

Meanwhile...

Written by
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EXT. PRINCE ST. - MANHATTAN. DAY.

Early. Orange sunlight on a warm day.

A few pedestrians, but the morning is uncomfortably silent.

Up an old LOFT BUILDING in the middle of the block--

INT. MICHAEL O'CONNELL'S APARTMENT. DAY.

High ceilings, mismatched furniture, a big TV with a Dreamcast attached, the domain of a young man.

A digital RINGING from the phone in the corner. No answer.

A FDNY TEE draped on a chair. The POST on the coffee table. The pile of mail by the door addressed to MICHAEL O'CONNELL.

ANSWERING MACHINE. 36 messages. The incoming-call message:

MICHAEL (V.O.)
You've reached Michael O'Connell. I'm
not available. Please leave your name
and number and I'll get back to you.

BEEP. A tired teenage voice (KRISTIN) comes through.

KRISTIN (V.O.)
Claire, it's me. It's Kristin. Sorry,
you know that. Sorry. I hope you're
there; it's still your brother's
voice on the machine. I mean, of
course it is. I was wondering if you
were coming up for the long weekend.
We don't know if you're...look, just
tell us you're okay, huh? Love you.

CLAIRE (17). She looks at herself in the foyer mirror. She's tall like a reed, a short crop of red hair, thin to the point of being sunken. Her face frozen in a severe look.

She looks towards the phone. She doesn't move towards it.

EXT. PRINCE ST.

Claire walks past a few PAISANS out on the stoop.

Crinkled MISSING FLIERS on the walls and lampposts. There's one for MICHAEL. An official portrait in his FDNY uniform.

Claire knows where it is. She doesn't look.

Claire's shoes. Impeccable Nikes. On the side near the sole she's etched initials in colored pen: CO, KN, GN, AT, DB--

She walks deliberately but the steps we hear are faster--

THE SHOES. Now beat to hell, rushing down a dirt path.

EXT. LAURENS STATE PARK - SKERRITSVILLE, NEW YORK. DAY.

An hour earlier in the crisp autumn. Hiking trails and long lawns of the Hudson Valley as far as the eye can see.

TITLE: "October 4, 2001. Skerritsville, NY."

TAP TAP TAP becomes BANG BANG BANG as the Nikes speed up.

Close on THE RUNNER. Seventeen, measured, and bright blonde.

 RUNNER (BLONDE)
 (to herself)
 C'mon, Noland!

We're left behind as she moves to the FIRST TURN

We catch sight of her again. No, not her. Uniform colors inverted, now she's sporting deep chestnut brown locks.

Her steps going THUD THUD THUD--

Slower. She checks her watch, now on the opposite wrist.

 RUNNER (BROWN)
 C'mon, Noland!

THUNK THUNK THUNK here we go here we go

BLONDE nearly floating. Vibrating. Like a superhero.

BRUNETTE moving through the turns like a bruiser.

BLONDE can see the finish line and the team van and COACH.

BRUNETTE growls in frustration. Faster! Please! NOW!

EXT. LAURENS STATE PARK -- GRAND LAWN. DAY.

The Blonde breaks out of the forest and to a stop. She's the first one out. She looks to her COACH, a middle-aged woman in a track suit.

 RUNNER (BLONDE)
 Time?

Coach looks down at their stopwatch for an official time.

 COACH
 Seventeen thirty-six.

The blonde pumps her fist once. Damn good work!

BROWN. She speeds right in front of Coach and the Blonde.

The Noland Twins: KRISTIN (Blonde) & GILLIAN (Brown, both 18).

GILLIAN
What's my time?

KRISTIN
Good hustle, Gillian!

GILLIAN
My TIME.

COACH
Eighteen flat.

GILLIAN
Hers?

COACH
Seventeen thirty-six.

The team barrels through, cutting a wall between the twins.

GILLIAN
Good hustle, Kristin.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SKERRITSVILLE.

The team van rolls past the only light in town.

Anytown from White Plains to Saugerties. A diner, trinket shops, one-screen movie theater playing "Don't Say a Word."

