TOWN CALLED MALICE

"Pilot"

written by

Erin Maher & Kay Reindl
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 paparazzi 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)
(lamely)
It would have been rude not to stop by.
18.

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 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.


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

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. Starbucks. I saw two on the way into town. You might like it, you know. They have specialty coffees, like cappuccinos and lattes.

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

CARL
I get a perfectly fine cappuccino 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)
(to Nico)

Go if you want.

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

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

You two. Knock it off.

Linda looks at her silent family.

So good sermon today, wasn't it?

EXT. MILLGATE -- DAY

Taylor and Nico walk down the street.

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?

Is.

What?

How big IS my school. I still go there.

Oh. I thought --

You thought wrong.

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

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

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 --
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.


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 RAFA 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

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?
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.

Like the Pancake Haus.

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

I wish I could do something.

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.

Crap. Dad and the wicked stepmother.

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

So. They're still together.

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

Right. I left before she had it.

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.

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.
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 cliche 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 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.