

TOWN CALLED MALICE

"Pilot"

written by

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TEASER

EXT. TROUBADOUR -- NIGHT

Establishing shot. Doug Weston's club is hopping tonight. A long line of hopefuls waits to get in. The press is here. The place is a madhouse. PRELAP ELIZA, enthusiastic and energetic:

ELIZA (V.O.)

I would listen to anything I could get my hands on. In our house, that meant Neil Diamond, Barry Manilow, Benny Goodman... I memorized the "Victory At Sea" soundtrack.

INT. TROUBADOUR

It's a crush in here. Oasis' "Rock n Roll Star" blares; the song's a decade old but sounds as fresh as it did in '94.

ELIZA (V.O.)

But then I discovered the devil's music. The classics first: The Beatles, the Stones, the Kinks, the Hollies, Sam Cooke... Janis led to Patti, which led to Van the Man, which led to Television and my first real crush, the Velvet Underground.

Upstairs, ELIZA HARMAN (35, hipster-cool and rock-thentic) is laser-focused on CAROL MARKHAM, equally hip, a music journalist who's looking at Eliza wide-eyed.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Then I went through my Ramones, Sex Pistols, Husker Du, Replacements phase, somehow ending up on singer-songwriters. Joe Jackson, Tim Buckley, Richard Thompson...

(beat)

Joy Division was my Manchester gateway drug. The Smiths, The Chameleons, Stone Roses...

Carol's trying to get a word in.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

The Jam got me through high school. I don't know where I would have been without the Modfather.

Carol is finally successful in getting a word in.

CAROL

What about Ray? I was hoping to interview you two together --

Eliza looks uneasy.

ELIZA

Yeah, he's... it's a big night, as you know, and he's got a process.

CAROL

A process?

ELIZA

A pre-show ritual.

(realizing)

You were just being polite. When you asked about my influences.

CAROL

No, no, I really wanted to know. I mean, sure, maybe you overshared a little and I don't know shorthand so I got a little lost, but...

Eliza stands.

ELIZA

I'll go find him.

CAROL

You don't have to --

ELIZA

No, you wanted to interview him, too, and of course you do, because he's the face of the band, the Salinger of rock, ha ha --

CAROL

But --

Eliza's already dashing down the stairs.

ELIZA

(to herself)

Shit, shit, shit... don't you EVER shut up? Good freakin' Lord, did you mention every band on the planet?

Eliza slams through the backdoor, going out into the alley.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Ray?

She waits. Nothing.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Stupid, stupid, stupid...

She wanders out into the dark, lighting a cigarette. She takes a drag, sighs.

RAY (O.S.)  
Interview over?

Eliza jumps and spins around to see her husband, RAY HARMAN (38, rock chic), emerge from the shadows.

ELIZA  
CHRIST!

Ray grins at her. It's a charming grin that always works.

RAY  
You gave her the list, didn't you?

ELIZA  
(defensive)  
She asked.

RAY  
Don't blame the victim, doll.

ELIZA  
You need to talk to her.

RAY  
Did you tell her about my process?

ELIZA  
Ray, come on. This'll be our first positive mention in the press in ten years. Be charming for two minutes.

RAY  
When you coerced me into doing this show, we made a deal.

ELIZA  
I did not coerce you.

RAY  
We made a deal, Eliza. I'm Liam, you're Noel. You do the interviews.

ELIZA  
They don't want to talk to me. They want to talk to you.

RICK, the promoter, sticks his head out the door.

RICK  
Three minutes, guys.

Ray nods. Rick closes the door.

RAY

Now we don't have time.

He grins and kisses Eliza. She kisses him back, then pulls away, looking at him curiously.

ELIZA

What's up with you tonight?

RAY

Nothing. I'm just excited.

Off Eliza, worried...

CUT TO:

INT. TROUBADOUR -- LATER

Eliza, Ray, and the other band members (GERRY and TED) are waiting nervously. Ray looks like he's going to throw up. Gerry's talking to him, secretive. Eliza watches, suspicious. Rick dashes in.

RICK

Okay, look. They're all here, right?  
Everyone. Even Morrissey.

The band members practically trample each other to look out the window.

ELIZA

Moz is here??

RAY

He came all the way from France to see us?

GERRY

Shove aside, lemme see...

RICK

Band. Settle down. This is the biggest reunion show since the Police.

RAY

(sarcastic)

Wow. Since last year? What a news item.

ELIZA

It's not a reunion show. We didn't break up.

RICK

You're on in three.

He rushes down the stairs. Ray slings an arm over Eliza's shoulders.

ELIZA

Took us ten years to get our shit together.

RAY

Me, you mean. I don't know how you didn't slide down that dark tunnel with me.

ELIZA

I told you. Rock-solid family values.

RAY

From those parents you hate so much.

ELIZA

I don't hate them, Ray.

RAY

We been together forever and I still don't get that.

He grins.

RAY (CONT'D)

Come on, Babe. Let's give them something to talk about.

INT. TROUBADOUR -- CONTINUOUS

Rick's announcing the band.

RICK

...Most anticipated comebacks in rock history. You're all privileged to be here. Give it up for THE NEW BLACK!!!

The place goes batshit as the band members bound down the stairs. As they take their places, Eliza and Ray give each other a high five -- a ritual. Ray grins, fierce, turns his electrifying gaze on the crowd.

RAY

(into microphone)  
Hello, Cleveland!

Eliza rolls her eyes and plugs in.

RAY (CONT'D)

We're The New Black, and we're back.

Ray turns to the band, Ted counts it out, and they launch into their first song -- bit, booming power pop, a la Ash.

Jet loves this band. Ray's a magical frontman. The crowd roars. Upstairs, even the record company stiffs are dancing. Eliza can feel the energy. And for a moment, it feels great.

But then she sees Ray, who's jumping around maniacally, almost assaulting the crowd. It's Liam Gallagher at the MTV Movie Awards. The crowd's starting to turn against him.

Tom casts an anxious glance at Eliza. She shrugs. Ray's not even singing anymore. He twirls his mike stand over the audience, almost hitting a guy in the head. Someone throws a cup of beer at Ray. He stops, eyes the guy.

RAY (CONT'D)

You want some?

GUY

Shut up and sing!

ELIZA

Oh, shit...

Ray throws the mike stand to the ground and jumps off the stage, on top of the guy.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

No, Ray, shit shit shit...

Eliza drops her guitar and starts towards Ray but Gerry pulls her back.

GERRY

Security's coming, Lizzie.

Eliza watches helplessly as security arrives and tries to pull Ray off the concert-goer. Eliza looks up to see the record company stiffs filing out. She closes her eyes. Goodbye, comeback.

END OF TEASER

## ACT ONE

INT. BEVERLY HILLS MANSION -- MORNING

A shell-shocked Eliza sits in an overly designed, opulent sitting room. This is what rock stardom buys. She's with her manager JOAN and her lawyer TREVOR.

TREVOR

Here's the sitch. The guy's gonna sue. And since there were about five hundred witnesses, he'll win.

ELIZA

I know I told you not to sugar-coat it, Trevor, but could you sugar-coat it a little?

TREVOR

I am sugar-coating it. Exactly how much blow did he do before the show?

Eliza stares at him.

ELIZA

He swore he was clean.

TREVOR

Drug test says otherwise.

Manager Joan gets off her phone call.

JOAN

He has to go to rehab.

ELIZA

He won't stay.

JOAN

I don't care if he climbs out the window. He's going to Promises or the Priory.

(beat)

This is the rock star perfect storm, Sweetie. Not only is he doing drugs again, he hit a guy.

Joan's checking her Blackberry.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Wow. Pete Doherty says Ray can call him if he needs anything.

ELIZA

You know things are bad if Pete's concerned.



JOAN

What about Nico? Does the press know what school she's at this year?

ELIZA

Probably. But we can go hide out. In London.

JOAN

Do you know how many paparrazzi hang out at airports?

ELIZA

Then I'll go get her and figure something out.

JOAN

Sweetie, this is a bad idea.

ELIZA

Well, it's not my first.

INT. SUV

Eliza's fiddling with the GPS.

JOAN

At least tell me where you're going.

ELIZA

I don't know where I'm going. I'll call you when I get there.

JOAN

Some people might think you're running away.

ELIZA

They'd be right.

Eliza closes the door. The SUV leaves. Joan sighs.

INT. SUV - THE GPS SCREEN

A jagged yellow line, pointing towards a STAR.

Eliza's got one eye on the GPS and another on the road. It's EVENING. She drives up a tree-lined street and into a curving driveway. She stops the car, and stares.

ELIZA

Holy crap.

Eliza's in the huge driveway of a massive STONE BUILDING. The wrought iron sign reads "EXETER ACADEMY." You'd think Eliza had never been here before. You'd be right. Eliza gets out, stares in awe.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I suddenly understand the tuition.

