keller  
pacing.

He looks like a man waiting for a train he knows is coming -  
he just doesn't know when.

The Reaper stands on a half-toppled statue, looking down at  
the square like a king surveying a fragile kingdom.

His watch ticks faster than ever.

Lara approaches him, exhausted but steady.

LARA

It's coming, isn't it?

He doesn't pretend otherwise.

THE REAPER  
The breach approaches.

LARA  
How many this time?

He looks across the square.

THE REAPER  
If the pattern holds... seventy-  
three.

Her eyes close briefly.

LARA  
And if it doesn't hold?

His gaze returns to her.

THE REAPER  
Then I do not know. And that... is  
why we are here.

A beat.

LARA  
I'm not bargaining with you this  
time.

He tilts his head.

THE REAPER  
You would let them die to spare  
your years?

LARA  
No.  
(beat)  
I'm going to try to save them  
without cheating. And if the  
universe doesn't like that...

Her voice shakes.

LARA (CONT'D)  
...it can file a complaint too.

For the first time, something almost like... apprehension...  
passes through his posture.

THE REAPER

You are destabilizing the ledger  
enough as it is.

LARA

Good. Maybe it needed  
destabilizing.

EXT. ROOFTOP OVERLOOKING TRIAGE - SAME TIME

Yara scans through binoculars.

The horizon is eerily quiet. No muzzle flashes yet. Just low,  
distant thunder.

YOUNG MAN

Maybe they won't come.

Yara lowers the binoculars, eyes tired but sharp.

YARA

They always come.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

A low, distant THUMP.

Lara's head snaps up.

Another THUMP. Closer.

Keller steps into the center, shouting:

KELLER

INCOMING! MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!

Chaos - controlled chaos - erupts.

Leila starts ushering people toward the pre-marked routes.

LEILA

Basement teams! Now! Grab who you  
can!

Farid grabs his kit, running toward the most vulnerable cots.

FARID

If you can walk, carry someone who  
can't!

Lara stands still for one beat, counting breaths.

The ticking in her skull is deafening.

The Reaper's voice is low, almost... pleading.

THE REAPER (V.O.)  
Lara. You cannot intercept an  
entire storm.

She opens her eyes.

LARA  
Watch me.

The first shell screams in.

WHIEEEEEEE--

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

BOOOOOOM.

The blast hits at the edge of the square, hurling debris. A building façade collapses, showering stone.

Lara is thrown off her feet, lands hard, ears ringing.

Slow motion:

- Kids blown backward.
- A tarp ripped from its poles.
- A lantern spinning through the air.

Lara's vision doubles. The world wavers... like bad reception.

Then--

A STRANGE GLITCH.

The blast rewinds two seconds.

The façade RISES BACK UP. Debris reverses. Lantern returns to its hook.

Sound warps.

We're back to:

- Kids still running.

– Tarp still up.

– No explosion yet.

Lara sucks in a breath, eyes wide.

LARA

...No.

The Reaper appears beside her, alarmed for the first time.

THE REAPER

What did you do?

She staggers to her feet.

LARA

I– I didn't–

Time SNAPS FORWARD again.

The shell hits – but slightly off. Instead of the center, it obliterates a wall further out, sparing several cots.

Still hell. But different hell.

Keller stares, disoriented. Deja vu thrums through the air.

Farid collapses to his knees, overwhelmed.

FARID

I– I swear that building already  
fell–

Another WHISTLING SHELL.

Lara's heart slams.

Her vision flickers:

– one version of the square with bodies down,

– another with different bodies down,

– overlays of carnage as if possibilities are crowding each other.

She clutches her chest, gasping.

LARA

Stop... stop–

The Reaper grabs her shoulders – his hands actually touching her for the first time, solid, cold.

THE REAPER  
You are cracking it.

LARA  
Cracking what?

THE REAPER  
The sequence.

BOOOOOM – another shell hits, this time overhead, dropping a section of roof toward a cluster of people.

Lara moves before it falls – like she already saw it.

She dives, shoving Leila and Kareem out of the way.

The roof section slams into the ground where they stood a split-second before.

Leila stares at her, stunned.

LEILA  
You– how did you–

Lara's eyes are wild.

She looks up at the sky.

Time seems to stutter, the clouds jumping like frames out of order.

The Reaper's voice is tight, almost angry.

THE REAPER  
You refused the terms. You reach beyond your purchase.

LARA  
I didn't make a deal!

THE REAPER  
Exactly.

He looks... shaken.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
You have done something irreversible.

Another shell screams in– closer, louder–

We freeze on Lara, caught between multiple overlapping futures, the square fracturing in her vision–

SMASH TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS AFTER BLACK

Silence.

Then—

A HIGH-PITCHED RINGING bleeds in.

Dust hangs in the air like snow in hell.

Shapes flicker — people running, people frozen, people doubled.

The world is a half-glitched broadcast.

LARA rises slowly. Her vision lurches:

three versions of the square phasing over each other.

She blinks — and sees:

— Version A: Yara is dead on the rooftop.

— Version B: Yara is wounded but alive.

— Version C: Yara is screaming for help.

The images overlap.

Lara grabs her head, staggering.

LARA  
(whisper)  
No... no, no, no—

THE REAPER appears inches from her face — closer than he's ever stood.

His voice is low, tight, dangerous.

THE REAPER  
You are seeing too much.

Lara looks around, horrified.

LARA  
What's happening—?

He grips her arm. His fingers sink through her skin like smoke that still burns.

THE REAPER

Reality does not like being argued with.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - DIFFERENT ANGLES

KELLER sprints through debris, shouting to Vega.

KELLER

Check north flank for survivors—  
MOVE!

Vega nods, but hesitates — her eyes flicker with disorientation.

VEGA

Major...  
(beat)  
Did that hit twice?

Keller doesn't answer. He feels it too.

HARRIS helps an elderly woman stand.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(confused)  
I dreamed a building fell on me...

Harris freezes. Because that building did fall — in one timeline. He saw debris rise and fall differently.

He looks toward Lara — suspicion and awe mixing.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LARA & REAPER - CONTINUOUS

Lara pants, gripping her chest. The ticking in her skull is a runaway train.

LARA

I didn't do anything!

THE REAPER

You violated the sequence. You refused the cost but reached for the power.

LARA

I didn't reach for anything!

The Reaper circles her like a storm given legs.

THE REAPER

Your will sought a path. The world  
bent to avoid your grief.

(beat)

That is not a gift.

It is a tear.

Lara looks around, seeing triple layers of carnage and almost-carnage.

LARA

Then stitch it! Fix it!

He stops.

THE REAPER

I cannot.

(quiet)

Because you caused the tear inside  
yourself.

Lara's breath catches.

Farid rushes up, coughing.

FARID

Lara! Lara— you okay?!

She looks at him — but sees two Farids overlapped:

one bleeding, one intact.

She sways.

LARA

Farid... don't move.

FARID

Why—?

A chunk of concrete CRASHES where he would have stepped — in one timeline.

Farid jumps back, shaken.

FARID (CONT'D)

Okay. New rule. I don't move unless  
you tell me.

EXT. ROOFTOP - SAME MOMENT

YARA (one version of her) lies unconscious, leg pinned by rebar.

But as reality stutters—

– she blinks awake,

– then vanishes,

– then reappears, screaming.

A beat later, she stabilizes – alive, trapped, bleeding.

KAREEM rushes to her from the adjacent roofline, shouting for help.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LARA - CONTINUOUS

Lara hears Yara's scream echo three different ways.

She sprints for the stairwell.

THE REAPER

Do not climb. Your body is  
unstable—

Lara ignores him.

EXT. ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

Yara cries out as Lara reaches her, dropping to her knees.

The rebar is wedged deep.

YARA

I saw myself die—  
(tears)  
Doctor, I saw—

LARA

(shaky, gentle)  
Look at me. Look at me— you're  
here. Right now. With me.

Yara tries to breathe.

YARA

Which "me" is with you?

Lara's eyes dampen – because she has no answer.

LARA  
Hold still.

Kareem arrives, terrified.

KAREEM  
I thought you- I thought-

Lara motions him to help stabilize Yara.

She braces herself.

LARA  
On three.  
(beat)  
One-

She PULLS on "one." Quick, brutal.

Yara screams - but the rebar slides free.

Kareem stares.

KAREEM  
You didn't count two or three.

Lara wipes sweat from her brow - angry at herself.

LARA  
I couldn't risk my hands shaking on  
the other numbers.

Behind them, The Reaper appears on the far edge of the roof,  
watching in judgment.

EXT. ENEMY FORWARD COMMAND - DAWN

A reconnaissance DRONE FEED displays the grey zone - smoke,  
but not annihilation.

General Nader frowns.

AIDE  
Sir... expected destruction levels  
not achieved.

Nader leans close.

NADER  
Impossible.

He zooms in: civilians evacuating, smoke clearing, the triage  
still functioning.

Then he sees Lara – tiny in the frame, but moving with purpose.

NADER (CONT'D)

There.  
 (points)  
 The anomaly.

The aide hesitates.

AIDE

Sir, she appears to be... just a woman.

Nader smiles – cold, thin.

NADER

Nothing is "just" in war.  
 (beat)  
 Prepare a barrage.

A real one this time.

The aide's eyes widen.

AIDE

A full battery strike? Sir– that will flatten half the civilian block.

NADER

Yes.  
 (smiles)  
 But in return, we eliminate the variable.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - DAWN AFTER STRIKE

Everything is smoke, grit, bruised light.

Lara descends from the rooftop, limping slightly.

Keller meets her halfway.

He looks shaken – but trying to mask it.

KELLER

What happened out there?

Lara hesitates.

LARA

Shells. Collapse. Bad physics.

Keller steps closer.

KELLER

Don't insult me. I watched a wall  
rise and fall in two different  
ways.

(beat)

I'm a soldier, Lara. I don't scare  
easy.

(quiet)

But that scared me.

She looks past him – seeing three versions of Keller  
flickering for a split frame.

LARA

You need to pull your people back.

KELLER

We're not leaving these civilians.

LARA

You don't have a choice. Your  
command already cut you loose.

Keller stiffens.

KELLER

How do you–

She nods toward his radio.

LARA

I overheard.

(beat)

Or... saw you overhear. It's  
complicated.

Keller studies her – concern deepening.

KELLER

Lara... what's happening to you?

She struggles for words.

LARA

I think I broke something.

(beat)

Inside myself. And outside the  
world.

Keller doesn't look away.

KELLER  
Then we fix it.

She almost laughs – exhausted, bitter.

LARA  
It's not a Humvee, Keller.

KELLER  
Everything is fixable until it  
kills you. And even then,  
sometimes...

He glances at Harris, who stiffens, uncomfortable.

Lara's eyes soften – for a moment.

Until another vision slams into her:

- A future Keller, dead on the square.
- Another Keller, wounded but alive.
- Another, abandoning the camp.

She gasps.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
Lara?

She steadies herself.

LARA  
Your choices matter more than usual  
right now.

KELLER  
They always matter.

LARA  
Not like this.

INT. COLLAPSED SHOPFRONT – SAME TIME

Qasim convulses. Kareem panics, yelling for Farid.