Hanging from every building is an American flag.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

The school is a squat brutalist structure, a 70s invention. Above the entrance is a "UNITED WE STAND" Mylar banner.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - JUNIOR LOCKERS.

Gillian stays back in the pack of runners. Kristin walks up front. Everyone talks to each other. Gillian doesn't.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - COMPUTER LAB.

DONNY (17), scrawny and wavering. He looks even smaller in the M65 jacket he's wearing.

He's sitting at a Compaq, the only student at a terminal.

The MONITOR. An email, subject "Sending Up a Flare". Email address: ClaireSO@NYSA.edu.

Looking out at the GLASS FRONT WALL as the girls' team passes by. Gillian raps on it to get Donny's attention.

She raises a questioning eyebrow. He shakes his head no.

She nods and points forward. Gonna keep moving.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM.

The girls empty their lockers. Low and indistinct chatter.

Gillian moves for the bathroom stalls. Kristin turns from a conversation with another girl to acknowledge Gillian.

KRISTIN

Jill, hey, can we--

Gillian holds up a blocking hand as she walks to the TOILETS

And scrambles into a stall. The door slams behind her.

She sits. Hands to her temples. Clenched fists. Strained eyes. She opens her mouth but nothing comes out.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - SENIOR LOCKERS.

CLOSE on the wall CLOCK reading 7:30.

A garland of American flags draped over the lockers.

"Jillie Noland is a Dyke" has been scrawled with permanent marker near Gillian's locker and bleached (almost) out.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM.

Dark. The voice of MEGAN, student head of theater tech.

MEGAN

Okay. Gimme two.

The stage lights ramp on. Megan (17) stands dead center. Her clothes and hair are flecked with paint. She carries her life in a side-slung carpenter's apron around her waist.

MEGAN (cont'd)

Perfect. Now gimme four with that.

A little bit brighter. She nods approval. She snaps and does a whirl with her index finger. The lights go down again.

MEGAN (cont'd)

And the spot now.

We hear the CLICK-CHUNG of a spotlight coming on and get all of a split-second of its glorious light before it blows.

MEGAN (cont'd)
Gimme two back, Kate.

Megan's assistant KATE (16) booms over the speakers.

KATE (O.S.)
The board's not responding.

OUTSIDE THE AUDITORIUM

Megan rushes out to Kate, who lives in ringer tees and drinks Diet Dr. Pepper nonstop. She's Kristin's cousin, her hyperactive echo. She shucks a pair of work gloves.

MEGAN
Again?

KATE
Still not my fault! Before summer break I wrote a full and detailed account of how the board needed--

MEGAN
And we're children so no one was gonna read it then, and now we're at war so nobody cares.

KATE
They're gonna care when we have to do this memorial by candlelight.

MS. ROBBINS (O.S.)
Why is the power out in my office?

Look down the hallway to Rebecca, who most students call MS. ROBBINS (25). She stands ramrod straight and folds her arms to help her authority. She's of Vietnamese descent, the adopted daughter of the local minister. She uses his physical cues to project the image of someone in charge.

KATE
Ms. Robbins, what happened was--

MS. ROBBINS
Megan, Katherine, fix it please? Now?

MEGAN
We'll have it done by ten.

Ms. Robbins walks towards her office. Megan turns to Kate and holds up one finger: wait one second.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - SECOND FLOOR.

Megan runs to catch up with Ms. Robbins.

MEGAN

Hey, Becky!

Ms. Robbins turns around. She narrows her eyes.

MEGAN (cont'd)

Sorry, Ms. Robbins.

MS. ROBBINS

What is it, Meg?

MEGAN

Are you okay to run this thing?

MS. ROBBINS

I'm fine.

MEGAN

With Michael and everything--

MS. ROBBINS

I'll need you to fix the lights,
Megan. Thank you for your concern.

Ms. Robbins gives Megan a "that's all" stare.

When she's alone Ms. Robbins lets her posture drop.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - BATHROOM.

Gillian stares at her reflection in the mirror. She shoves her hair all the way to the left, pulls it back, tries to slick it down. She pushes her nose this way and that, as far as the cartilage will let her change her appearance.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

Jill? You okay?