INT. EXETER ACADEMY -- DORM ROOM

Meet NICO HARMAN (15), glam, wordly, and currently having sex with rough-looking DUNCAN. He flops down beside her.

DUNCAN

You rock, girl.

NICO

Mmm hmm.

Nico pulls on clothes and sits cross-legged on the bed. She lights a cigarette and takes a long drag, glancing at Duncan.

NICO (CONT'D)

We're not going to cuddle.

DUNCAN

You want me to leave.

NICO

That'd be great.

Duncan shrugs, gets dressed. Nico smokes and watches him.

DUNCAN

They weren't kidding. You aren't in the least bit clingy. I love it.

NICO

Whatevs. Get out.

Duncan opens the door. Eliza stands there. Duncan jumps and looks guilty. Nico just blinks.

NICO (CONT'D)

Huh.

Eliza's furious. She points at Duncan.

ELIZA

Get out before I bite your head off.

Duncan slinks out, terrified. Nico smiles.

NICO

Why, Mother. What brings you here?

ELIZA

I thought we'd go on a road trip.

NICO

What, now?

ELIZA

Sure. Why not?

NICO

Look around. I'm in school.

ELIZA

Interesting curriculum.

NICO

Harmless teenage fun.

ELIZA

We'll talk about this later. And we've gone on road trips before.

NICO

No, what we've gone on are tours.

(beat)

I can't believe you even found this place, since you've never been here.

ELIZA

Pack a bag. Come on. It'll be fun.

EXT. EXETER ACADEMY -- LATER

Eliza and Nico are in the SUV. A GUARD is talking to Eliza.

GUARD

Just go straight down this road, then a sharp left at the lake. That'll take you the back way, so you can avoid the press.

ELIZA

Thank you.

The guard nods. Eliza starts the car and programs the GPS. Eliza pulls out. Nico crosses her arms.

NICO

Geez, Mom, who the fuck did you kill?

INT. COFFEE SHOP -- EVENING

A shabby roadside coffee shop in the middle of nowhere, still showing the vestiges of Googie architecture. Eliza's studying the menu. Nico, arms still folded, stares at Eliza.

ELIZA

I love diner food. Greasy fries, milkshakes... figured out what you want?

NICO

A new mother.

ELIZA

I think I'm getting a burger. Want a burger?

NICO

What the fuck's going on?

ELIZA

How many times do I have to say road trip?

NICO

Until it doesn't sound like a lie?

ELIZA

Nico. Everything's fine. Okay?

NICO

Didn't Dad want to come on this supposed road trip?

ELIZA

He can't. He's busy.

NICO

I'll bet you didn't even tell him. This is one of your torturous mother-daughter getaways. Isn't it?

ELIZA

Yeah. Sure. That's what it is. So can you just relax for five minutes and figure out what you want to eat?

The WAITRESS comes over.

WAITRESS

Take your order?

ELIZA

Hamburger, no mayo.

NICO

(reluctantly)

Same.

The waitress leaves. Mother and daughter stare at each other.

INT. SUV -- EVENING

Nico's staring out the window. They've just passed a sign that says "Welcome To Millgate - America's Promise." Eliza's searching radio stations. She lands on Matthew Wilder's "Break My Stride" and starts to sing along.

ELIZA

(singing)

Ain't nothin' gonna break my stride...  
nobody's gonna slow me down, oh no --

NICO

You have lost your mind.

ELIZA

Part of the fun of a road trip is  
singing along with the radio.

(beat)

Dammit, I must've missed the turn  
off...

NICO

Are you ever going to tell me where  
we're going?

ELIZA

It's a surprise.

NICO

Paris is a surprise. London is a  
surprise. A town called Malice...  
not a surprise.

Eliza glances at Nico, amused.

ELIZA

That's what I used to call it, too.

Eliza sees a gas station up ahead and pulls in. She rolls  
down the window and shouts at the ATTENDANT.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Excuse me? Can you tell me where  
the Road 80 turn off is? I think I  
missed it.

ATTENDANT

Left after the CostCo.

ELIZA

Oh. That didn't used to be there.

The attendant looks at her curiously.

ATTENDANT

Been there over ten years.

ELIZA

Right. Well, thanks.

She rolls up the window and goes back the other way. Nico  
glances at her, then at the GPS.

NICO

You don't even know how to read that thing. Do you?

ELIZA

Not the slightest clue.

(beat)

But now things are starting to look familiar.

NICO'S POV - MAIN STREET

Small town Americana. Local SHOPS, like a hardware store and a stationery store, are sandwiched between newer CHAIN stores -- a Gap, Williams-Sonoma, Barnes & Noble.

On the radio now is Starship's "We Built This City on Rock N Roll." Nico's in banal rock hell.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

The hardware store's still here...  
Where did the Williams-Sonoma come from? There's the bakery. They have the best egg salad sandwiches. And here's the Huggy Bear.

Eliza pulls into the driveway of the Huggy Bear Motel, typical small town charm.

NICO

Someone named a motel after a character on Starksy & Hutch?

ELIZA

Believe me, they didn't know they were doing it.

NICO

Oh. My. God.

ELIZA

What?

NICO

You came from here. We're in your hometown.

INT. HUGGY BEAR MOTEL

Eliza and Nico stand at the front desk. HERMAN, the ancient manager, is slowly writing down Eliza's credit card information. Very slowly. He keeps peering at her.

HERMAN

Why do you look familiar?

NICO  
Because she's from here.

HERMAN  
Eh?

NICO  
(loudly)  
She's from here.

Herman stares at Eliza and then goes back to writing. After a carefully scripted letter, he peers at Eliza again.

HERMAN  
Why do you look familiar?

Nico drops her head to the counter.

INT. ELIZA AND NICO'S ROOM -- LATER

They enter. It's a typical motel room, complete with scratchy bedspreads and bad Keene paintings nailed to the walls. Nico sits on the other. A beat.

NICO  
Shouldn't we get our stuff?

ELIZA  
We have to go someplace first. And don't forget to look adorable. It may be our only advantage.

NICO  
Where are we going?

ELIZA  
To pay our respects to the Godfather.

INT. TOWNSEND HOUSE -- EVENING

A nice house, well kept. Country decor is tastefully displayed. There's even a Kinkade hanging over the fireplace.

LINDA TOWNSEND (late 50s) and her husband CARL (60s) are at the kitchen table with their son TOM (40, solid-looking), his wife GINNY (38, maternal) and their daughter TAYLOR (16, clean-cut). They've just had dinner and are playing a card game. They're having fun. A typical suburban family evening.

CARL  
So what's for dessert?

TOM  
Dad always wants dessert when he's losing.

CARL  
 (false gruffness)  
 Come on, let's play. Whose deal?

TAYLOR  
 It's mine, Grampa.

Taylor deals the cards. There's the SOUND of a CAR pulling into the driveway. The Townsends look at each other.

LINDA  
 Now who could that be?

EXT. TOWNSEND HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

The Townsends come out. And stop. Eliza and Nico stand there, next to the SUV. Nico looks completely mystified. Eliza looks uncomfortably guilty.

NICO  
 Who the fuck are they?

ELIZA  
 My parents. Your... grandparents.

LINDA  
 My God. Is that Nico?

Linda smiles, hugs Nico, who stiffens.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
 Welcome home, Eliza.

ELIZA  
 Thanks, Mom.

Carl shakes his head and, followed by Tom and his family, goes back into the house. Linda ignores them.

LINDA  
 Why don't you come in?

ELIZA  
 Love to. Thanks.

Linda and Eliza walk towards the house.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Nico, come on.

Nico's too stunned to object. She follows.

INT. TOWNSEND HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Eliza and Nico enter the house. They can hear RAISED VOICES coming from the dining room. Linda turns to Eliza and Nico.



LINDA  
Would you like anything to drink?

ELIZA  
An iced tea would be lovely.

Linda moves off. Nico stares, wide-eyed, at her mother.

NICO  
That's so weird. You sound like  
each other.

ELIZA  
That's not true. Take it back.

Nico won't. She looks around.

NICO  
It's like the set of "Seventh Heaven"  
in here.

ELIZA  
I am NOT like my mother.

From the dining room...

CARL (O.S.)  
What the heck, Lin? How could you  
invite her into our house?

LINDA (O.S.)  
She's here, Carl. And she brought  
Nico.

CARL (O.S.)  
Right. The granddaughter we didn't  
even know about until we read about  
her in the Rolling Stone.

TOM (O.S.)  
After what she did to this family...  
how DARE she show up here.

NICO  
(whispering)  
Who *is* that guy?

ELIZA  
Tom. My brother.

NICO  
You have a *brother*?  
(beat)  
They sound pissed. What did you do?

LINDA (O.S.)  
This is our house, Tom. Not yours.

CARL (O.S.)

If it's our house, I get a say, too.

GINNY (O.S.)