Farid rushes in.

FARID  
Okay, okay–

Qasim grabs Farid's arm, desperate.

QASIM

Nader...

(strained)

...isn't finished. He will erase this place. Entire block. No survivors—

FARID

We know. We know—

QASIM

No. Not barrage.

(beat)

Full battery. Saturation fire.

He wants the doctor.

He thinks she... bends outcomes.

Farid goes pale.

FARID

He thinks she's a weapon.

Qasim nods, trembling in pain.

QASIM

He thinks she's a fairy tale.

He exhales sharply — and passes out.

Kareem looks at Farid, terrified.

KAREEM

Tell Lara.

Farid shakes his head — terrified.

FARID

If I tell her, she'll stand in the center of the square and try to catch artillery with her bare hands.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - DAWN LIGHT SHARPENS

Lara, Keller, Harris, Vega, Farid, Leila — all converge in the square as civilians gather anxiously.

The Reaper stands on a toppled slab, silent, watching.

Lara senses him — and turns.

LARA  
Tell me how to stop this.

THE REAPER  
You cannot.

LARA  
Then tell me how to survive it.

THE REAPER  
You cannot.

Her hands tremble.

LARA  
Then what do I do?

The Reaper's voice is quiet, almost mournful.

THE REAPER  
Choose the losses you can bear.

Lara's jaw tightens – fury boiling.

LARA  
No.  
(beat)  
I choose NO losses.

For the first time, the Reaper looks... afraid.

He steps closer.

THE REAPER  
Then the world will break you.

Lara leans in, trembling with exhaustion and rage.

LARA  
Then let it try.

A LOW, FAR THUNDER rumbles across the sky.

But it's not weather.

It's artillery repositioning.

Keller looks up, dread forming.

KELLER  
...That's not good.

Farid runs to Lara, breathless.

FARID

We've got intel- Nader's prepping a full battery strike. Saturation. He wants everything gone. Us. The wounded. The square. You-

Lara's breath catches.

The civilians collectively inhale in fear.

LEILA

(full of dread)

What do we do?

Lara looks across the square - at every face: wounded, old, children, exhausted fighters of life who didn't sign up for any of this.

Reality flickers again - split frames of futures where they all die.

Her hands shake violently.

The Reaper whispers:

THE REAPER

Your next act will define us both.

And Lara steps forward into the center of the square-

...knowing the next 10 pages will either make her a martyr, a miracle, or something the ledger has never seen before.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. ENEMY ARTILLERY RIDGE - PRE-DAWN

A battery of MASSIVE ARTILLERY GUNS sits on a ridgeline like blunt, smoking fingers pointed toward the city.

Crews load SHELLS with mechanical efficiency.

GENERAL NADER stands at an observation point, binoculars raised. The distant city flickers with sporadic fires.

His AIDE consults a tablet.

AIDE

Battery calibrated. Wind minimal.  
Full saturation of grid Delta-Seven  
on your command.

Nader lowers his binoculars. His face is calm, almost bored.

NADER

The anomaly is still there?

The aide nods.

AIDE

Drone confirms. Human concentration  
remains above projected  
survivability.

Nader's jaw twitches.

NADER

Then today we fix the projections.

He raises a hand.

NADER (CONT'D)

On my mark.

Beat.

Fire to erase all variables.

He drops his hand.

The guns ROAR – a deafening, rolling thunder. Barrels recoil,  
smoke belches.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - PRE-DAWN

The square vibrates with distant concussions.

LARA stands in the center, eyes scanning the faces gathered  
around: LEILA, YARA (bandaged, on crutches now), KAREEM with  
his baby, FARID, KELLER, HARRIS, VEGA, dozens of CIVILIANS.

The air feels electrically charged.

LARA

Listen up!

Voices die. All eyes on her.

LARA (CONT'D)

This isn't a maybe. It's coming.

(beat)

So we do what we always do: move  
fast, carry each other, and make  
the math harder for the bastard  
with the map.

A few nervous chuckles.

She points, rapid-fire.

LARA (CONT'D)  
Route One – basements and tunnels.  
Leila, you lead. Get the non-ambulatory down first.

Route Two – south alley shelter. Kareem, you're point. Take anyone who can move under their own steam.

She turns to Yara.

LARA (CONT'D)  
You're off rooftops. You run messages. If a corridor collapses, you redirect.

Yara opens her mouth to protest.

YARA  
But–

LARA  
No glamor, all survival. Are we clear?

Yara nods, swallowing.

Farid edges closer.

FARID  
And what about you?

LARA  
I'm everywhere.

He hates that answer.

FARID  
Try to narrow it down. The universe is already confused.

Keller steps up.

KELLER  
My squad splits. Harris with Leila. Vega covers the south route from the rooftops. I stay with the doc.

Lara gives him a look.

LARA

You sure you want to tie your fate  
to mine? I'm not exactly trending  
"low risk."

KELLER

Somebody has to yell at you when  
you do something suicidal.

FARID

Get in line.

Another distant BOOM. Closer.

The ground trembles.

The Reaper stands at the edge of the square, half in shadow,  
watching like a referee for a game no one agreed to play.

His watch ticks in manic staccato.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

Controlled chaos.

Lines of CIVILIANS, some carrying the wounded, stream toward  
marked exits.

Leila directs traffic.

LEILA

Basement group, with me! No shoving  
— if you push, we bottleneck and  
die!

Yara limps between groups, shouting updates.

YARA

The north stairs are blocked! Use  
the east stairwell! Don't stop—!

Kareem adjusts the baby sling, then hoists an older man's arm  
over his shoulder.

KAREEM

You walk, I carry both of us. Deal?

The man nods, shaking.

Farid rushes from patient to patient, checking bandages,  
slapping awake those slipping toward shock.

FARID  
 If you're conscious,  
 congratulations, you've been  
 drafted into the "carry someone"  
 program-move!

Lara stands in the middle, turning, scanning, her pupils  
 dilating strangely.

She's seeing more than one version of the square.

Her POV:

– Version 1: A shell hits the south route, killing Kareem and  
 twenty others.

– Version 2: The north exits collapse, trapping the non-  
 ambulatory.

– Version 3: A stray round hits the rooftop, killing Vega and  
 Yara.

All there at once, overlapping.

Lara grips her head.

LARA  
 Stop. Stop..

The Reaper appears beside her – closer than ever, almost  
 desperate.

THE REAPER  
 You cannot see all paths and remain  
 whole.

LARA  
 Then narrow them.

THE REAPER  
 That is not my role.

She rounds on him, eyes blazing.

LARA  
 Then whose is it?

He studies her for a painful beat.

THE REAPER  
 Yours.

EXT. ENEMY ARTILLERY RIDGE - SAME TIME

The guns fire in a deadly rhythm.

Spent shells clatter to the ground.

Nader watches a tablet displaying a simplified grid overlay. Each shell's target flashes as a pulsing dot.

AIDE

First volley impacting in twenty seconds.

Nader's voice is calm.

NADER

Then let's see if the anomaly survives mathematics.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - BUILDING TENSION

The whine of incoming shells rises like ripping metal in the sky.

WHIEEEEEEE--

Keller grabs Lara's arm.

KELLER

We need to get you under cover--

Her eyes are far away, tracking invisible possibilities.

LARA

If I hide, they bottleneck at the basements. If I go south, Kareem dies. If I send Yara back up, the roof collapses.

Keller stares.

KELLER

You're guessing.

She looks at him - and he sees it: she's not guessing. She's seeing.

LARA

No. I'm not.

He swallows.

KELLER

Okay. Then pick the least bad future.

Her jaw clenches.

LARA

They all have bodies in them.

The Reaper's voice threads the air.

THE REAPER

Choice collapses the wave.

Lara's head snaps his way.

LARA

What?

THE REAPER

Until you act, infinite patterns exist. When you choose, the others die unborn.

(beat)

You cannot save them all. You never could.

Tears burn in her eyes.

LARA

I know.

She turns back to the chaos.

LARA (CONT'D)

(to Keller)

You trust me?

He doesn't hesitate.

KELLER

Unfortunately, yes.

LARA

Then when I move, you move. No questions.

Another shell SCREAMS overhead.

EXT. TRIAGE - FIRST IMPACTS

BOOOOOOM.

A shell obliterates a building on the north side – exactly where one of her “versions” predicted.

Lara’s vision-glitch settles for half a beat. She chose wrong for someone. Right for others.

Screams.

Dust wave.

HARRIS  
(shouting)  
North flank hit! I’ve got  
survivors!

Lara sees, in another flicker, a version where Harris dies trying.

She grabs Keller.

LARA  
GO! Cover him! Now!

Keller sprints with two soldiers toward the north, laying covering fire at imagined threats.

Farid drags a stunned woman away from falling debris.

FARID  
If you can scream, you can move!  
That’s the deal!

Another incoming.

Lara sees it – three branches:

- Branch A: Shell hits the south route, kills Kareem & baby.
- Branch B: Shell hits the center, kills Leila & a cluster of wounded.
- Branch C: Shell hits an empty building if she can get the people clear in time.

She spins, breath heaving.

LARA  
LEILA! GET OFF THE SOUTH ROUTE—  
NOW!

Leila doesn’t question. She starts shoving people sideways, redirecting the stream.

LEILA  
Move! Change line! CHANGE LINE!

KAREEM  
What—?

LEILA  
Just MOVE!

Lara stumbles toward the center, screaming:

LARA  
CLEAR THE SQUARE! HUG THE EAST  
WALL!

People run, trip, drag each other.

The Reaper watches, fascinated and horrified.

THE REAPER  
You are carving the pattern with  
your fear.

LARA  
Whatever works.

WHIEEEEEEE—  
The shell slams into a mostly empty  
SOUTH BUILDING — shaking the earth,  
shattering windows, but missing the  
bulk of the evacuees.

Shockwave knocks people down but doesn't wipe them out.

It's still hell. But a hell with more survivors than math  
allows.

EXT. ENEMY ARTILLERY RIDGE - SAME TIME

The aide stares at the monitor.

AIDE  
Impact patterns... slightly off, sir.

Nader's eyes narrow.

NADER  
Casualty density?

The aide works numbers, horrified.

AIDE

Lower than projected. Again.

(beat)

Sir... this isn't possible without  
foreknowledge of impact points.

Nader clenches his jaw.

NADER

Then they have foreknowledge.

His eyes harden.

NADER (CONT'D)

Either intelligence leaks... or they  
have a seer.

The aide half-laughs, then sees Nader isn't joking.

EXT. TRIAGE - THIRD WAVE

More WHISTLES. More IMPACTS.

Lara's body moves on instinct, guided by the horrible gift:

– She pushes a kid left before a falling beam crushes the  
spot where he stood.

– She yanks Farid back just as a shard of metal spears the  
air where his throat was a heartbeat "ago."

– She screams at Vega on the roof.

LARA

VEGA DOWN— NOW!

Vega doesn't argue. She throws herself flat as a shell  
detonates above, shattering the parapet where she'd been  
standing.

Chunks of concrete explode around her.

Vega coughs, stunned.