GILLIAN

Yes.

KRISTIN (O.S.)

I've got that recruiter thing, so--

GILLIAN

OKAY BYEEEEEE!

Frustrated. Gillian tries to get accustomed to her face.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - TEACHER'S LOUNGE.

Ms. Robbins is head-down making red-pen revisions.

Reverse on the paper. A speech from the faculty of the high school: "The events of September 11th have left this country shaken, but our community has never been stronger..."

Ms. Robbins stares at the paper like it's gibberish.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

8:15. The students of Skerritsville High are arriving.

The skidding stop of a 1984 Toyota Tercel. Behind the wheel is ALYSSA FELDMAN (18). She thinks in paragraphs and forgets to use contractions. The horror-movie tee under her jacket is perfect for October and distasteful for post-9/11.

She stumbles out of her car and we MOVE INSIDE--

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - FIRST FLOOR.

Donny and Alyssa meet in the hallway. She pauses, gives him a quick "wait" sign, slings her bag forward. She pulls a VHS tape out of it and moves it ahead of her for him to take.

ALYSSA
For you, Donald.

Donny reads the label of the tape and then flips it into the large pocket of his coat.

DONNY
I hope it's better than that dumb
slasher thing you made me watch.

ALYSSA
Phantom Sever is not dumb. It is
artistically unsound.

DONNY
Was the art in flying chainsaw or
when they yelled "watch out for that
corpse! It's dead!"

ALYSSA
Keep that up and I will stop bringing
tapes. Do you know if we have lab
reports due for Orgo?

DONNY
Nah, there's the memorial.

ALYSSA
Memorial for what?

Donny looks at her like she has three heads.

ALYSSA (cont'd)
...I forgot.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM.

Gillian hides herself in her clothes: an oversize Sleater-Kinney tee, puffy North Face jacket, baggy jeans.

She takes a breath before she opens the door.

We follow her down the FIRST-FLOOR HALL.

POV GILLIAN. Myopic and blurred. Other students staring. They look at her like a side-show attraction.

DONNY (O.S.)
Jill? Jill?

GILLIAN. Donny and Alyssa flank her.

GILLIAN
Hi. Sorry. Can we walk? Let's walk.

INT. PRINCE ST. STATION - NEW YORK. DAY.

Claire waits for her train.

INT. SUBWAY CAR. DAY.

Same stance, same frame position. The train speeds uptown.

EXT. 96TH STREET - NEW YORK. DAY.

Claire walks uphill.

INT. DELI. DAY.

Claire at the counter. She hands over a five to the CASHIER.

A postcard of the Twin Towers taped to the cash register, the words "NEVER FORGET" now pasted under them.

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS. DAY.

Kids are walking up the Upper East Side towards the school.

They seem to part and give Claire a wide berth.

INT. NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS - LOCKERS. DAY.

On Claire's locker: a rose taped to it. A note written on loose-leaf attached: "C. O'Connell - Principal."

She looks at it with disgust.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Coach and Kristin wait outside. Kristin stands at parade rest to hide that she's cold.

Three COLLEGE RECRUITERS. Kristin greets them with phony grown-up professionalism.

KRISTIN
 Kristin Parker Noland, glad to meet you. [Next one] Hello, Kristin Parker Noland, how are you? [One more] Kristin Parker Noland, very glad to meet you--

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - SENIOR LOCKERS. DAY.

Gillian leads and turns backwards towards Alyssa and Donny.

The school is starting to fill up. Kids at their lockers.

GILLIAN
 I'm not going to Fall Ball, Alyssa's not going to Fall Ball, that doesn't mean YOU shouldn't go to Fall Ball.

DONNY
 (to Alyssa)
 You're not going to Fall Ball?

ALYSSA
 I will be working and then enjoying the comforts of my VHS collection. Gillian you are of course invited.

GILLIAN
 You're not gonna make me watch Phantom Sever again, are you?

DONNY
 Right? That movie sucked!

ALYSSA
 Both of you are Philistines.