I don't want her around Taylor.  
Her, or her daughter.

NICO

(offended)

What did *I* do? And who's Taylor?

ELIZA

Your cousin.

Linda and Carl appear at the doorway. Carl looks at his daughter for the first time. He looks disappointed and angry.

CARL

Okay. What?

LINDA

(admonishing)

Carl.

ELIZA

First off, I'm sorry. I know it's years too late, but I was a teenager --

CARL

What about the past eighteen years? You could have called. You could have written.

(beat)

I know we didn't have the best of relationships before you ran away, Elizabeth, but to keep our grandchild from us? How can you be so heartless?

ELIZA

I didn't mean to hurt you.

CARL

So you suddenly came all the way up here just to apologize?

ELIZA

We're on a road trip. Nico wanted to see where I grew up.

Nico snorts. Eliza gives her a look.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

(lame)

It would have been rude not to stop by.

CARL

What you mean is, someone in town  
would've told us you were here.

ELIZA

Look, really, we just wanted to say  
hello. So... hello.

Eliza turns to go.

LINDA

Eliza. Carl. Both of you. Stop.

Eliza stops.

LINDA (CONT'D)

(to Carl)

You're going to just let her walk  
away, Carl?

(to Eliza)

And you... you'll just go, without  
even a word?

ELIZA

Mom, this isn't going to work. I  
was kidding myself. Look, we're  
staying at the Huggy Bear tonight.  
We'll be gone in the morning.

LINDA

You are not staying in that deathtrap,  
Elizabeth. You'll stay here.

ELIZA

No, Mom, thanks, but...

LINDA

But nothing. Are your bags in the  
car?

Eliza nods. Linda glances at Carl. He sighs, storms out.  
Linda turns back to Eliza and Nico, a smile on her face.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Now... let me see about that iced  
tea.

Linda goes back into the kitchen. A beat.

NICO

And I thought I was a disappointment.

INT. TOWNSEND HOUSE -- LATER

Carl is leading Eliza and Nico down the hall. Carl opens  
the door to the GUEST ROOM. To put it kindly, it's a little  
spare in here.

There's a small bed, a bedside table, a dresser. The only thing on the wall is a CRUCIFIX, which is over the bed.

ELIZA

I see the nun room hasn't changed.

Carl crooks his finger at Nico.

CARL

Come on.

She follows Carl. He opens another bedroom door, presumably Eliza's childhood room. Nico stares.

This is the opposite of the nun room. This room is a blast of color and design. The walls are covered with posters -- mainstream stuff like the Beatles, Janis Joplin and U2, and lesser-known rock gods like the Replacements, Husker Du, the Stone Roses, the Skids, Lone Justice.

Nico looks up. Over the bed is an enormous poster of the Velvet Underground and Nico. Nico grins.

NICO

Cool.

Carl stands there, uncomfortable... he hasn't been in this room for years.

CARL

Yeah, well... you can stay in here.

He leaves. Nico looks around in awe. Eliza comes in, watches her daughter examine the room. Eliza looks around with fondness and a little pain.

ELIZA

Just like I left it.

Nico turns.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

They didn't change a poster. Just sealed it up, I guess, and purified the hallway with salt.

NICO

This is too cool. My whole rock education is in this room.

ELIZA

It took me years to get it this way. You can't buy anything interesting in this town, and there wasn't an Internet then.

NICO  
Why'd you leave it?

ELIZA  
(softly)  
You can't run away with all your  
stuff, Kid.

CUT TO:

INT. ELIZA'S ROOM -- EARLY MORNING

Eliza's asleep. A shadow falls over her and she bolts awake.  
Nico stands there, holding her cellphone.

NICO  
Dad's all over Defamer. They said  
he overdosed and hit some guy.  
There's even a dead pool.

ELIZA  
Geez, it's six in the morning --

NICO  
Are we running away? I don't want  
to be Thelma to your Louise. I'm not  
four. You can't just treat me like  
an accessory anymore.

ELIZA  
I never treated you like that.

NICO  
Oh, please. The Anton Corbijn photo  
shoot on the Asian tour? If that  
wasn't the opportunistic exploitation  
of a minor, I don't know what is.

The door opens. Carl stands there.

CARL  
Time for church.

Carl leaves. Nico blinks. Eliza looks oddly happy.

NICO  
Excuse me. Church?

ELIZA  
Welcome to small-town America.

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

INT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH -- MORNING

The Townsend family sits in a pew. Nico's looking around like she's never been in a church before. Which she probably hasn't. People are staring at Eliza and whispering. PARISHIONERS line up for Communion. Nico gets up.

ELIZA  
(whispering)  
What are you doing?

NICO  
Getting some body of Christ. I'm  
starving.

Eliza grabs Nico's arm, pulls her down.

ELIZA  
We're going to eat after. The Pancake  
Haus. You'll love it.

EXT. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH -- MORNING

PARISHIONERS exit the church. Eliza and Nico exit. Father Donnelly smiles frostily at them.

FATHER DONNELLY  
Elizabeth. I still have the same  
hours for confession.

ELIZA  
Good to know, Father.

They walk away. Nico looks at Eliza.

NICO  
Confession?

ELIZA  
No way. I'd be doing Hail Marys  
into my sixties.

NICO  
God, that was boring. Do these people  
come here every Sunday?

ELIZA  
It's tradition.

NICO  
And you did this when you lived here?

ELIZA  
Along with catechism.  
(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 (off Nico's blank  
 look)  
 Catholic Sunday school.

NICO  
 No wonder you ran away.

CARL  
 Eliza. Nico. Let's go.

Carl and Linda are in the family Taurus.

ELIZA  
 See? Breakfast.

NICO  
 Thank Christ.

INT. HOMETOWN BUFFET -- LATER

A depressed Eliza stands with the Townsend family and Nico in a long line inside the chain restaurant.

LINDA  
 The Pancake Haus has been gone for about five years, Eliza. Your dad likes this place better.

CARL  
 You get more for your money.

A mystified Nico pokes Eliza.

NICO  
 Hey... what is this?

ELIZA  
 What is what?

Nico gestures to the line of people.

NICO  
 This. What are we waiting for?

ELIZA  
 We have to wait in line. There are people ahead of us.

NICO  
 I didn't have to wait in line for U2 at Staples. This is ridiculous.

Eliza catches Carl's eye. He frowns, disapproving.

INT. HOMETOWN BUFFET -- LATER

They've been seated. Nico comes back with a heaping plate of breakfast meats.

ELIZA

You seem to have applied some kind of breakfast physics to get it to stay like that.

NICO

I think that's the point.

TOM

So Eliza. Are you going to tell us what you're doing here? Or will you just leave us a note when you leave in the middle of the night?

LINDA

Tom!

Eliza stands abruptly.

ELIZA

I'm going for more coffee.

Eliza takes her cup and meanders through the buffets towards the coffee pot. Just like in church, people are staring at her. She automatically smiles at the person at the next coffee tureen, but her smile fades. It's Carl. The natural inclination is to flee, but they're both filling up coffee cups. There's a long, uncomfortable beat.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Good coffee.

CARL

Better than that five-dollar coffee you get in Hollyweird, I'll bet.

ELIZA

Dad, you have the five-collar coffee place here. Starbuck's. I saw two on the way into town. You might like it, you know. They have specialty coffees, like cappucinos and lattes.

Eliza can't believe she's chattering about coffee.

CARL

I get a perfectly fine cappucino at the gas station.



ELIZA

That's just hot water and instant mix. You should try a real one. I know how much you like coffee.

Carl's cup is filled. He turns to go, stops.

CARL

I'll think about it.

He leaves. Eliza smiles. As she turns, her face lights up.

ELIZA

Alice?

Eliza has spotted ALICE SWENSEN (35), Eliza's bestest childhood friend. Alice turns. She looks surprised but as uncomfortable as everyone else. She's with her mother, JUDY.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Judy. Hi.

JUDY

Eliza. This is a surprise.

Alice could look happier to see Eliza.

ALICE

I didn't know you were back.

ELIZA

Just for a few days.

An uncomfortable beat.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I brought my daughter with me.

ALICE

Oh, that's cool.

Another beat.

ELIZA

If you're not doing anything tonight, want to hit it? It's been too long.

ALICE

Gosh, Lizzie, I don't know...

JUDY

She's not doing anything. It's not like she has a man in her life.

ALICE

Then I guess that makes me Little Edie to your Big Edie.

Eliza laughs. Alice can't help it; she grins.

ALICE (CONT'D)

You're the only person I know who'd get a Grey Gardens reference.

ELIZA

So Riverland? It's still there, right?

JUDY

She'll meet you at eight.

ELIZA

Okay. Cool. It's really good to see you guys.

Eliza walks off to find coffee. Alice glares at Judy.

JUDY

She's your best friend.

ALICE

Was.

JUDY

Just go. It'll be fun.