VEGA

(over radio)

Okay, I vote we listen to the witch  
doctor from now on—

On the ground, Keller fires toward a distant muzzle flash,  
then glances back — seeing Lara in the middle of an  
impossible dance with death.

The Reaper stands within arm's reach, watching her bleed years with every decision.

His voice is low.

THE REAPER

This is not what your bargain bought.

She doesn't look at him.

LARA

Then send me a bill.

Her knees buckle. Her skin is ashen. New fine lines etch around her eyes. Another streak of white threads through her hair.

Farid sees her sway.

FARID

Lara! You're burning up!

LARA

I don't have time to burn. Keep them moving!

EXT. TRIAGE - LULL

Abrupt silence.

No more whistling shells.

Just ringing ears, groans, crackle of fire.

The smoke drifts, revealing a square that is broken... but still there.

Two buildings gone. One collapsed alley. Many wounded.

But far fewer bodies than there should be.

Leila stares around, dazed.

LEILA

We're... we're still here.

Kareem clutches his baby, crying quietly.

KAREEM

Thank God...

Farid looks at Lara – and almost doesn't recognize her.

She looks a decade older. Cheeks hollowed, posture stooped with invisible weight. Her hands tremble uncontrollably now.

FARID  
You traded again.

LARA  
(shakes head)  
I didn't... I didn't say yes this time.

The Reaper steps closer, watch in hand.

THE REAPER  
You did not bargain.  
(beat)  
You simply... bent.

He opens the watch.

Inside, the gears are SPARKING, jumping backward and forward, skipping teeth. The hands spin erratically.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
The ledger is... rewriting itself.

Lara sways.

LARA  
Is that... bad?

THE REAPER  
For you.  
(beat)  
For me.  
(beat)  
For everyone who thinks tomorrow is owed to them.

A small girl clings to Lara's leg, sobbing.

Lara looks down, stunned she didn't even feel her approach.

GIRL  
You... you moved us... like in a story..

Lara kneels, barely.

LARA  
I just yelled. You moved yourselves.

The girl shakes her head.

GIRL  
No. You knew.

The crowd's eyes slowly drift toward Lara – awe mingled with fear.

Whispers ripple.

SURVIVOR #1  
She knew where they'd hit...

SURVIVOR #2  
She walks where death hasn't walked yet...

SURVIVOR #3  
She's not just a doctor.

Lara's stomach drops.

LARA  
No. Don't start–

Leila steps forward, voice trembling but strong.

LEILA  
You saved us.

LARA  
I didn't save all of you.

She looks at the bodies being covered at the edges of the square.

LEILA  
No one could.  
(beat)  
But without you, there would be no one left to cover.

That lands.

Keller watches, caught between respect and concern – hearing the birth cry of a myth.

The Reaper's tone is almost bitter.

THE REAPER  
I told you belief distorts.

Now you will learn what it means to be distorted.

EXT. ENEMY ARTILLERY RIDGE - SAME TIME

The guns go silent.

Nader stares at updated casualty estimates. His knuckles are white.

AIDE

Sir... city sensors indicate  
survivorship in Delta-Seven at-  
(beat)  
-over forty percent.

Nader closes his eyes briefly. Rage simmers.

NADER

They are not dying correctly.

The aide doesn't know what to do with that.

NADER (CONT'D)

Where is our humint on the ground?

AIDE

We lost contact with most cells.  
Some radio chatter mentioned.. "a  
woman who walks between shells."

Nader opens his eyes.

NADER

A story.

AIDE

Stories move people, sir.

Nader finally smiles, thin and cruel.

NADER

Then we will tear out the story.

He taps the tablet, zooming on a still of the triage - one frame where LARA stands in the middle of a shell-battered square, alive.

NADER (CONT'D)

I want a squad moved into the  
ruins. Quietly. Find her.  
(beat)  
Bring me the anomaly.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LATER

The immediate panic has shifted into frantic work.

SOME tend to the wounded. OTHERS clear debris. Soldiers and civilians labor side by side.

Keller stands with Harris and Vega, watching Lara as she moves through the aftermath – pausing occasionally, disoriented, like she's hearing echoes no one else can.

HARRIS

Sir... did you see...?

Keller nods slowly.

KELLER

Yeah. I saw.

VEGA

This level of survival? That wasn't tactics. I've run numbers my whole life. This?

(shakes head)

This is... wrong.

Harris glances at Keller.

HARRIS

What do we tell Base Echo?

Keller looks toward his radio. Then toward the people.

After a beat, he picks up the handset.

EXT. KELLER'S JEEP - CONTINUOUS

Keller steps a bit away, composes himself, then keys the radio.

KELLER

Base Echo, this is Zero-Three. Come in.

Static. Then MARLOWE'S voice crackles through.

MARLOWE (V.O.)

Zero-Three, this is Echo. Report status.

Keller looks back at the bustling triage – wounded but alive, civilians moving.

Then he looks at Lara, bent over a patient, hair streaked with white.

He makes a decision.

KELLER  
Sector Delta-Seven experienced full  
battery saturation.  
(beat)  
Forward triage was...  
(beat)  
...destroyed.

Marlowe is silent for a beat.

MARLOWE (V.O.)  
...Confirm. No survivors?

Keller's throat tightens.

He watches Leila hand bandages to Yara. Farid smack a soldier awake. A kid kick a dented can like a soccer ball.

KELLER  
(low)  
Confirm. No organized presence.  
Area is... non-viable.

Silence. Then:

MARLOWE (V.O.)  
Copy, Zero-Three. Return to Echo  
when able.

Keller stares at the radio.

KELLER  
...Negative, Echo. Vehicle damaged.  
Comms intermittent. Will advise  
when mobile.

He clicks off.

Vega approaches, eyebrows up.

VEGA  
So. We're dead now.

KELLER  
Officially.

Harris looks uneasy.

HARRIS

Sir, that's—

KELLER

—The only way Command doesn't turn this place into someone else's problem.

(beat)

We hold here. Off the books. As long as we can.

Vega smiles, grimly impressed.

VEGA

Congratulations. You just defected without moving.

EXT. TRIAGE - EDGE OF SQUARE - SAME TIME

Farid knots a bandage tight, then pushes to his feet, knees cracking.

He spots Lara sitting on a broken step, alone for the first time in hours.

He weaves through the crowd to her.

Up close, she looks wrecked — hands trembling so badly she has to press them between her knees.

FARID

You look awful.

LARA

You always know what to say.

He sits beside her with a groan.

FARID

You know, when I became a medic, I pictured boring clinics and maybe the occasional dramatic car accident. Not... whatever the hell this is.

She stares at her hands.

LARA

I saw them, Farid.

(beat)

All the versions where I didn't get there in time. Where Samin died. Where you... didn't.

He goes still.

FARID

Me?

She nods, eyes welling.

LARA

You die a lot, apparently.  
(tries to joke, fails)  
Terrible survival instincts.

Farid swallows.

FARID

But I'm here.

She nods, tears spilling over.

LARA

Because I chose you over someone  
else in one of those branches.  
(beat)  
There's blood on that choice either  
way.

He watches her, face softening.

FARID

Lara... I don't know what you're  
becoming.  
(beat)  
But I know what you are.

She looks at him, vulnerable.

FARID (CONT'D)

You're the one in the square when  
everyone else runs.

He shrugs.

That counts for something.

She huffs a broken laugh.

LARA

It counts for gray hair.

He squints.

FARID

On you? Works. "Distinguished  
battlefield witch-doctor."

She elbows him weakly.

EXT. TRIAGE - QUIETER CORNER - TWILIGHT

The sun is a faint smear behind the smoke.

Lara steps away from the noise, toward a collapsed wall near the square's edge.

The Reaper waits there, half-merged with shadow.

THE REAPER

You lied to your commander.

She doesn't jump anymore when he speaks.

LARA

It was Keller's lie. I just benefitted.

THE REAPER

You hide a pocket of life inside a war that wants it gone.

He tilts his head.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)

Do you know what happens to pockets?

LARA

They get turned inside out?

A faint, reluctant pause. If he could smirk, he would.

THE REAPER

They get noticed.

She leans against the wall, exhausted.

LARA

Nader will come?

THE REAPER

He is already coming.

(beat)

He is not like you. His ledger is made of numbers, not names.

She looks at him.

LARA

What about yours?

He looks away.

THE REAPER  
Mine was numbers once.

That surprises her.

LARA  
What changed?

He studies her – genuinely, almost painfully curious.

THE REAPER  
You did.

They share a quiet, uneasy beat.

LARA  
If I keep doing this... what happens  
to me?

The Reaper opens the watch again.

This time, instead of gears, she sees a faint REFLECTION of herself – older, hollow-eyed, surrounded by overlapping ghost images of the same square.

THE REAPER  
You may not die as you were meant  
to.  
(beat)  
You may not live as the living  
understand it.

Her voice is barely a whisper.

LARA  
What does that even mean?

THE REAPER  
It means you are walking toward a  
place my book has no page for.

She swallows.

LARA  
And if I stop?

He closes the watch.

THE REAPER  
Then the war continues as it always  
has.

Children die on schedule.

Men like Nader write clean reports.

She looks back at the square – at Leila comforting a child, at Yara limping but alive, at Keller working beside Kareem to shore up a wall.

Lara's answer is simple.

LARA

Then I don't stop.

A long, heavy silence.

The Reaper watches her like someone watching a star about to go supernova.

THE REAPER

You are not the first to defy  
death, Lara Eshkan.

(beat)

But you might be the first to drag  
it with you.

She straightens, despite the tremors.

LARA

Good. He should get out more.

She walks back toward the people – toward work, toward the next impossible decision.

The Reaper lingers in the shadows, watch ticking unevenly.

Off the square – scarred, defiant, very much alive – as unseen enemy ground forces begin slipping through the ruined streets toward them..

CUT TO:

EXT. RUINED STREETS - NIGHT

Shattered buildings loom like broken teeth.

SHADOWS move with purpose – NADER'S STEALTH SQUAD (8 MEN), in dark gear, camouflaged to blend with rubble. Night-vision goggles. Suppressed weapons. Knives.

Their leader, SERGEANT HALIM (40s, cold, efficient), signals with precise hand gestures.

They move low and silent, hugging walls, stepping over corpses without looking down.

Through a crumbling archway ahead: the faint glow of the TRIAGE SQUARE.

INT. COLLAPSED SHOPFRONT - SAME TIME

QASIM lies propped on blankets, sweating, his breathing ragged.

KAREEM sits nearby, rocking his baby, keeping half an eye on Qasim.

Qasim suddenly goes rigid - listening.

KAREEM

You okay?

Qasim's eyes sharpen. He hears something under the night sounds - faint BOOTS on rubble, the soft CLINK of gear.

QASIM

(whisper)

They're coming.

Kareem frowns.

KAREEM

Who?

Qasim's hand gropes for the wall, trying to pull himself upright.

QASIM

Not... shelling. Footsteps.  
 Patterned. Spread four-two...  
 (terrified recognition)  
 It's Halim. Nader's ground blade.

Kareem stiffens.

KAREEM

Can you be sure?

Qasim closes his eyes, listening like a man trying to decode a ghost.

QASIM

They're in column, not line. No shouting. No wasted speech.  
 (beat)  
 Nader's elite.

He staggers to his feet, almost collapsing.

KAREEM  
You're bleeding—

QASIM  
I know how they come.  
(grim)  
I helped teach them.

He grabs Kareem's arm urgently.

QASIM (CONT'D)  
Go. Tell the doctor. Tell the  
soldiers. They will flank, then  
take hostages to force surrender.

Kareem hesitates, looking at Qasim's shaking body.

KAREEM  
You need a medic—

QASIM  
I need this not to end the way it  
always does.

His eyes burn.

QASIM (CONT'D)  
Go.

Kareem sprints out with the baby.

Qasim leans on the wall, catching his breath—

Then limps toward the door himself.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

The square is running on fumes.

Lanterns burn low. People move slower, exhaustion heavy in every step.

LARA checks on a row of patients. Her hands tremble so badly she fumbles a syringe.

She stares at it — furious at her own nerves.

LARA  
Come on...

Her fingers spasm. The syringe slips, clattering to the ground.

Farid notices.

FARID  
I've seen drunk interns steadier  
than that.

She forces a fake glare.

LARA  
You want to try threading a vein in  
the half-light while aging in dog  
years?

Farid bends, picks up the syringe, tosses it into a waste bucket.

FARID  
I want you to admit your body has a  
vote in this now.

Her jaw tightens.

LARA  
My body is outvoted.

She turns to move to another patient – but her leg buckles.

For a split second, the world DOUBLES – she sees herself fall and not fall simultaneously.

Then reality chooses: she FALLS.

Farid catches her just before she faceplants.

FARID  
Okay. That's not a vote. That's a  
veto.

She struggles to stand.

LARA  
I'm fine.

He doesn't let go.

FARID  
You're shaking like a cheap  
generator. Sit. For once in your  
overachieving life, sit.

Across the square, LEILA sees Lara on her knees, concern flashing.

The Reaper stands nearby, a dark sentinel, watching her body finally refuse.

His voice is low, almost clinical.

THE REAPER

Your vessel reaches fatigue. Bones cannot carry what you ask of them.

Lara hisses under her breath.

LARA

Not now.

THE REAPER

There is no "now." There is only accumulation.

Her hands spasm again. She bites back a groan.

EXT. TRIAGE EDGE - SAME TIME

KELLER and VEGA survey the darkened streets beyond the square.

HARRIS checks his rifle, scanning rooftops.

The night is too quiet.

VEGA

Sir... artillery stops, but no repositioning noise. That bother you?

KELLER

Everything bothers me.

He listens - straining.

Footsteps. Very faint. Too ordered.

KELLER (CONT'D)

...They're coming on foot.

Harris stiffens.

HARRIS

How sure?

KELLER

I've been the boot in the dark. I  
know the sound.

Before they can move—

KAREEM runs up, panting, baby against his chest.

KAREEM

Major— there's a man— the deserter—  
he says Nader's elite are coming.  
They take hostages. They... they'll  
go for the doctor.

Keller's face hardens.

KELLER

Of course they will.

To Harris and Vega:

KELLER (CONT'D)

Positions. Quiet. No warning shots.  
If they hit the square, they hit  
prepared.

Vega nods, moving off toward an overwatch point.

VEGA

On it.

Harris checks his mags again, adrenaline cutting through  
fatigue.

EXT. RUINED STREETS - APPROACH TO SQUARE - NIGHT

Halim's squad moves with ghostlike efficiency.

He raises a fist. The squad HALTS.

He points two fingers left, two right. The team SPLITS into  
wings, circling the square like predators.

One soldier taps Halim's arm, then signals: SEVEN HOSTILES,  
MANY CIVILIANS.

Halim nods.

He holds up a small PHOTO — blurry drone print of the triage.

In the middle: tiny figure of LARA, streaked hair, surrounded  
by activity.



She frowns.

LARA  
An inquiry?

From the watch, a second TICKING joins his own – deeper, slower, like a JUDGE'S GAVEL.

The Reaper stiffens in discomfort.

THE REAPER  
The higher ledger has noticed  
irregularity.  
(beat)  
They question whether the  
instrument –  
(quiet)  
– or the anomaly should be removed.

Lara's eyes widen.

LARA  
You mean me.

He looks at her.

THE REAPER  
And me.

For the first time, genuine fear edges his tone.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
If I interfere beyond measure, I  
risk deletion.  
(beat)  
Erasure from causality.

He looks away – ashamed to admit it.

LARA  
That... can happen?

THE REAPER  
Even death can die.

She swallows. Her own fear flickers, but she shoves it down.

LARA  
I didn't ask you to help.

THE REAPER  
You did when you demanded a  
different pattern.

He looks back at her, torn.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
Do not ask again. Or I will have to  
decide whether your defiance is  
worth my end.

Farid glances between them – seeing only Lara talking to  
empty air, looking more shattered than ever.

FARID  
Who are you arguing with now?

She shakes her head.

LARA  
The auditor.

EXT. SQUARE'S NORTH ALLEY - SAME TIME

Two of HALIM'S MEN crawl along the shadows, hugging the wall.

They peek around the corner – see a small knot of civilians  
moving supplies.

One soldier gestures: HOSTAGES.

They move in, quiet and precise.

A hand clamps over a WOMAN'S mouth. Another grabs a TEEN BOY  
by the collar.

But before they can drag them–

HARRIS steps out from a recessed doorway, rifle up.

HARRIS  
Don't.

The soldiers freeze, suppressors pointed back at him.

Tense standoff.

Then– a KNIFE flashes from the side, cutting Harris's arm as  
a THIRD soldier appears.

Harris fires reflexively – silenced muzzle flash, one soldier  
drops.

Chaos erupts.

The civilians SCREAM and scatter.

The remaining soldier DRAGS the teen boy back, using him as a shield.

Harris, bleeding, ducks behind cover.

EXT. TRIAGE EDGE - SOUTH SIDE - SAME TIME

VEGA lies prone on a low-rise rooftop, scope searching.

She catches movement - two ENEMY SOLDIERS slipping along the street's edge.

Her finger tightens.

VEGA  
(mutters)  
Got you.

She fires. One drops. The other bolts into another shadow.

She shifts position, moves to new cover - too pro for a second shot from the same spot.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Gunfire snaps. Shouts echo closer now.

Civilians panic.

CIVILIAN #1  
They're here-!

CIVILIAN #2  
Soldiers! Not ours!

Leila swings into action, shouting.

LEILA  
Basements! Tunnels! MOVE!

Yara hobbles toward the sound of gunfire instead of away.

YARA  
I'm going-

Lara sees her- then sees three futures:

- Yara shot in the chest.
- Yara grabbed as a hostage.
- Yara tripping, drawing fire away from kids.

Lara lurches forward.

Her legs fail. She staggers, falls to one knee.

LARA  
Yara—! Stop!

Her voice cracks — weak.

Yara hesitates, torn.

Farid grips Lara's shoulders.

FARID  
You're not sprinting anywhere. Your  
legs have left the chat.

Lara shoves at his hands, furious.

LARA  
I can still—

Her vision fractures, the square spinning in overlay.

Sound warps. Her heart stutters.

For a terrifying second, her body seizes — a full-blown tremor. She can't move her arms.

She watches, helpless, as Yara limps toward danger on crutches.

This is it. Her weakness is about to cost a life.

EXT. NORTH ALLEY — CONTINUOUS

Halim arrives, calm amid chaos.

He sees his wounded man, the dead one, the teen hostage, Harris pinned.

He steps to the boy's back, gun at his head.

HALIM  
(sharp, accented English)  
Drop your weapon. Or the boy drops.

Harris, breathing hard, aims— but can't get a clean shot.

His eyes dart, desperate.

Back in the square, Keller hears the shouting. He runs.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LARA'S POV - CONTINUOUS

Lara tries to stand.

Her legs will not obey.

Her hands curl into claws, nails digging into her own skin.

LARA  
Move. MOVE—

The Reaper watches, intangible, eyes burning.

THE REAPER  
You are at your limit. There is  
nothing left to trade.

She grits her teeth, tears streaming from sheer frustration.

LARA  
I don't care—

She sees two futures:

— Future 1: Keller runs in blind, gets shot.

— Future 2: Keller hesitates, the boy dies.

She tries to scream a warning—

Nothing comes out but a hoarse wheeze.

This is the breaking point. The moment where her body betrays  
the vision.

Farid sees her crumble, panic in his voice.

FARID  
Lara—!

EXT. COLLAPSED SHOPFRONT / STREET - SAME TIME

Qasim staggers out of the shopfront, clutching his side.

He sees HALIM in the alley, the hostage, the soldier's  
stance.

Recognition hits like a weapon.

QASIM  
(whisper)  
Halim..

He knows the formation. He knows the blind spot.  
 He limps toward the alley, determination overriding pain.

EXT. NORTH ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Halim presses the barrel harder into the boy's skull.

                          HALIM  
                           (sharp)  
                           Weapon. On the ground. Now.

Harris's eyes flick from the boy to Halim.  
 Then – behind Halim – he sees QASIM staggering into view.  
 Qasim raises a trembling hand.

                          QASIM  
                           Halim!

Halim half-turns, keeping the boy shielded.

                          HALIM  
                           ...Qasim.  
                           (disgust)  
                           Traitor.

                          QASIM  
                           You don't have to do this.

Halim's jaw flexes.

                          HALIM  
                           You left your brothers under the  
                           shells you refused to call in. They  
                           died for your conscience.

Qasim's eyes shine.

                          QASIM  
                           They died for yours.

Halim sneers.

                          HALIM  
                           Stand down, or I finish what the  
                           shrapnel started.

Qasim glances at the boy. Then at Harris.

A memory of training snaps into place.

He sees the angle. The way Halim's weight is shifted. The way his arm is exposed—

QASIM  
(to Harris, low)  
Left knee. Two inches below the  
plate.

Harris frowns.

HARRIS  
What?

QASIM  
(urgent)  
Do it.

Halim tightens his grip on the boy.

HALIM  
Last chance—

Qasim moves.

In a burst of suicidal courage, he SLAMS himself into Halim from behind, knocking the gun off-line.

The boy jerks, free for a half-second—

HARRIS  
Now!

Harris fires exactly where Qasim told him.

The round punches through Halim's exposed leg, sending him sprawling.

The hostage boy bolts, sprinting back toward the square.

Halim hits the ground hard, gun skittering.

Qasim, bleeding badly now, lands in a heap.

He coughs, red bubbling up.

Harris advances, gun trained.

HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Don't move.

Halim glares at Qasim — contempt, betrayal, reluctant respect, all tangled.



Qasim tries to smile, teeth red.

QASIM  
Told you... I know how they move.

Keller cuffs Halim, rough.

KELLER  
Tie him. Gag him. He's intel now.

Halim snarls.

HALIM  
You think you've won something?  
Nader will burn this city until  
your bones are dust.

Keller leans in.

KELLER  
Then he can start with us. We're  
already ghosts on the map.

He turns to Qasim, kneeling.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
You did good.

Qasim's eyes flick toward the square.

QASIM  
Did... she... make it?