Eliza goes back to the Townsend table. Nico's made quite a dent in her mile-high plate, and now Taylor stands.

TAYLOR

May Nico and I be excused? I want to show her around town.

NICO

What? No way.

GINNY

Absolutely not.

Nico glances at her, surprised.

TOM

(to Ginny)

She could be a good influence for Nico.

NICO

Hey, Tom? You don't even know me.

TOM

But I know your mother.

ELIZA

Screw you, Tom.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

(to Nico)

Go if you want.

NICO

Oh, I definitely want to go now.  
Let's see the town, Taylor.

Nico and Taylor leave. Carl looks at Eliza and Tom.

CARL

You two. Knock it off.

Linda looks at her silent family.

LINDA

So good sermon today, wasn't it?

EXT. MILLGATE -- DAY

Taylor and Nico walk down the street.

TAYLOR

Millgate's mostly a farming community.  
So a lot of the kids live out in the  
country and get bussed in. We have  
a pretty good high school, nice  
teachers... How big was your school?

NICO

Is.

TAYLOR

What?

NICO

How big IS my school. I still go  
there.

TAYLOR

Oh. I thought --

NICO

You thought wrong.

Taylor lapses into silence. Nico looks at her, a little  
sorry. She sighs.

NICO (CONT'D)

I don't know how many kids go there.  
It's exclusive. A private school.

TAYLOR

Oh. Right. Okay. So what's your  
favorite subject?

NICO

I don't really have one.

TAYLOR

I like math. I'm taking pre-calculus. I'm going to be a teacher. What about you? What do you want to do with your life?

NICO

Live off my trust fund, I guess. I haven't really thought about it.

They walk for a silent moment.

NICO (CONT'D)

What do you do for fun around here?

TAYLOR

Lots of things. Our youth group is really involved in the community. I'm a member of the Christian group at school.

NICO

How is any of that fun?

TAYLOR

It's rewarding. We give back to the community. We put on a pancake breakfast to raise money for causes.

NICO

Oh, like bombing abortion clinics, that sort of thing?

TAYLOR

Of course not. We feed the homeless. We build houses in South America. We help the victims of natural disasters.

NICO

And then you convert them. Right?

TAYLOR

We don't require that anyone we help believes what we believe. That's not Christian.

NICO

Okay, geez, I'm sorry. The only Christians I see are on the news.

TAYLOR

Well, we're not them.

(MORE)

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Hey, there are my friends.

Nico looks. Walking towards them are four TEENAGERS -- clean-cut MORGAN, wispy KAREN, overweight JOANNE, quiet JOHNNY.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Hey, you guys, this is my cousin Nico. Nico, this is Morgan, my boyfriend... Karen... Joanne... and THIS... is Johnny. Johnny, Nico.

Taylor presents Johnny like he's special.

JOHNNY

(nervous)

It's nice to meet you. You're even prettier than Taylor said you were.

Nico stares at him.

NICO

Okay.

She watches everyone watching her and Johnny. Taylor looks like a proud parent. Nico's no slow girl; she gets it.

NICO (CONT'D)

Hey, Taylor, a minute?

She drags Taylor out of earshot.

NICO (CONT'D)

Look... it's not gonna happen.

TAYLOR

What isn't?

NICO

Me and the Beav. He isn't my type. And I don't appreciate being set up.

TAYLOR

I just thought maybe you'd like to meet a nice boy.

NICO

I don't go for nice boys. I'm not a "Take Back the Night" kind of girl. I hook up.

TAYLOR

By "hook up," you mean you...

Taylor can't say it.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

But that's...

NICO

Against the Bible. Right?

Taylor doesn't answer, but yeah. That's it.

NICO (CONT'D)

Look, Taylor, you all seem nice.  
Like, too nice to be true. But I  
need to be on my own for awhile.  
Okay?

TAYLOR

Yeah. Okay.

Nico waves at the other kids.

NICO

Nice to meet you.

She takes off. Taylor stares after her, barely resisting the urge to cross herself.

EXT. MILLGATE MAIN STREET -- LATER

Eliza's taking a walk through town. On this block, every storefront (and they're all locally owned businesses) is either going out of business or having a huge sale. The only store that isn't is PET SOUNDS RECORDS. Eliza goes inside.

INT. PET SOUNDS RECORDS -- LATER

Eliza stops, looks around fondly -- this is an extension of her childhood room. The place is packed full of used and new records and Cds. The View's "Wasted Little Djs" blares from the Harmon Kardons, shaking the windows. Several hip young CLERKS file records. One of them (SHEILA) is talking on the phone. She glances up as Eliza enters the store, does a double-take.

SHEILA

Oh my God. You're HER! Can I get  
your autograph? You're such an  
inspiration, oh my God...

Eliza looks surprised, but pleased.

INT. PET SOUNDS RECORDS -- LATER

Eliza's now surrounded by a cadre of CLERKS and LOCALS. She's signing records and basking in the glow.

Round GREGORY (40s), wearing a too-small vintage Men At Work t-shirt, comes out off the backroom carrying a box of merchandise. He stops, furious at first.

GREGORY

Do I have to do everything around here?

Gregory sees Eliza and almost drops the box.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Eliza! Holy crap!

Eliza and Gregory hug like old friends. Which they are.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

The hell are you doing back in town?

ELIZA

Road trip. So you still work here, after all these years.

GREGORY

Work here? Nah. I bought the place.

ELIZA

Gregory... that's awesome.

One of the clerks, MITCHELL (17) sidles up to Gregory.

MITCHELL

Does this Kelly Jones chick have any other albums or should I make a bin card?

ELIZA

(to Mitchell)

Kelly Jones is not a "chick," but the singer for the Stereophonics.

Mitchell looks blank. Gregory looks pained.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Oh my God.

Eliza goes straight for the record bins.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

The Stereophonics. Britpop. From Wales. Formed in '92. Kelly Jones. Richard Jones. Stuart Cable, until he was sacked a few years ago.

Eliza's pulling albums.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Gregory --

GREGORY

On it.

As Eliza piles records into a startled Mitchell's hands, Gregory's handing him a DVD.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Cardiff Castle show.

ELIZA

(to Mitchell)

You have a lot of listening ahead of you.

Bewildered, Mitchell wanders off. Gregory grins.

GREGORY

Just like old times.

ELIZA

So what's going on around here?  
Looks like the whole block's going  
out of business.

GREGORY

This developer offered to buy out  
the block. They want to put in some  
kind of mall. Everybody caved.  
Except me.

ELIZA

Good for you.

GREGORY

Not as good as you'd think. Once  
these businesses go down, it'll be a  
ghost town on this block. I don't  
know how long I can hold out.

Eliza's stunned.

ELIZA

Gregory... I had no idea. Of course,  
how could I, right? I haven't been  
here for eighteen years.

GREGORY

You got out, did your thing. That's  
nothing to be sorry for.

ELIZA

Well, everyone else has been looking  
at me like I've returned to Peyton  
Place.



GREGORY

You're the closest thing this town  
has ever come to a scandal. They'll  
get over it.

INT. PIZZA PIRATE -- AFTERNOON

The town pizza place. It's dark and red. Black Rebel  
Motorcycle Club's "Stop" blares from the jukebox. Hardly  
anyone's in here. Nico's playing pool by herself. Behind  
the counter is RAFE ARTOUNIAN (50s), his wife MIRA (50s),  
and several COUSINS. They're staring at Nico.

RAFE

Maybe she's Jimmy Machoian's kid.

MIRA

She's too old. The Kandarian girl?

COUSIN #1

That one's fat.

COUSIN #2

I don't think she's Armenian at all.

RAFE

Then who IS she?

Nico's oblivious to all of this. She's expertly sinking the  
ten in a corner pocket. The song ends. Nico digs in her  
pocket -- comes up with a ten. She goes to the counter.

NICO

Hey, can I get some quarters, and a  
pack of Morleys?

RAFE

Aren't you too young to smoke?

NICO

No.

Disconcerted, Rafe complies.

MIRA

Who are you?

NICO

Nico.

That doesn't help. Nico picks up the ciggies and the quarters  
and goes to the jukebox. She puts quarters in, selects songs.  
The Jam's "Town Called Malice" plays. Nico sighs, happy for  
the first time in this town.

NICO (CONT'D)

Modfather. Swoon.

She turns back to the pool table, startled to find someone there. This is ALEC. He's eighteen, and he looks like the bad boy he is. Nico ignores him.

ALEC  
You're not bad.

NICO  
Wow. Thanks. What a compliment.

ALEC  
I haven't seen you around here before.

NICO  
No, you haven't.

Alec slaps a quarter on the table.

ALEC  
I have next game.

NICO  
I'll kick your ass.

ALEC  
Give it your best shot, new girl.

Nico looks at him. There's a spark. She grins.