Keller nods.

KELLER  
Doctor's alive.

Qasim exhales - a mix of relief and resignation.

QASIM  
Good.  
(beat)  
Then... somebody worth the shells...  
finally.

His eyes flutter, on the edge.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The immediate firefight has died down.

Nader's men have been pushed back or pinned. The square holds – barely.

Civilians huddle deeper into cover. Kids whimper. Lanterns flicker.

Lara sits propped against a low wall, legs refusing to cooperate.

Her hands shake in her lap, beyond her control.

Farid stands over her, scanning for new threats.

Leila approaches, dirt on her face, pipe still in hand.

LEILA

We heard there were more soldiers  
in the alleys.

FARID

There were. Now there are fewer.

Leila looks at Lara.

LEILA

You need to rest.

Lara laughs – a bitter little sound.

LARA

If one more person tells me to  
rest, I'm prescribing myself  
something I can't pronounce.

Leila kneels, serious.

LEILA

You fell. You couldn't move. I saw  
you.

Lara's gaze drops, shame flooding in.

LARA

I froze.  
(beat)  
I saw the boy die in three  
different ways and I still couldn't  
move.

Leila studies her.

LEILA

And yet... he's alive.

Lara blinks.

LEILA (CONT'D)  
Not every miracle has to come from  
your hands.

That lands. Hard.

Leila stands, squeezes Lara's shoulder, then moves off to help others.

Farid watches Lara, gentle.

FARID  
You're allowed to be human, you  
know.

She looks at him, eyes rimmed red.

LARA  
I don't think I am anymore.

EXT. QUIETER CORNER OF THE SQUARE - LATER

The square buzzes with low-level activity, but this corner is momentarily clear.

The Reaper stands opposite Lara, who sits slumped, sweat-damp, visibly older than when this started.

His watch still glows faintly with alien glyphs. The secondary ticking – the higher ledger – pulses through the air like distant thunder.

THE REAPER  
The inquiry intensifies.

She looks up, hollow.

LARA  
What does that mean?

THE REAPER  
They measure deviation.  
(beat)  
They count how many lives have  
moved beyond statistical tolerance  
because of you.

She lets out a bitter breath.

LARA  
Sorry for the inconvenience.

He steps closer.

THE REAPER

Do not joke.

(quiet, urgent)

If the higher ledger judges this anomaly unsustainable, they will excise the problem.

She swallows.

LARA

Excise... how?

His voice drops.

THE REAPER

By removing the aberrant variables from the system.

(beat)

You.

And those whose trajectories orbit you too closely.

Her stomach drops.

Her eyes dart toward Farid. Leila. Yara. The kids.

LARA

They'd erase them... because of me?

THE REAPER

If your existence threatens the coherence of causality, they will rewrite you as if you never were. Along with all dependent events.

Her voice is a whisper.

LARA

That sounds... worse than dying.

THE REAPER

It is worse than dying.

(beat)

It is un-being.

She stares, shaken.

LARA

And you? What happens to you?

He looks at his watch – the glyphs flaring hotter, the second ticking now almost painful.

THE REAPER

I am the instrument that allowed  
this deviation to persist.

(beat)

I am being audited.

He looks at her – for the first time, nakedly vulnerable.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)

If I touch the thread again – if I  
intervene to tip scales in your  
favor – they may delete the  
function. They may... erase death.

Her breath catches.

LARA

Isn't that... good?

He almost laughs – a hollow, echoing thing.

THE REAPER

Without death, there is no  
movement. No urgency. No meaning to  
sacrifice.

(beat)

Life without death is not mercy. It  
is stagnation.

She leans her head back against the wall, overwhelmed.

LARA

So if I keep trying to save  
everyone...

(beat)

...I might kill the thing that makes  
saving anyone matter.

He considers her carefully.

THE REAPER

Or they may simply erase you and  
reset the pattern.

She closes her eyes, the weight almost too much.

Then, quietly:

LARA

If they erase me... these people  
still die, right?

He nods.

THE REAPER

Yes.

LARA

So the math doesn't change. Only  
the story does.

He studies her, struck by the simplicity of that.

She looks up at him, resolve flickering back beneath the  
exhaustion.

LARA (CONT'D)

Then I keep going.

(beat)

If someone has to get erased, I'd  
rather it be the one who chose  
this.

He stares at her – torn between duty and something  
dangerously like admiration.

THE REAPER

If you keep going, I may die with  
you.

She holds his gaze.

LARA

Then make your own choice, Reaper.

A long, thick beat.

He looks down at his glowing watch, at the burning glyphs, at  
the trembling hands.

For the first time, his voice trembles.

THE REAPER

I do not know if I am capable of  
choice.

She smiles weakly.

LARA

Then consider this... your first  
lesson.

Her body shakes, exhausted, but her eyes burn steady.

Off them – a battlefield medic and the embodiment of death, both staring down the possibility of un-being as enemy shadows regroup in the ruins beyond–

CUT TO BLACK.

(End of approx. pages 81-90.)

This section:

\* Gave you Lara's physical breaking point – she literally cannot move when it matters.

\* Made Qasim essential, with him recognizing Halim, calling the shot, and turning the ambush – at great cost.

\* Raised the Reaper's stakes: he's facing audit and potential deletion from a higher ledger, which transforms him from aloof cosmic function into someone with something to lose.

Next 10 (91-100) should push into:

\* Nader tightening his strategy after the failed ground hit.

\* Lara grappling with the guilt of failure and the threat of erasure.

\* Keller and the civilians fortifying for what might be the last stand.

\* The Reaper edging closer to making a real choice – whether to break his own rules in the final confrontation.

When you're ready to push into the Act II->III bridge:

"Continue pages 91-100."

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.

EXT. NORTH ALLEY / MAKESHIFT HOLDING POINT – NIGHT

HALIM sits against a wall, wrists bound, leg bandaged tight. Rage simmers beneath his controlled exterior.

KELLER stands over him. HARRIS nearby, watching the perimeter.

QASIM lies on a stretcher a few yards away, Farid working frantically over him.

Qasim's shirt is soaked dark. Each breath sounds like it might be the last.

FARID

You couldn't just hide like a normal traumatized deserter, could you?

Qasim's lips twitch, a ghost of a smile.

QASIM

Boring... way to die.

Farid presses gauze, trying to stem an impossible bleed.

FARID

Who said anything about dying? I'm very invested in your continued discomfort.

Keller glances over, sees how bad it is. His face hardens.

He kneels beside Qasim.

KELLER

You bought us time. You saved that boy.

Qasim's gaze drifts toward the square, where faint lantern-glow flickers.

QASIM

I... helped... kill so many boys before.

(weak)

This... makes the ledger... less ugly.

Farid's hands still for a beat, that word hitting.

FARID

Don't steal her vocabulary. She'll sue.

Qasim's eyes find Keller's.

QASIM

Don't let... Halim... go back. He... he knows how Nader thinks.

Keller nods, grim.

KELLER

He's not going anywhere.

Behind them, Halim watches Qasim with a mix of contempt and something like grief.

HALIM

You betrayed your brothers.

Qasim wheezes.

QASIM

No.

(beat)

I stopped betraying... everyone else.

Farid swallows, blinking hard.

Qasim coughs, blood bubbling.

QASIM (CONT'D)

Tell her...

(beat)

Tell the doctor...

(he struggles)

I believed the numbers.

(weak smile)

Now I believe... the names.

His eyes fix on something no one else can see.

For a flicker, THE REAPER stands behind Keller, watching.

Qasim's gaze meets his – and for a second, there's recognition.

QASIM (CONT'D)

(whisper)

There you are...

His chest rises... falls... stills.

Flat.

Farid bows his head.

FARID

Damn you for making me like you.

Keller gently closes Qasim's eyes.

He looks to Halim.

KELLER

You just lost the only man in this alley who didn't want you dead.

Halim's jaw tightens, but he says nothing.

EXT. ENEMY FORWARD COMMAND - LATER THAT NIGHT

The artillery ridge is quieter, guns resting like beasts between feeds.

GENERAL NADER reviews a report on a tablet.

Drone stills show:

- Halim's team in contact.
- Distant muzzle flashes.
- Then... nothing.

The AIDE stands stiffly nearby.

AIDE

We've lost Halim's tactical feed.  
Last telemetry indicated engagement  
near the anomaly's camp.

Nader's eyes are flat.

NADER

Casualty estimates?

AIDE

Mixed. Some signatures vanished.  
Others remain.  
(beat)  
The doctor's camp still shows  
activity.

Nader exhales slowly, almost a sigh.

NADER

Shells fail. Steel fails. Men fail.

He sets the tablet down.

NADER (CONT'D)

We are done trimming at the edges.

The aide shifts uneasily.

AIDE

Sir?

Nader taps a different file on the tablet.

A schematic appears: a THERMOBARIC WARHEAD – fuel-air explosive. Big, mean, illegal as hell.

NADER  
We level the grid.

The aide blanches.

AIDE  
Sector Delta-Seven contains at least three hundred civilians.

NADER  
Not if we do this correctly.

He zooms in on the grey zone.

NADER (CONT'D)  
The blast will erase structures, tunnels, basements.  
(beat)  
Nothing to shelter inside. Nothing left to rally around.

The aide swallows hard.

AIDE  
Command will require justification–

Nader's expression never changes.

NADER  
The justification is simple.  
(beat)  
An anomaly disrupts attrition. We restore equilibrium.

He looks to a COMM TECH.

NADER (CONT'D)  
Open a channel on all bands. And prep the loudspeakers on the south approach.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE – WEE HOURS

The adrenaline has faded to a heavy, buzzing exhaustion.

People patch walls, tie splints, share boiled water.

The air feels... off.

A lantern on a crate FLICKERS – bright, dim, bright – then for a second exists in two places at once, like a bad double exposure, before “choosing” one spot and staying there.

YARA notices, brow furrowing.

YARA  
 ...Did you see that?

The KID next to her shrugs, too tired to care.

Farther away, a DEAD MAN being prepared for burial suddenly GASPING—

– then instantly still again.

LEILA yelps, dropping the sheet.

LEILA  
 Jesus—

She checks. No pulse. Dead as before.

She looks around, rattled.

Nearby, HARRIS pauses mid-step – his boot lands and for a split second he sees two footprints appear, then one vanishes.

He shakes his head like trying to clear a buzz.

HARRIS  
 (to himself)  
 Get it together, man.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE – LARA’S CORNER – SAME TIME

LARA sits against a low wall, blanket around her shoulders. Her hair is now streaked with white almost from temple to temple.

Her hands tremble in her lap, fingers twitching in arrhythmic spasms.

FARID approaches, carrying two dented mugs.

He hands her one.

FARID  
 Gourmet boiled water. Pairs nicely  
 with existential dread.

She takes it with both hands – one isn't enough to stop the shaking.

LARA  
You should open a restaurant. "The  
Defiant Triage."

He sits beside her, sighing.

FARID  
No. I've seen what you people do to  
kitchens.

They sit in silence for a beat, watching the square.

A CHILD runs by, laughing at something stupid. Somehow.

Farid glances at Lara.