INT. RIVERLAND RESTAURANT -- EVENING

This is the local nice restaurant. If you went to the Millgate High prom, you've been to Riverland. Eliza is in the big corner booth with Alice. Eliza's talking a mile a minute. Alice looks like she doesn't want to be there.

ELIZA  
And then Ray filled Noel Gallagher with about three gallons of Stella Artois and they wrote the worst piece of shit ode to Stella you've ever heard. So then --

ALICE  
Eliza, just tell me why you're really here. Why we're here, at Riverland, drinking bad house Merlot.

ELIZA  
Nico and I are on a road trip. I wanted to see you. That's all.

ALICE  
All of a sudden, after eighteen years of no contact whatsoever?

Alice can't contain her anger.

ALICE (CONT'D)

The first time I saw you on TV was for that video, "For Someone." And I was like, DAMN, that's my best girl! It was exciting.

(beat)

But then I got mad. I helped you, and you turned your back on me. On everyone. I just want to know why.

Eliza stares at Alice and sighs.

ELIZA

When I got to L.A., I wanted to call you. But I couldn't. Because of the way I left. I was horrible.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I didn't really think we could just pick up where we left off, but... I had to give it a shot. I was a kid. Scared out of my freaking mind. It was the biggest, dumbest decision I ever made. Just tell me what to say, Alice. I want to make it right.

Alice gives Eliza a long, contemplative look.

ALICE

I think maybe... I was jealous of you. So I wouldn't have called you, either.

Alice holds up her glass.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Toast.

They clink glasses and grin at each other.

CUT TO:

INT. RIVERLAND -- LATER

Alice and Eliza are chatting away, comfortable.

ALICE

Much to my mother's dismay, I never became the next Jodie Foster, but the Millgate Playhouse has actually been in the black for about three years now. I'm lucky WalMart doesn't have a dinner theater.

ELIZA

Are things really that bad here?

ALICE

When the WalMart came in, it didn't close down any businesses, so everyone let it happen. Then the toy store closed because WalMart was cheaper, and they all fell like dominoes.

ELIZA

Like the Pancake Haus.

ALICE

People like the lower prices and the convenience. They pretend these corporations aren't raping the town.

ELIZA

I wish I could do something.

ALICE

There's nothing anyone can do. Corporations always win. The little guy's gone from owning his own business to being the greeter at WalMart.

The door opens and ANDY (60) enters with CARRIE ANN (35). Carrie Ann is 35, but dresses like she's still in high school.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Crap. Dad and the wicked stepmother.

Andy and Carrie Ann don't see her and walk off to be seated.

ELIZA

So. They're still together.

ALICE

He actually married her after he divorced Judy. Their kid is as fucked up as she is.

ELIZA

Right. I left before she had it.

ALICE

Alec. He's eighteen, and a total punk. Make sure he stays away from your daughter.

A BAND appears to be setting up. Eliza turns.

ELIZA

I didn't know there was live music here.

Alice can SEE the four band members, in shadow, walking towards the stage. One of them waves at Alice. She stands.

ALICE  
They suck. Let's go.

ELIZA  
I love bad bar bands, as long as  
they don't do Dave Matthews or Jimmy  
Buffett.

ALICE  
This one does nothing but Gordon  
Lightfoot covers. Come on, Lizzie,  
I'm doing you a favor here --

The band members take their place and set up. They lights  
go on, illuminating BEN (35), cute and scruffy.

BEN  
Hi, y'all, we're Rockabilly Barbecue.  
You got a favorite, shout it out.

Eliza stares, frozen, horrified. Alice sighs.

ALICE  
I forgot it was tonight.

ELIZA  
Yeah... I'm suddenly not in the mood  
for Gordon Lightfoot.

Eliza stands up and accidentally knocks her glass off the  
table. It hits the ground and shatters louder than any glass  
has ever shattered before. Ben looks over. He and Eliza  
lock eyes. Mortified, Eliza turns and makes her graceful  
exit, fighting the urge to run.

END OF ACT TWO

## ACT THREE

EXT. MILLGATE -- MORNING

Eliza's walking down Main Street, past chain after chain. She passes the Century 21 office. In the window, she can see Linda, wearing the gold Century 21 blazer, shaking hands with two BUSINESSMEN. Linda looks up and sees her, motions to her to wait. Linda opens the door for the businessmen.

LINDA

It's just a matter of time before he sells.

The businessman walk off. Linda turns to Eliza.

LINDA (CONT'D)

So what are you up to today?

ELIZA

I'm meeting my manager at the Starbuck's. She's got some papers for me to sign or something.

LINDA

Where's Nico?

ELIZA

Oh. I don't know. Around, I guess.

LINDA

You just let a fifteen-year-old wander off on her own?

ELIZA

Didn't you always say this was the safest town in America?

LINDA

I'm not worried about Nico. I'm worried about the town.

Eliza changes the subject.

ELIZA

It looks like Century 21 ate Millgate Realty.

LINDA

It wasn't as dramatic as that. But yes. I like working for this company. They treat their employees well.

Down the street, Eliza sees the two businessmen stop in front of the record store. One of them gets on his phone.

ELIZA

Are you helping those guys buy the record store?

LINDA

I'm involved in the development deal for the entire block, not just the record store.

ELIZA

So you're trying to strongarm Gregory into selling.

LINDA

They're offering Gregory fair market value for the property. There's no strongarming going on.

ELIZA

He bought that store because he loves it, Mom. And you're forcing him to sell it.

LINDA

I'm not forcing anyone to do anything.

ELIZA

Yes, you are. You're just lying about it so you can feel good about yourself.

LINDA

You've been here for two days and suddenly you care about what happens to this town?

ELIZA

You've always hated that store because of what it meant to me.

LINDA

Oh, Eliza. Really.

ELIZA

Yes. Really. And you know what? I'm going to stop you.

LINDA

Stop me? How?

ELIZA

I'm going to buy it, Mom. I'm going to buy the record store.

Linda stares at Eliza in disbelief. A triumphant Eliza turns on her heel and storms off.

INT. STARBUCK'S -- MORNING

Joan's already chattering as Eliza sits down.

JOAN

This town is DARLING. I was doubtful that you could keep away from the press but now that I've seen it with my own eyes, I have total faith. They'll never find you here.

(beat)

What's up, Sweetie?

ELIZA

I've made a decision. I'm going to buy the record store.

JOAN

What record store?

ELIZA

Pet Sounds Records. The local store in town. My haven when I was a kid.

(beat)

Can you make that happen? Or Trevor, or whoever buys things for us?

JOAN

I'd love to, Eliza, but the thing is... you can't buy it. You're a little tight on money at the moment.

ELIZA

How tight?

JOAN

You don't have any.

Eliza stares at her.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I did not want it to come out that way.

(beat)

Your finances are in a bit of a tangle. The record company backed out because of Ray's situation. So they want their advance back.

ELIZA

Then let's give it back. We've still got our savings, and other assets.



JOAN

Ray seems to have gone through the advance already. And his rehab's expensive. And then there's Nico.

ELIZA

What about Nico?

JOAN

You took her out of school, rather publically.

(beat)

There's some talk, Sweetie... because of Ray's situation, and your past... people are wondering if you're a fit mother for her.

ELIZA

Oh, for... okay. I'll take her back to Exeter tomorrow.

JOAN

Well... your business manager had to shift some money over to pay for rehab and for the advance. Since you took Nico out of Exeter...

ELIZA

I didn't un-enroll her, Joan. We just went on a road trip!

JOAN

Mike had to act fast, and it was easier to get a refund from Exeter than liquidate some assets.

(beat)

Which will probably have to be liquidated at some point, but...

ELIZA

So what am I supposed to do?

JOAN

All I can tell you is, you have got to deal with Nico's situation if you don't want to end up in court.

Off Eliza...

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLGATE MAIN STREET -- LATER

Eliza's walking down the street, on her cellphone.

ELIZA  
 (on phone)  
 Yes, her name is Nico Harman... what  
 grade?

Eliza winces, thinks.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Sophomore?  
 (beat)  
 No, of course I wasn't asking you.  
 Yes, she's a sophomore.

As Eliza talks, she starts to notice people looking at her.  
 It's unsettling. She talks more quietly.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 This afternoon? Terrific. Thanks.  
 We'll be there at four.

Eliza hangs up, looks relieved. A LITTLE OLD LADY smiles at  
 her.

LITTLE OLD LADY  
 Good afternoon, Eliza.

A puzzled Eliza nods at her. A GROCERY STORE CLERK gives  
 her a thumbs up.

CLERK  
 Way to go. Thanks.

Eliza's confused. Then she's suddenly assaulted by a joyous  
 Gregory. He almost picks her up.

GREGORY  
 I love you, Eliza!

ELIZA  
 Ooof! Gregory, what --

GREGORY  
 I heard. We all did.

Mitchell and Sheila are with him. They're both beaming.

ELIZA  
 Heard what?

GREGORY  
 That you're going to buy the store.  
 You're our savior!

Eliza pales.

ELIZA

Oh, well, you see, the thing about that --

GREGORY

You're saving my life, Eliza. Our lives.

(beat)

I really didn't want to go work at WalMart. But YOU... you made it happen. You gave hope to the little guy.

Gregory, Mitchell and Sheila practically skip down the street. Mortified, Eliza ducks around a corner.

ELIZA

Oh my freaking God. What the hell am I going to do?

INT. MILLGATE HIGH SCHOOL - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE -- LATER

Eliza and Nico sit on creaky wooden chairs in the counselor's outer office. Nico's glaring at Eliza.

NICO

I knew you'd dump me here.

ELIZA

I'm not dumping you anywhere. This is temporary.

NICO

What about Exeter? And my friends?

ELIZA

You can't go back to Exeter right now.

NICO

(darkly)

I knew it.

The door opens and the counselor comes out. It's BEN, the singer from Riverland. He and Eliza stare at each other.

BEN

Oh.

(beat)

Why don't you come in?

They get up. Nico stalks into the office. Eliza hesitates.

ELIZA

I didn't know you worked here.

BEN

Well. I do.

ELIZA

You weren't expecting me.

BEN

Mrs. Grumbachler didn't give me all the information. So no. I wasn't.

He turns and goes into the office. Eliza sighs and follows. Ben settles behind his desk.

BEN (CONT'D)

I have a copy of Nico's school records here. You're doing very well in your A.P. classes. I think your credits will transfer perfectly here.

NICO

Well. Good news.

Eliza's looking anywhere but at Ben. Nico starts to notice.

NICO (CONT'D)

Hey, did you go here?

BEN

To Millgate? Yes, I did.

NICO

You're about the same age as my mom. Do you guys know each other?

A very awkward beat as Nico looks from Ben to Eliza.

NICO (CONT'D)

You totally went out, didn't you?

ELIZA

Nico...

BEN

We did totally go out. Until your mom left.

Nico turns to Eliza.

NICO

Did you throw this guy over for Dad?

ELIZA

That's none of your business.

NICO

Look how embarrassed you guys are. Was he your first, Mom?

ELIZA

NICO. Shut the fuck up RIGHT NOW.  
RIGHT NOW. Don't you say another  
fucking WORD.

Nico stops, shocked. Ben stares at Eliza, who looks furious. For a moment, Nico looks like a scared little girl. But she collects herself. She folds her arms and turns back to Ben.

NICO

So you think my credits will transfer?

Off Ben and Eliza...

INT. MILLGATE HIGH SCHOOL -- MOMENTS LATER

Nico, holding a class schedule, exits the office. She stomps down the hall and stops at an OPEN CLASSROOM DOOR, where the frustrated TEACHER is trying to engage the bored class.

TEACHER

You don't have to name both artists.  
Just one of the founding members of  
the Blue Rider movement.

(waits)

His name starts with a K. Rhymes  
with Andinsky.

(waits)

Come on, it's not that hard...

Nico shudders, then turns and walks out the front door.

INT. MILLGATE HIGH SCHOOL - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS  
LATER

Ben's talking to Eliza. He's very formal, distant.

BEN

Your daughter's very bright. Her  
test scores frighten me. But --

ELIZA

Can I just apologize to you?

BEN

Why? Because you're in an awkward  
situation and it seems like the right  
thing to do?

ELIZA

Exactly.

BEN

You know what, Eliza? Screw your  
apology. You owed that to me eighteen  
years ago.

ELIZA

You seem to be doing fine.

BEN

That's not the point.

ELIZA

Then what is the point? Do you just want to yell at me? It wasn't all me, Ben, so don't act like it was.

BEN

It's all for show, isn't it?

ELIZA

What is?

BEN

To prove to the press that you're a good mother. As soon as you're out of the headlines, you're gone.

ELIZA

It's really none of your business.

BEN

The kid probably feels like you're dumping her. Punishing her. Sound familiar?

ELIZA

I am NOT my father.

BEN

I didn't say you were.

Eliza grabs her bag and stands.

ELIZA

Screw you.

EXT. MILLGATE HIGH SCHOOL -- LATER

Nico's watching the front door as Eliza storms out and walks off. A sweet Trans Am drives up. It's Alec.

ALEC

You rang?

Nico hops down off the wall and gets into Alec's car.

END OF ACT THREE

## ACT FOUR

INT. PIZZA PIRATE -- AFTERNOON

Eliza sits at a table. Rafe Artounian brings her a pitcher of beer and two glasses. He lights up.

RAFE

Eliza! You're back from the fame!

He grins, hugs her.

RAFE (CONT'D)

The Karaoke machine has missed you.  
I still have all the records you put  
into our jukebox. Very popular.

(beat)

You drink. I'll send some wings  
over. Gratis.

ELIZA

Thanks.

Eliza pours a glass of beer, downs the entire thing.

GLEN (O.S.)

Hey, you.

Eliza turns to see GLEN CUNNINGHAM (35), dressed as a sheriff. Glen's a straight-arrow type, and a former classmate of Eliza's.

ELIZA

Oh. Wow. Glen. Look at you, you're  
a... sheriff. Impressive.

GLEN

You look amazing, Eliza. Rowr.

ELIZA

Did you just *growl* at me?

GLEN

You let me take you out, I'll do  
more than just growl.

(beat)

Everybody's talking about what you're  
doing for Greg. It's really cool.

Eliza sighs.

ELIZA

Uh huh.

GLEN

You should have a big bash to celebrate. Hey, could you get Cyndi Lauper to come? I loved her back in the day.

ELIZA

Sure, Glen, lemme just get on the phone to her --

Eliza stops. She stares at Glen.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Wait a minute. I CAN get on the phone to her.

(beat)

I never thought I'd say this, Glen, but you're a genius.

Glen grins.

INT. ALEC'S CAR -- LATER

The Trans Am's motoring down a rural dirt road. Nico's smoking as Alec drives. She fiddles with the radio.

NICO

Country... country... Spanish... country... Prager, yuck...

(beat)

There's no good music.

ALEC

Cds in the glovebox.

Nico pops it open and pulls out a handful of Cds.

NICO

Great White... Poison... Bon Jovi...

(beat)

You're really pushing the cliché barrier here, Alec.

ALEC

What? It's good music.

NICO

I'd even settle for a White Stripes album at this point.

ALEC

I don't know them.

NICO

Yeah. Huge shocker.



Alec pulls in front of an abandoned BARN. It looks like Sam's Hot Car Lot out here -- there are about thirty muscle cars and pickups.

NICO (CONT'D)

Oooh. Where are WE?

ALEC

You wanted to party, Babe.

They get out of the car and go towards the barn.

INT. BARN -- MOMENTS LATER

There are several KEGS, chili pepper lights everywhere... the country version of Haight-Ashbury. One of Alec's friends, DOUG, hands Alec a joint. He gives Nico the once-over.

DOUG

Hot.

NICO

Aren't you sweet.

Alec takes a drag on the joint, hands it to Nico. She takes a drag and smiles.

NICO (CONT'D)

Things are looking up.

Someone puts music on the boombox. It's Boston, "More Than A Feeling." Nico's smile fades. She taps Alec on the shoulder, indicates the joint.

NICO (CONT'D)

I'm gonna need more of these.

"More Than A Feeling" bleeds over into...

INT. PIZZA PIRATE -- LATER

Eliza's on her cellphone.

ELIZA

This store folds, and it's only a matter of time before they start going after bigger fish.

(beat)

Well, so far, I've got Bloc Party, the Editors, Johnny Marr's gonna drop by, the Kaisers, Kasabian... getting Snow Patrol would be totally awesome, and I'd owe you big.

(beat)

That's great, Gary. Thanks so much.

Eliza hangs up. She looks happy. Gets an idea.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Oooh... Kings of Leon. I know I've  
 got a Followill on here somewhere...

Eliza's phone RINGS and she answers.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Hello? Oh. Hi, Mom.  
 (beat)  
 Yeah, I was gonna tell you about  
 that. It's only temp -- What do you  
 mean, she ditched?

Eliza sighs.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Don't worry. I have a feeling I  
 know where she is.

INT. BARN -- NIGHT

The party's on fire. The music, now the little-known second  
 Boston album, is blasting so loud it's shaking the barn.  
 Everybody's drunk and/or high. Nico, totally flying, is  
 making out with Alec on one of the hay bales.

Eliza walks into the barn. She sighs, pained, as she spots  
 Alec and Nico. Eliza grabs Alec's arm and pulls him up.

ALEC  
 Take it easy, Doug, you'll get your  
 chance --

ELIZA  
 I'm not Doug. But on reputation  
 alone, you must be Alec.

ALEC  
 Do we know each other?