FARID (CONT'D)  
You going to pretend what happened  
back there was fine?

She stares ahead.

LARA  
Which part?

FARID  
The part where your body went on  
strike while a kid had a gun to his  
head.

She flinches – no defense.

LARA  
My legs... just stopped.  
(beat)  
I saw it, Farid. I saw him die.  
Three different ways. I saw Keller  
get shot. I saw you go down.  
(voice small)  
And then my muscles... just... quit.

She grips the mug tighter.

LARA (CONT'D)  
I'm supposed to be the one who  
moves when everyone else freezes.  
That's the deal. That's why I  
stayed.

He studies her.

FARID  
The deal with who?

She doesn't answer.

He nudges her shoulder.

FARID (CONT'D)  
You're not a machine. You're a human who's been playing a game against a calculator and somehow winning.  
(a beat)  
Eventually, the flesh calls in a favor.

Her eyes glisten.

LARA  
What happens when the next kid has a gun to his head and my hands won't move?

He looks at her, softer than usual.

FARID  
Then someone else moves. Like Qasim. Like Harris. Like Leila with her pipe.  
(beat)  
You're not the only player on the board, Lara.

She stares down at her shaking hands.

LARA  
Tell that to whatever's rewriting my insides.

EXT. TRIAGE - ANOTHER CORNER - SAME TIME

KELLER and HARRIS stand near the damaged jeep, half in shadow.

Harris's arm is bandaged where the knife cut him earlier.

HARRIS  
Sir... about what you told command-

Keller looks away, jaw tight.

KELLER  
We're dead on paper.  
(beat)  
Means no reinforcements. No air  
cover. No evac.

Harris swallows.

HARRIS  
Means no one's coming.

Keller nods.

KELLER  
Also means no one's coming... to tell  
us to abandon them.

He nods toward the civilians.

Harris follows his gaze – sees Leila wrapping a boy's ankle,  
Yara teaching kids how to bandage each other, Kareem singing  
quietly to his baby.

HARRIS  
When this started... I thought we  
were just plugging a hole until  
command figured out the bigger  
picture.

KELLER  
There is no bigger picture.  
(beat)  
This is the picture.

Harris takes that in.

HARRIS  
You really think we can hold if  
they come again?

Keller's silence is answer enough.

Finally:

KELLER  
No.  
(beat)  
But I think we can make it cost  
them something.

Harris nods slowly.

HARRIS

Then I'm in.

(beat)

If I'm going to die in a red square  
on some colonel's tablet, at least  
let it be for something that looks  
like it matters.

Keller gives him a rare, tired smile.

KELLER

That's the spirit, Sergeant. Aim  
for meaningful footnotes.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

A strange, LOW HUM vibrates the air.

People look up, unsettled.

A VEHICLE somewhere in the distance – not close, but carrying  
sound – a TRUCK with LOUDSPEAKERS.

The hum sharpens into a VOICE, distorted, booming over the  
ruins.

NADER (V.O.)

(over loudspeaker,  
echoing)

To the doctor in the ruins. To  
those harboring her.

Heads turn. All eyes slowly drift toward Lara, even before  
the voice finishes the sentence.

Lara stiffens, eyes narrowing.

The Reaper materializes at the edge of the square, cloak  
flickering with static.

He listens.

NADER (V.O.)

You have altered the course of this  
conflict. You have extended the  
suffering of those who were meant  
to die quickly.

Murmurs ripple. People exchange glances.

NADER (V.O.)

I offer you... mercy.

Farid snorts under his breath.

FARID

Whenever a man with artillery says  
"mercy," we should all dive for  
cover.

The voice rolls on, implacable.

NADER (V.O.)

At dawn, you will present yourself  
at the main road south of your  
current position. Alone. Unarmed.  
You will surrender.

Yara swallows hard.

YARA

Doctor—

NADER (V.O.)

If you do not, we will deploy  
devices that will erase your  
district completely. No bunker, no  
basement, no tunnel will shield  
you.

The word "erase" lands harder on Lara than the rest.

Her eyes flick sideways to the Reaper. He is very, very  
still.

NADER (V.O.)

Your life for theirs. This is the  
equation.

The PA crackles, then cuts.

Silence after is suffocating.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Everyone looks at Lara.

Leila steps forward first.

LEILA

You're not going.

Lara blinks.

LARA

I didn't say I was.

LEILA

You didn't have to. That voice  
walked straight into your head. I  
could see it.

Farid moves to Lara's other side.

FARID

We don't negotiate with people who  
use thermobaric anything in a  
sentence.

Keller joins them, face grim.

KELLER

He's not bluffing.  
(beat)  
You've embarrassed his math twice.  
He'll burn the grid to get rid of  
you.

Lara's breath shakes.

Reality around her flickers – for a heartbeat everyone in the  
square appears twice, then snaps back to one.

No one else seems to notice this time.

Only her.

And the Reaper.

EXT. TRIAGE - QUIET SIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Lara steps away from the others, around a half-collapsed  
wall.

The Reaper follows, limping slightly now, as if his form is  
glitching.

Bits of his cloak PHASE OUT for a second, revealing bone  
beneath, then reappearing.

The ticking from his watch is uneven – speeding up, slowing,  
skipping beats.

THE REAPER

The higher ledger approves of his  
equation.

Lara turns on him, angry.

LARA

Of course it does. "One life for many." That's the kind of moral math men like Nader sleep on.

His voice is softer.

THE REAPER

Not just his. The oversight above me measures only stability.

(beat)

Remove the anomaly, and the pattern returns to acceptable variance.

She laughs bitterly.

LARA

You mean: I die, and the war goes back to killing people on schedule. How comforting.

The Reaper's form flickers. For a second, he disappears entirely—

— then snaps back, staggering, as if yanked.

Lara's eyes widen.

LARA (CONT'D)

What was that?

He looks... rattled.

THE REAPER

They are... testing excision.

(beat, strained)

Seeing what the ledger looks like without my line.

She stares.

LARA

They just... turned you off.

THE REAPER

For a moment.

(beat)

It will grow longer.

She steps closer, searching his face — or what passes for a face.

LARA

If they erase you... what happens here?

He looks out at the square.

THE REAPER

At first... nothing. Bodies will still break. Hearts will still stop.

(beat)

But there will be no one to carry the names. No... continuity of endings.

She frowns.

LARA

So people just... die into nothing?

THE REAPER

Worse. They may not die at all. Not properly.

(beat)

The world would fill with unfinished departures. Clinging. Hungry.

A cold shiver goes through her.

LARA

So if I keep doing this... if I bend the ledger harder... they erase you to stabilize the system.

His silence is confirmation.

THE REAPER

If you walk to that road and die as they intend, the anomaly closes. The audit ends.

(beat)

I continue.

She takes that in.

LARA

So I can save you... by letting them kill me.

He doesn't answer, but his hands flex – long bone fingers clutching at nothing.

She looks out at the square – at Leila, at Yara, at kids curled against their parents, at Keller and Harris checking ammo.

LARA (CONT'D)  
And if I don't go?

His ticking stutters. His form flickers again, momentarily headless, then whole.

THE REAPER  
Then I may vanish. And they will  
erase you anyway, eventually.  
(beat)  
With less... mercy.

She closes her eyes, overwhelmed.

LARA  
So either way, I'm a rounding  
error.

He steps closer.

THE REAPER  
No.  
(beat)  
You are the one variable that asked  
what the equation cost.

A beat.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
That is why they hate you.

She opens her eyes, meeting his gaze.

LARA  
What about you?  
(beat)  
Do you hate me?

He hesitates – a long, grinding pause in his ticking.

THE REAPER  
I do not know how to hate.  
(beat)  
But I know how to... fear.

He looks at his trembling hands.

THE REAPER (CONT'D)  
And I am afraid... of not existing.  
(beat)  
For the first time.

She nods, oddly gentle.

LARA  
Welcome to the club.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - PRE-DAWN

The sky is starting to gray. A sickly, ash-colored light.

People sleep in clumps. Others keep watch. The whole camp feels like it's holding its breath.

Keller walks the perimeter, doing one last check.

He stops near Leila, who sits awake, pipe across her knees.

KELLER  
You should sleep.

Leila shakes her head.

LEILA  
Slept enough in my old life.  
(beat)  
This one seems... shorter.

He manages a tired smile.

KELLER  
You were a teacher, right?

She nods.

LEILA  
Third grade.  
(beat)  
My biggest problem used to be  
parents complaining about too much  
homework.

She looks out at the broken buildings.

LEILA (CONT'D)  
Now I teach kids which sounds mean  
"run" and which mean "hide."

Keller shifts, uncomfortable.

KELLER

I wish I could tell you this ends well.

She looks at him.

LEILA

Can you tell me it ends at all?

He considers.

KELLER

Everything ends.

(beat)

Some endings are just less stupid than others.

She huffs a small laugh.

LEILA

Then let's aim for "less stupid."

EXT. LARA'S CORNER - SAME TIME

Lara stands now, leaning on a chunk of wall. Her legs hold her, barely.

She looks older in this half-light - like the war has aged her twenty years in two days.

Farid approaches, sensing something.

FARID

You've got that look.

LARA

What look?

FARID

The "I've decided to do something insane and noble" look.

She tries to deflect.

LARA

Maybe I'm just constipated.

He doesn't buy it.

FARID

We heard the broadcast. We're not idiots.

He steps in front of her.

FARID (CONT'D)  
You're not walking to that road,  
Lara.

She studies him.

LARA  
If I don't, he burns the district.

FARID  
If you do, he might burn it anyway  
and get a bonus for efficiency.

She looks past him, at the sleeping faces.

LARA  
Or maybe he doesn't. Maybe he gets  
what he wants - his scary story  
ended, anomaly removed - and he  
gets to write a neat after-action  
report.  
(beat)  
Maybe that's enough for a man like  
Nader.

Farid's voice tightens.

FARID  
And what about men like me?  
(beat)  
What about the people who have to  
live with the hole you leave?

She swallows.

LARA  
If I stay, I risk more than my  
life.  
(beat)  
The... system... doesn't just want me  
gone. It wants to erase everything  
I've changed.  
(voice low)  
You. Leila. The kids who should  
have died in that first strike.

He frowns, not fully tracking.

FARID  
Erase how?

She glances toward the Reaper, who flickers in and out like a bad signal.

LARA  
Like we never happened. Like none  
of this did.

Farid's expression hardens.

FARID  
Then they're idiots.  
(beat)  
We happened. I'm here. I remember.

She looks at him, tears brimming.

LARA  
That might not be enough.

He steps closer, fierce.

FARID  
It's enough for me.

A beat.

She reaches out, fingers brushing his wrist – a rare, small gesture.

LARA  
Either way... thank you.

He stiffens.

FARID  
That sounds like goodbye. I don't  
like it.

LARA  
You don't like anything.

He searches her face.

FARID  
If you leave... you break us.  
(beat)  
You break me.

That lands.

She swallows, voice barely above a whisper.

LARA  
 If I stay, I might break  
 everything.

They stand there, caught between impossible options.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - JUST BEFORE DAWN

The first smear of orange touches the horizon.

A distant RUMBLE that is not artillery – heavy trucks  
 repositioning, something big being moved into place.