Nico sits up. Her eyes are glassy.

NICO  
 Oh, hey, Mom...

ALEC  
 MOM?

ELIZA  
 Nico. Out. Now.

Nico scrambles to her feet. Eliza turns to Alec.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 How old are you?

ALEC

Eighteen.

ELIZA

Do you know how old she is?

Alec shakes his head.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Fifteen.

Eliza raises her voice.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

This girl is fifteen years old, you  
fucking perverts. I hope you didn't  
lay an inappropriate hand on a fifteen-  
year-old.

As Eliza marches Nico out of the barn, the party dies a slow,  
sad death.

INT. TOWNSEND HOUSE -- LATER

Linda and Carl are in the living room. They can hear Eliza  
and Nico shouting at each other in Nico's room.

CARL

They sound like they're on Jerry  
Springer.

LINDA

Did you know that Eliza enrolled  
Nico at Millgate High today? And  
she wants to buy the record store.

Carl stares at her.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Let's just let her handle it, Carl.

INT. NICO'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Nico's hysterical.

NICO

I was having FUN, and you ruined it!

ELIZA

Just tell me if you did anything  
other than smoke pot, Nico. Please.

NICO

They're country kids. Pot's all  
they've got. That, and every freaking  
Boston album.

ELIZA

Why did you skip school?

NICO

Because I don't want to go there. I want to go back to my normal life. Back to Exeter. And Dad.

Eliza tears up but tries to hide it.

NICO (CONT'D)

Mom... just tell me what I did wrong.

ELIZA

You're not being punished, Nico.

NICO

Then what IS this? Why are you dumping me here?

ELIZA

I'm not dumping you.

NICO

You always do that. "Your father's fine. He's not on drugs." Remember that one? And then he went away. And now he's gone away again. Are you going to tell me he's fine?

ELIZA

No, I'm, not. Everything sucks. We're broke, Nico. Your dad snorted all our money. You can't go back to Exeter. Your tuition is paying for your dad's rehab.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I'm a terrible mother. One of the worst. Joan Crawford would be embarrassed.

Eliza sits down, spent.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Nico, I don't have any other options. I'm sorry you hate it here, and believe me, I get that. But you have to make the best of it.

(beat)

Take aspirin before you go to bed. I don't want you to be hung over for school tomorrow.

Eliza leaves. Nico sits there, alone. And for the first time, she starts to cry.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

Eliza looks like she hasn't gone to bed. She's sitting at the table, a SHOEBOX in front of her. Linda enters, surprised to see her. She goes about making breakfast.

LINDA

So how'd your conversation go with Nico?

ELIZA

The fight, you mean?

LINDA

You weren't exactly quiet about it.

ELIZA

She's upset. I get it.

(beat)

Because I am dumping her. It's just semantics, really.

LINDA

You know she can live here.

Eliza knows. She can't say anything.

LINDA (CONT'D)

You can't afford to buy the store, can you?

ELIZA

No. I can't.

LINDA

But you're trying to save it anyway. With your benefit.

ELIZA

Small town, word travels. Right?

LINDA

Everyone in town considers me a failure as a mother. I brokered this deal. If it falls through, I'll be a failure as a businesswoman, too.

ELIZA

When I told you I wanted to buy it... I was angry. I would have just let it go, but then Gregory heard about it, and...

LINDA

So you won't let him down, but your own family...

ELIZA

What do you want me to say, Mom?  
I'm sorry. Okay? I'm sorry I'm  
such a huge disappointment to you.  
I ran away, and it was awful, and I  
felt guilty. I didn't want to face  
you, or Dad.

LINDA

For eighteen years.

ELIZA

Every year, I wrote you a Christmas  
card. A birthday card. A Mother's  
Day card. But I couldn't mail them.

Eliza slides the shoebox over to Linda.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

So I kept them. I'll warn you, the  
theme's pretty much the same. Me  
wishing you a happy whatever, and  
then apologizing.

(beat)

But I figure that three apologies a  
year might make up for something.

Linda looks down at the shoebox, then back at Eliza.

LINDA

You can't have the benefit, Lizzie.

ELIZA

What?

LINDA

You can't just have it. You need a  
permit.

ELIZA

Okay... so how do I get one of those?

LINDA

You'll need to get approval from one  
of the council members to petition.

(beat)

Meet Councilwoman Linda Townsend.

Eliza drops her head to the table.

END OF ACT FOUR

## ACT FIVE

EXT. MILLGATE HIGH -- MORNING

Eliza and Nico pull up in front of the school. Nico looks out the window at the school, as kids stream up the wide front steps, laughing with their friends.

ELIZA

Try to have a good day.

NICO

It'll be swell, I'm sure.

Nico gets out. Eliza waits a beat, then drives off. Nico starts trudging the entrance.

TAYLOR (O.S.)

Nico! Hey!

Nico turns. Taylor's there with her gaggle of friends, which includes odd Johnny.

NICO

Hey.

TAYLOR

What do you have first period?

NICO

English.

TAYLOR

Me too. I'll show you where it is.

For a brief moment, Nico's relieved.

NICO

Thanks.

BRIANNA (O.S.)

There's the nerd-whore.

TAYLOR

(tightly)

Just keep walking...

Nico turns. There, in all her glory, is queen bitch of Millgate High -- BRIANNA (16), with two of her hangers-on.

NICO

Did you call me a nerd whore?

BRIANNA

You're dressed like a whore, and you're with the nerd. It's called a hybrid.

NICO  
So is skanky bitch.

Brianna's shocked at Nico's quick comeback. Taylor and Nico escape into the building.

TAYLOR  
That was really good.

NICO  
I got a million of 'em.

INT. PET SOUNDS RECORDS -- DAY

Eliza, holding a clipboard, is walking with Gregory. Gregory looks excited.

GREGORY  
All those bands want to help me out?  
I don't know what to say!

ELIZA  
Well, there's this dog and pony thing  
at the council meeting tonight.  
It's not a done deal yet.

GREGORY  
I know, but your mom's on the council,  
so it's as good as done, right?

A beat.

ELIZA  
Gregory, do you know what "estranged"  
means?

GREGORY  
But she's your mom.

ELIZA  
Let me spell it for you. E, S --

GREGORY  
Okay, okay. I get it.

ELIZA  
I just want to make sure I've got  
all my bases covered, and the list  
of commitments I have aren't going  
to impress the council, unless I can  
squeeze Josh Groban in there.

GREGORY  
If it takes Josh Groban to save my  
store, forget it. I'll work at  
WalMart.



ELIZA

One of the things they're going to want to know is where this shindig's gonna take place.

(beat)

I think we should do it here.

GREGORY

I haven't had a gig here since I bought the place.

ELIZA

Then we should definitely do it here. It'll really showcase the store.

GREGORY

(doubtful)

Do you think we can pull this off?

ELIZA

I've got practically all of Coachella committed to playing. All you have to do tonight is nod with conviction.

GREGORY

I can do that.

Eliza's phone rings.

ELIZA

(into phone)

Hello? Yes, this is Eliza Harman...

Eliza blanches.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

She did what?

Off Eliza, looking horrified...

CUT TO:

INT. MILLGATE HIGH SCHOOL -- LATER

Nico's sitting on a bench in the hall, chewing gum. Eliza comes out and just stares at her. Nico blows a bubble.

ELIZA

What on Earth were you thinking? You know damned well that of all the words you can't say in public, THAT word is the worst.

NICO

We had to read a poem. "Running the World" just popped into my head.

(MORE)

NICO (CONT'D)

It's not my fault I wasn't prepared for class.

ELIZA

You're lucky you only got detention. You need to behave, Nico, or they'll kick you out and you won't have anywhere to go.

NICO

Kicked out of Shitsville. What a tragedy.

ELIZA

You know how I found you at the barn? Because I used to party there, too. I used to say shocking, inappropriate shit at church. I sang "Anarchy in the U.K." at the talent show, and destroyed a guitar on stage. You didn't invent rebellion.

NICO

I told you I didn't want to go to that school.

ELIZA

Nico, you don't get to decide. I'm the parent.

NICO

Right, and what a prize you are. I haven't seen you since Gstaad at Christmas.

ELIZA

Because you were in school --

NICO

You could visit, you know. Other parents do. You could, I dunno, CALL me, see what's going on. At least YOUR parents care about you. I think they care more about me than YOU do.

Nico's getting emotional, but trying to hold it in. Eliza's surprised at the outburst.

NICO (CONT'D)

I know, you were busy planning your big comeback, which is the only thing you care about. I get it.

(MORE)

NICO (CONT'D)

(beat)

And don't tell me you're doing all of this for me. Because you aren't. At least be honest about it.

A long beat. Eliza sighs.

ELIZA

You're right. I've just been hauling you around, telling you to trust me. But why should you listen to a word I say? We only see each other three weeks a year, and all we do is exchange "Best Of" playlists. All we've got in common is our love for the Jam and our hatred of emo.