Everyone feels it in their bones.

The Reaper appears next to Lara again.

He's fading – parts of him translucent, time skipping around  
 his movements like dropped frames.

His watch glows white-hot now, glyphs spinning.

THE REAPER  
 They are coming to erase the page.

She looks at him.

LARA  
 Then this is where the story ends.

He steps closer, his voice strained.

THE REAPER  
 If you walk to that road, you die  
 their way. The ledger closes  
 neatly.  
 (beat)  
 If you stay, everything tears  
 further. I may vanish. You may...  
 never resolve.

She breathes, slow.

LARA  
 What would you do... if you could  
 choose?

He flinches slightly at the word.

THE REAPER  
 I would do what preserves the  
 pattern.

She nods.

LARA  
Of course you would.

She looks at the square – at every broken, stubborn, breathing person.

LARA (CONT'D)  
I'm not the pattern.

She meets his fading gaze.

LARA (CONT'D)  
I'm the error message.

A beat.

LARA (CONT'D)  
And maybe... the only way to fix this  
is to... uninstall myself.

The Reaper stares, something like grief in his hollow eyes.

THE REAPER  
If you step onto that road, I may  
lose the only anomaly that ever  
looked back at me.

She smiles weakly.

LARA  
You'll survive. You always do.

His form stutters – half-gone, half-here.

THE REAPER  
I am not certain.

She inhales slowly – then squares her shoulders as much as her shaking body allows.

LARA  
Then I guess we both find out what  
we're made of.

She turns toward the south – toward the unseen road.

Far in the distance, beyond the ruins, a faint FLASH on the horizon hints at something monstrous being armed.

Off Lara, stepping away from the fragile safety of the square, toward an ultimatum that may cost her existence but save everyone else—

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. RUINED CITY - PRE-DAWN

LARA walks alone through the broken streets, heading south.

The sky is bruised purple. Her breath steams in the chill.

Every step is work.

Her hair is nearly all white now, loose around her face. She looks like someone who has lived a lifetime in a week.

Behind her, far in the distance, the TRIAGE SQUARE glows faintly.

The Reaper drifts a few paces behind, flickering in and out like a glitching hologram.

His ticking is ragged.

EXT. SOUTH APPROACH ROAD - PRE-DAWN

A cleared stretch of asphalt cuts through rubble, ending at a set of makeshift BARRIERS.

NADER'S CONVOY is there:

TRUCKS. ARMORED VEHICLES. A MOBILE LAUNCHER with a sleek, ominous WARHEAD angled toward the sky.

SOLDIERS in hard armor ring the area, rifles up.

GENERAL NADER stands at the center, immaculate despite the war.

LOUDSPEAKERS crackle nearby, mounted on a truck.

A TECH adjusts the angle on the THERMOBARIC MISSILE.

Lara's small figure approaches along the road.

Nader watches her like a scientist watching a specimen.

EXT. ROAD TO THE CONVOY - CONTINUOUS

Lara's POV:

The convoy looms.

The missile gleams, fuel lines coiled around it like a sleeping snake.

The Reaper stumbles behind her, briefly phasing halfway into the ground before snapping back.

THE REAPER  
(strained)  
You can still turn back.

Lara doesn't break stride.

LARA  
You told me turning back doesn't  
fix the math.

He winces as his arm half-disappears, then reforms.

THE REAPER  
This... is more than math.

She stops for just a second, winded.

LARA  
Everything is more than math.

Then she walks on.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - SAME TIME

The square stirs.

KELLER, FARID, LEILA, YARA and a handful of others stand near the edge, watching the faint silhouette of Lara in the distance.

YARA  
She's really doing it.

Farid's jaw clenches.

FARID  
Of course she is. She's an idiot.

Keller raises binoculars, scanning the southern road.

Through the lens: he sees the convoy, the missile, the soldiers, Nader.

KELLER  
Shit.

HARRIS  
(overhearing)  
Sir?

Keller lowers the binoculars.

KELLER  
He's got a launcher primed. That's  
not a bluff.

Farid swears under his breath.

FARID  
So what, she hands herself over and  
he still wipes us off the map?  
That's not a deal, that's customer  
service for psychopaths.

Keller looks at the ragtag defenders.

KELLER  
Gear up. Quietly.  
(beat)  
If this is a trap, we spring it  
from both sides.

Leila steps closer.

LEILA  
We're coming too.

Keller shakes his head.

KELLER  
You're civilians.

LEILA  
So are they.

She nods out at the sleeping families.

LEILA (CONT'D)  
We're done waiting to die politely.

Keller meets her eyes, sees the steel there.

He gives the smallest nod.

KELLER  
Then stay low. Follow our lead.

EXT. SOUTH APPROACH ROAD - PRE-DAWN

Lara reaches the barrier.

Soldiers aim rifles at her chest. She stops, hands slightly raised.

Up close, she looks ancient and young at once. Skin drawn, eyes too clear.

Nader steps forward.

NADER

Doctor.

Lara studies him.

LARA

General.

They face each other like opposite theories.

Behind Nader, the THERMOBARIC MISSILE is being armed. Crews move with clinical efficiency.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Reaper stands just behind Lara, invisible to everyone but her, glitching badly now.

His cloak stutters in segments.

THE REAPER

He has no intention of sparing them.

She doesn't look back.

LARA

I know.

THE REAPER

You came anyway.

LARA

I had to see the man who thought he could negotiate with a fire he already lit.

Nader watches Lara, unnerved by the white hair, the weird stillness.

NADER  
You walk like someone already dead.

LARA  
You talk like someone who's never  
met a corpse.

A flicker of annoyance.

NADER  
I have met more than you.

He gestures toward the warhead.

NADER (CONT'D)  
You have complicated a simple  
equation. You've extended  
engagements, increased supply  
expenditure, created morale  
anomalies.

He says it like she misfiled a form.

LARA  
You mean I stopped some people  
dying on your schedule.

NADER  
You ruined symmetry.

He steps closer.

NADER (CONT'D)  
But even anomalies obey certain  
rules.

He nods to a nearby SOLDIER.

The soldier raises a small REMOTE – a safety key for the  
missile.

Lara's eyes dart – tiny detail.

EXT. TRIAGE SIDE STREETS - SAME TIME

Keller leads a small team – HARRIS, VEGA, and a few ARMED  
CIVILIANS – through back alleys toward a flanking position  
above the road.

Farid's there, carrying a medic bag and a pistol he clearly  
hates.

FARID  
Just for the record, I'm opposed to  
this plan.

KELLER  
You were opposed to breakfast too.

Farid grumbles.

FARID  
Breakfast never shot back.

They reach a vantage point – a partially collapsed building  
overlooking the approach road.

Keller crawls to the edge, peeks out.

He sees Nader, Lara, the missile, lines of soldiers.

His face tightens.

KELLER  
Yeah. Trap.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD – CONTINUOUS

Nader eyes Lara like he's inspecting a glitchy program.

NADER  
Kneel.

Lara raises one eyebrow.

LARA  
Do your numbers need that for  
closure?

He nods once to the loudspeaker operator.

The TRUCK SPEAKERS crackle to life again.

NADER (V.O.)  
(over speakers, for the  
district to hear)  
To those in the ruins – the doctor  
has arrived.  
(beat)  
If she accepts her fate, you will  
be spared.

His voice echoes through the city.

Back in the square, civilians look at each other, a fragile hope flickering.

Leila's jaw works.

LEILA

Don't you dare, Lara...

On the road, Lara looks back toward the city – just a faint cluster of light in the distance.

She sinks slowly to her knees.

Not in reverence. In exhaustion and rage.

Nader smiles faintly.

NADER

Good. The equation balances.

Behind Lara, the Reaper trembles as if being pulled apart by invisible forces.

The watch on his chest glows white-hot.

A second, deeper ticking pounds the air – the higher ledger.

THE REAPER

They approve of this path.

(beat, strained)

If you die now, I... remain.

Lara's shoulders shake.

LARA

That's not a great sales pitch.

He flinches – part of his skull fizzles away, then reappears.

THE REAPER

If you do not... they will erase you more violently.

She looks up at Nader.

LARA

Tell me something.

He waits.

LARA (CONT'D)

After you erase us... do you sleep better?

He tilts his head.

NADER

After I erase anomalies... I sleep at  
all.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - LARA'S POV - CONTINUOUS

Her vision fractures again:

- Future 1: She kneels. Nader shoots her in the head. The  
missile launches.

- Future 2: She fights. He kills her. The missile launches.

- Future 3: She runs. Snipers drop her. The missile launches.

In all of them:

The square is obliterated. Basements collapse. Children  
vaporized.

She gasps.

LARA

(whisper)

There's no version where you spare  
them.

Nader doesn't answer.

He doesn't have to.

The Reaper confirms, voice like breaking glass.

THE REAPER

No.

Somewhere deep in his watch, glyphs flash: EXECUTION OF  
CORRECTION.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - SAME TIME

The PA voice reaches them faintly.

Civilians cling to the edges of hope.

Kareem holds his baby tighter.

KAREEM

She'll fix it. She always does.

Leila shakes her head, tears gathering.

LEILA  
She's not a spell.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Lara's eyes glisten. She looks the Reaper dead in the face.

LARA  
Show me.

He stiffens.

THE REAPER  
I should not—

LARA  
Show me the moment he erases them.  
All the versions.

He hesitates.

For the first time, it feels like disobedience.

Then he lifts a shaking hand, palm open.

The air around them ripples.

VISION - MULTIPLE FUTURES - RAPID MONTAGE

— The missile launches. Fireball blossoms. The square becomes a crater.

— Basements implode, people crushed by vacuum.

— Children disintegrate mid-scream.

— Tires melt. Bones flash.

— Farid dies mid-run, reaching for someone.

— Leila burns alive as she shields a child.

— Keller's body lies half-buried in rubble, hand still reaching.

Every version ends in the same silent void.

BACK TO SCENE - EXT. SOUTH ROAD

Lara reels, gagging at the images.

LARA

He never planned to spare them.

Nader watches, not knowing exactly what she's seeing - only that she is breaking.

NADER

Your suffering was always part of  
the algorithm.

He nods toward the missile tech.

NADER (CONT'D)

Prepare to fire.

The tech moves to an ARMED panel.

EXT. RUINED BUILDING OVERLOOKING ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Keller sees the tech's hand go to the panel.

KELLER

They're arming. That's not  
conditional. That's happening no  
matter what.

Harris swears softly.

HARRIS

So... surrender's just theater.

KELLER

Yeah.

He looks at his team.

KELLER (CONT'D)

On my mark, we light up their  
firing lane. We're not stopping the  
missile from here, but we can  
scramble their plan.

Farid swallows.

FARID

And then what?

KELLER

Then we improvise.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Lara, still kneeling, looks up at Nader.

Something has changed in her face.

The surrender is gone.

What's left is clarity.

LARA

You didn't come here to bargain.

(beat)

You came here for a clean story.

Nader's lip curls.

NADER

History prefers clean lines.

She shakes her head slowly.

LARA

History prefers witnesses.

He frowns.

She turns slightly, toward the Reaper.