Eliza looks at Nico, sad.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Jesus, Nico... you're fifteen. And I don't even know you. Forget me being your mother... I don't know who you ARE.

(beat)

Apparently, you're smart. And poised. It's good you can take care of yourself, but... you shouldn't always have to.

NICO

You, either. You work way too hard at your rock exterior. I never got why, until I met Carl and Linda.

(beat)

They need you to need them. And you don't. So it pisses them off.

Eliza's astonished.

ELIZA

That's... really insightful.

NICO

Add it to the list of what I am, I guess.

ELIZA

What about you, Nico? What do you need?

NICO

I need to know... I've got someone to count on. And I know it's not Dad.

Nico looks vulnerable. It breaks Eliza's heart. She holds out her arms. Nico stares at her.

NICO (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

ELIZA  
Come on. Let's hug it out.

NICO  
I don't want to.

ELIZA  
Sure you do.

Nico hesitates, then hugs Eliza. They hold onto each other, fiercely, then they let go, both surprised at the emotion.

NICO  
Don't tell anyone. It'll ruin my cred.

ELIZA  
Kid, this is Millgate. Any cred you had vanished at the city limits.

Nico smiles.

INT. COUNCIL ROOM -- EVENING

The COUNCIL MEMBERS, including Linda, are all seated on the dais. Eliza, dressed in her version of a conservative suit, is standing at the podium, presentation materials beside her. She looks out at the sea of expectant faces. Gregory gives her a thumbs up. Nico already looks bored.

ELIZA  
My name is Eliza Harman, and I'm here to present a, um, presentation...

Eliza clears her throat, nervous.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
This is Gregory Sanchez, whom most of you know. He owns Pet Sounds Records.

Eliza looks down at her notes.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
The Klamath Group has bought every store on South Main except for Gregory's store. As many of you know, the Klamath Group is responsible for what they're calling the gentrification of Millgate.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

They are going to build an outdoor mall on South Main. The Klamath Group is owned by M. Douglas Rich, who also owns...

Eliza glances at the council members. One of them is nodding off. Eliza sighs.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Nobody cares about that, do they? I mean, you don't care who owns the Klamath Group, or what they do. You just want your WalMarts and your CostCos and your Outback Steakhouses.

(beat)

You all claim that small towns are the backbones of America. But you won't hesitate to rape Millgate if it gets you cheaper toilet paper. You're all a bunch of hypocrites.

Now Eliza has everybody's attention. Gregory looks like he's going to throw up, but Nico is paying attention.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I worked on my presentation all day long. I crunched numbers, which I've never had to do in my life. I surfed the Internets, compiled information. But this is just a formality, isn't it? You have no intention of letting Gregory try to save his store.

Eliza leans forward. Even though people seem pissed, they're certainly paying attention.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

When I was growing up here, every business in town was locally owned. My favorite place in all of Millgate was Pet Sounds Records. One, because I love music more than anything except my daughter over there, and two, because I was welcome. It was a great place to hang out.

Eliza pulls out her presentation materials and props an ILLUSTRATION up on the table. It's a rendering of the record store, but the store's been re-designed -- in the back is a small STAGE, with comfortable CHAIRS and a COFFEE BAR. It looks warm and inviting.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Gregory can't afford to have live music in the store but Don and Sue, who owned it before, used to have shows all the time. For the number crunchers among you, this adds to the revenue.

(beat)

You see music as something passive, something that corrupts. But it isn't. Music is about finding yourself. And it has to be performed to be lived.

COUNCIL MEMBER

What are you proposing here?

ELIZA

My proposal, which I worked out with Gregory, is this.

(beat)

We want to stage a benefit, which will help pay the store's overhead. It will also pay to renovate the store, to turn it into a combination music store-performance space.

COUNCIL MEMBER #2

And how does loud rock music benefit the town?

ELIZA

This will be an acoustic space. It will showcase unknown or little known artists of all genres. Rock, country, folk, soul... you name a genre, Gregory has it covered.

GREGORY

And it will benefit the town. You want this new mall to succeed, it's gonna need more traffic than just people who live in Millgate. If we put on shows, we'll get people from neighboring towns. They'll be spending their money in Millgate.

There's a murmur from the crowd. The council members look at each other.

COUNCIL MEMBER

I call for a vote.

The other council members nod.

COUNCIL MEMBER (CONT'D)

I vote aye.

COUNCIL MEMBER #2  
I'll go along with that. Aye.

COUNCIL MEMBER #3  
I'm going to have to vote no on this one. Sorry.

All eyes go to the fourth council member.

COUNCIL MEMBER #4  
I'll have to vote no as well. A reluctant no, but still...

Eliza looks to her mother, dreading this.

LINDA  
While I admire Mr. Sanchez's commitment, it seems that this idea originated with Eliza. Is that true?

GREGORY  
Yes, it was Eliza's idea.

LINDA  
Then I'm a little concerned. Because I know you're not planning on staying here. Sure, you'll organize the benefit and get your important friends to play... but then you're going to leave. So I'll vote yes on one condition.  
(beat)  
That Eliza becomes Gregory's partner. If that's okay with Gregory.

GREGORY  
Okay? I'd be thrilled!

Eliza's backed into a corner.

ELIZA  
Well. Sure. Of course.

Linda smiles. Gotcha.

LINDA  
Then I vote aye.

COUNCIL MEMBER  
The ayes have it.

He bangs the gavel. Gregory sees how distraught Eliza is.

GREGORY  
Lizzie, I'm sorry, but --

ELIZA  
It's okay. She sandbagged us both.

Linda comes over.

LINDA  
Congratulations. And welcome back  
to Millgate.

ELIZA  
Don't let anyone tell you you're not  
a good businesswoman, Mom.

Linda smiles. Carl joins them. He looks grumpy.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Hey. It wasn't my idea.

CARL  
That's what worries me.

ELIZA  
Don't think we're going to live with  
you. We'll find a place of our own.

NICO  
We?  
(beat)  
You want me to stay in this town  
that you ran away from, and go to  
that crappy high school with my Jesus  
freak cousin and sit next to the  
small-town version of Lindsay Lohan?

ELIZA  
Yeah.

NICO  
I hate you.

ELIZA  
I hate you, too.  
(beat)  
You hungry? I'll buy you a pizza.

NICO  
Whatevs.

They head out. Carl looks at Linda.

CARL  
What a weird relationship.  
(beat)  
You completely manipulated her.



LINDA  
 She's coming home, Carl. Does it  
 matter how?

Carl shakes his head.

INT. PIZZA PIRATE -- LATER

Eliza and Nico are sitting with Alice, eating pizza. The  
 place is much busier at night.

ALICE  
 Who knew your mom was such a shark?

ELIZA  
 It came as a surprise to me, too.

Eliza's CELLPHONE rings. She looks at it.

CLOSE ON CELL

The Caller I.D. reads "RAYCELL."

Eliza turns it off.

NICO  
 Was that Dad?

ELIZA  
 (lying)  
 No. Joan.

Eliza turns to see Ben entering. They look at each other  
 and for a moment, there's the old chemistry. But then Ben  
 turns and holds the door for CALLIE (30s; naturally gorgeous)  
 and JEFFREY (7, adorable). Alice leans forward.

ALICE  
 His son's name is Jeffrey. He's  
 seven. The wife's Callie.  
 (beat)  
 Could've been you, I guess.

ELIZA  
 It never would have been, Alice.

NICO  
 Wow. The counselor's married. To a  
 hottie. I never saw that coming.

Rafe Artounian comes over.

RAFE  
 Eliza, you promised Karaoke for me!

ELIZA  
 Aw, Rafe...

ALICE  
Do it, Eliza.

NICO  
Yeah, come on, Mom. Sing something cool.

ELIZA  
Oh, Geez. Okay.

Eliza gets up and goes to the Karaoke machine. People recognize her and start clapping. Eliza's embarrassed, but we can see that she likes the spotlight.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Okay, let's see...

Eliza smiles. She found one. The music starts -- it's laid-back, acoustic. The Jam's "To Be Someone."

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
This is for Nico.

Alice glances at Nico, who's thrilled.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
(singing)  
To be someone must be a wonderful thing... a famous footballer, a rock singer... or a big film star, yes I think I would like that... to be rich and have lots of fans. Getting drugged up with my trendy friends... they really dig me and I dig them... And the bread I spend is like my fame, it's quickly diminished...

Eliza sounds like Janis, with a little Patti thrown in. Her voice is husky and warm.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
And there's no more swimming in a guitar-shaped pool... no more reporters at my beck and call... no more cocaine it's only ground chalk... no more taxis, now we'll have to walk... But didn't we have a nice time... didn't we have a nice time... wasn't it such a fine time...

As Eliza closes her eyes and sings, we

FADE TO BLACK.