LARA (CONT'D)

If I die here like this... you keep  
carrying the names?

He answers automatically.

THE REAPER

Yes.

She nods, then looks back at Nader.

LARA

What if... that's not enough anymore?

Nader gestures, impatient.

NADER

Your words don't change the yield.

He raises his hand.

NADER (CONT'D)

Fire.

EXT. MOBILE LAUNCHER - CONTINUOUS

The tech flips the final safety cover.

His finger hovers over the FIRE switch.

At that exact moment—

A RIFLE SHOT rings out from the ruined building.

The tech's hand explodes in blood.

He screams, falling back.

EXT. RUINED BUILDING - SAME TIME

Keller works the bolt, already shifting position.

KELLER

Move! Return fire!

Soldiers whirl, firing at the building.

Bullets chew stone around Keller's team.

Vega picks targets, cool and fast.

VEGA

Right flank! Two down!

Farid flattens, covering his head.

FARID

I hate this plan! Just an update!

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Gunfire erupts.

Nader spins, shouting orders.

NADER

Take that building! Secure the  
launcher!

Soldiers peel off, creating chaos.

In the confusion, Lara rises slowly from her knees.

She's shaking, but she stands.

Nader turns back — surprised.

NADER (CONT'D)

I did not give you permission to stand.

She smiles faintly.

LARA

I don't remember needing it.

Behind her, the Reaper is barely holding together. His cloak tears in invisible wind, shards of him blowing away like ash.

The ticking from the higher ledger BOOMS, like a countdown.

THE REAPER

They are moving to erase both of us.

Lara's eyes lock on the missile.

LARA

Then I guess we're out of extensions.

EXT. MOBILE LAUNCHER - MOMENTS LATER

A SECOND TECH, shaking, moves to take his colleague's place.

Nader yells.

NADER

Fire! NOW!

The tech slams his palm onto the switch-

The launch clamps disengage.

The THERMOBARIC MISSILE kicks off the rail with a scream, streaking upward.

EXT. RUINED BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Keller sees the missile arc.

His face goes blank.

KELLER

...We're too late.

Harris stares.

HARRIS  
How big is that—

KELLER  
Big enough.

He breathes once, looking toward the distant square.

KELLER (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.

EXT. SKY ABOVE CITY - CONTINUOUS

The missile arcs high, nose tipping toward the district.

Its exhaust leaves a dirty white trail.

Time feels like it's speeding up.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Everyone watches — soldiers, Keller's team, civilians from afar.

The Reaper looks up.

His ticking falters.

THE REAPER  
This is the moment.

Lara follows the missile's path with her eyes.

Her voice is barely audible.

LARA  
You said you don't know how to choose.

He looks at her — what's left of him.

THE REAPER  
I am... function.  
(beat)  
Not will.

She steps closer.

LARA  
You've been watching us die since the first fire.  
(beat)  
(MORE)

LARA (CONT'D)  
Don't tell me you never wanted to  
change the outcome.

That lands like a blow.

For a heartbeat, the ticking stops.

Then starts again – but different. Slower. Like it's  
thinking.

The Reaper looks at his own hands, dissolving at the edges.

THE REAPER  
If I touch this...  
(beat)  
I end.

She holds his gaze.

LARA  
If you don't... they end.

He looks between the falling missile and the distant square.

His voice is very quiet.

THE REAPER  
I was never meant to choose.

She smiles – exhausted, broken, still defiant.

LARA  
Then die doing something you  
weren't meant to.

EXT. SKY – CONTINUOUS

The missile screams toward the city.

At the last possible second–

The Reaper APPEARS directly in its path, impossibly high,  
cloak billowing like black wings.

Time HICCUPS.

The missile freezes mid-flight, vibrating with lethal energy.

The world goes silent.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD / CITY - SAME TIME

Everyone stares upward.

Nader's eyes widen, for the first time genuinely shaken.

NADER

...What?

Keller's mouth opens.

KELLER

Is that-

Farid squints.

FARID

Oh, now he decides to showboat.

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

The Reaper spreads his arms.

His cloak wraps around the missile like a shroud.

The higher ledger's ticking SLAMS into a single, massive tolling sound.

Glyphs flare around him, burning, then cracking.

His voice, echoing everywhere:

THE REAPER

I choose.

The cloak tightens.

The missile begins to unravel - bolts pop free, plating disintegrates, fuel vaporizes into harmless mist.

At the same time-

The Reaper's body fractures, segments of him dissolving into particulate light.

Bone turns to dust. Cloth turns to smoke.

His watch splinters, fragments spiraling outward as streaks of pale fire.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Tiny motes of that same pale fire drift down across the battlefield.

They land on helmets, rifles, rubble.

Where they touch, metal briefly phases - ghostly, then solid again.

Lara watches, tears cutting lines through the grime on her face.

LARA  
(whisper)  
Carry their names.

Up in the sky, the final piece of the Reaper - his hollow face - looks down one last time.

A faint, almost human smile.

Then he's gone.

The missile is gone.

The sky is empty.

EXT. ENEMY FORWARD COMMAND - SAME TIME

Sensors go crazy.

TECHS shout, screens glitching. Missile telemetry disappears mid-path.

The THERMOBARIC ICON blinks... then blanks out.

The system throws up one simple word in red:

ERROR.

Nader's aide stares, stunned.

AIDE  
Sir... the warhead... it's just... gone.

Nader's composure fractures.

NADER  
Weapons do not just vanish.

His voice borders on hysteria.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The battlefield hangs in stunned silence.

Soldiers look around, lost.

Some cross themselves. Others mutter prayers. A few drop to their knees.

One SOLDIER lowers his rifle entirely.

SOLDIER #1  
We're fighting.. what?

Another backs away from Lara, shaking.

SOLDIER #2  
This is cursed.

Lara stands in the middle of it all, breathing hard.

Her hair is now pure white, luminous in the weak dawn light.

For a heartbeat, she seems... bigger. Not in size, but in presence. Like reality is bending around her instead of the other way around.

A soft ticking returns – not from the Reaper, but from somewhere around her.

Nader stares at her like she is the equation that broke his career.

NADER  
What... are you?

She looks at him, eyes old as the war itself.

LARA  
I'm the part of the ledger that  
learned to say no.

His jaw clenches. Rage surges back in.

NADER  
You think this changes anything?  
I'll level your district with  
conventional rounds. I'll turn your  
square into dust with tanks.  
(beat)  
My numbers always adapt.

He grabs a nearby rifle, shoulders it himself, starts firing toward Lara.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Bullets scream toward her.

And then—

They stutter in the air, flickering out of sync.

For a split second each bullet appears in two places at once, then drops harmlessly to the asphalt.

Nader stares, unbelieving.

His own gun JAMS, the slide locking halfway.

He yanks the trigger. Nothing.

Keller's team seizes the moment.

KELLER

Now! GO!

They open fire on the convoy — controlled bursts, targeting tires, weapon mounts, radios.

VEHICLES blow tires, spin out.

Radios SPARK, channels flooded with overlapping voices from three different times.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - SAME TIME

Back at the square, people flinch at distant gunfire—

—but the killing rain never comes.

They wait for the death-blast.

It never arrives.

Instead, a gentle fall of pale motes drifts down — remnants of the Reaper.

They land in children's hair, on Leila's shoulders, on Qasim's wrapped body.

Leila looks up, tears in her eyes.

LEILA

He... he stopped it.

Kareem holds his baby up to the light, shaking with relief.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Panic sweeps Nader's soldiers.

Fields of probability are failing them. Bullets misfire.  
Vehicles stall.

One soldier rips off his helmet.

SOLDIER #3

I'm not dying for this. For... her.

He drops his gun, backs away.

Others follow - some fleeing, some just standing down.

Nader roars.

NADER

Cowards! Get back in line! This is  
not chaos- this is an anomaly!

He lunges toward Lara, gun half-working.

He's close now - close enough to see the fine cracks at the  
edges of her eyes, like porcelain under pressure.

He points the rifle at her chest and fires point-blank-

The gun EXPLODES in his hands.

He screams, thrown backward, fingers mangled.

He lands hard on his back.

EXT. SOUTH ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Nader gasps, staring up at the sky like it betrayed him.

Lara limps toward him.

Each step ages her another year.

By the time she reaches him, she looks like she's in her  
seventies. Deep lines, ghost-pale, hair a white halo.

She looks down at him.

LARA

Your math was right about one  
thing.

He grits his teeth.

NADER  
And what is that?

LARA  
Everyone dies.

He laughs, ragged.

NADER  
So... you kill me.

She shakes her head.

LARA  
I don't have to.

She looks over her shoulder.

Behind her, CIVILIANS are arriving – Leila, Yara, Kareem, others who followed Keller and Farid, armed with pipes, rocks, whatever they could grab.

They ring Nader at a distance.

Lara looks back down at him.

LARA (CONT'D)  
You spent your life treating them  
like numbers.  
(beat)  
Now you get to meet them as names.

She steps back.

The circle tightens.

Nader tries to crawl away, but his hand is shredded, his men scattered or surrendered.

Faces loom over him – people he never counted.

The camera rises as the civilians close in.

We don't need to see the rest.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE - DAY (LATER)

The sun is up.

The city is broken, but not gone.

Makeshift tents and tarps cover open spaces. Water is boiled. Food is shared.

A WALL has been cleared and painted white.

NAMES are written on it in careful script – soldiers, civilians, QASIM near the center.

Leila writes another name, then steps back.

Keller stands nearby, arm in a sling, watching kids play with an improvised soccer ball.

Harris limps past with a box of supplies.

Farid exits a tent, wiping his hands, exhausted but alive.

He glances at the name wall.

FARID

We're going to run out of space.

Leila shrugs.

LEILA

Then we repaint another wall.

Keller joins them.

KELLER

Command finally acknowledged  
someone's alive out here.

(beat)

They're "reviewing options."

Farid smirks.

FARID

We should send them a memo: "Option  
A – don't screw this up."

Leila looks around the square.

It's still ruined. But it's theirs.

LEILA

Whatever they decide...

(beat)

We already changed it.

They share a quiet moment.

EXT. TRIAGE SQUARE – EDGE – DAWN (SOME DAYS LATER)

Farid stands alone at the edge of the square, looking out at the city.

It's quiet – that eerie, post-bombardment quiet.

The air has a faint ticking in it.

He frowns.

FARID

Okay. That's new.

He turns slowly.

In a broken window's reflection, for just a moment, he sees a figure behind him:

LARA.

Older, white-haired, but... luminous. Not quite solid. Not quite gone.

He spins around.

No one there.

He looks back at the glass.

Now the reflection is just him.

He exhales, shaky.

FARID

You better not be haunting me. I don't have the energy.

The air shifts.

A soft voice – LARA'S – not from behind him, not from outside, but through the space.

LARA (V.O.)

(overlapping with the  
ticking)

Keep them alive.

Farid closes his eyes, absorbing it.

When he opens them, the ticking fades, replaced by normal morning sounds – coughing, kids, pots clanking.

He smiles, sad and proud.

FARID

I'll try.

(beat)

But don't audit my technique.

He heads back into the square, back to work.

THE END