GILLIAN
 And you, Donald Brown, will finally ask Megan out.

ALYSSA
 You still have not?

DONNY
 You're not keeping tabs?

ALYSSA
 We do not discuss boys. Or men.

She looks Donny up and down.

ALYSSA (cont'd)
Boys. What stops you from saying "Ms. Campbell, the world is scary, let us kiss with gross tongues?"

DONNY
What if she says no?

GILLIAN
Then she said no. If she says yes it may still end in disaster. But the third option is what you're going for. So you're going to go up to the lighting booth right now--

Donny begins to object.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
RIGHT now--you're gonna ask if she has a minute and ask her to the dance. And everything will be jake.

She turns towards her locker. All three of them stop when they see the beached-out phrase on the wall.

Some SENIOR GIRLS pass by. One of them body-checks Gillian.

Gillian balls up her hands. Don't blow up don't blow up--

ALYSSA
Have you spoken with Kristin?

GILLIAN
No. Different rooms, different floors. I only see her at practice.

DONNY
I don't think she meant to--

GILLIAN
(interrupting)
I don't care what she meant to. She thought she knew and suddenly the whole school thinks what she thinks.

There's a commotion at the end of the hall. Two SENIOR BOYS are hassling TOMMY B. (13), who's short even for a 9th Grader. He wears a jaunty hat and a sport coat, the beginnings of a sense of style.

ALYSSA. She groans and starts moving towards them.

ALYSSA
He is looking for me.

GILLIAN
Is Harvey giving him a hard time?

SENIOR BOYS. Gillian tries to separate them from Tommy B.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
Okay, stop hassling the kid.

SENIOR BOY
Or what?

GILLIAN
Or I'll tell your old man that you're
the one who wrecked his Camaro.

The boy leaves but doesn't seem to admit defeat.

Tommy B. adjusts himself. He clears his throat and
straightens up like he's trying to look impressive.

TOMMY B.
Wow, Gillian. Thank you.

GILLIAN
Sure, whatever.

ALYSSA
Thomas, you should know not to
approach the senior hallway,
especially while being so (gestures
vaguely) this.

TOMMY B.
I didn't want to miss getting tapes--

ALYSSA
You no longer get any tapes. Your
mother called my house complaining
that a film gave you nightmares--

GILLIAN
Oh my god what movie?

TOMMY B.
Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

GILLIAN
The old one? The Kristy Swanson one?

ALYSSA
I try to ease the babies in slowly.

TOMMY B.
I'm not a baby! I'm almost 14!

GILLIAN
Whoa look out now.

Gillian throws up sarcastic spirit fingers as she leaves.

DONNY
Buffy the Vampire Slayer?

TOMMY B.
What? It's the truth!

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LIGHTING BOOTH.

The SNAP and WHIR of a sparking connection. Megan has her hand in the fuse box. All we see of Kate is her legs sticking out from under the board.

KATE
If the school burns down we get A's
for the rest of the semester.

MEGAN
We should be so lucky.

KATE
Be more careless. I need all the
grade inflation I can get.

MEGAN
When are you taking the SATs?

KATE
Saturday morning.

MEGAN
Go home and study!

KATE
Are you kidding? I'm trying to find a
way to sleep here.

MEGAN
Kate--

Kate wheels out from under the board.

KATE
If I go home I have to prepare for my
mother's cocktail parties, spending
before during and AFTER the SATs
ogled by doctors who--despite their
extensive educations--are blithering
idiots and gigantic assholes.

That all comes out in a rage.

MEGAN
All right. We have (checking watch)
shit, forty minutes. Let's move.

KATE
Who's leading the assembly?

MEGAN
Principal Lennox doesn't come back
until next week, so it's Ms. R.

KATE
Alone?

Megan shrugs. Don't ask me.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY.

Ms. Robbins at the lunch room door as the students file in.

MS. ROBBINS
Good morning, students! On each table
you will find a stack of worksheets
in order to facilitate your
discussions. Please use them
thoughtfully as we...

Nobody pays attention. She ends her sentence there.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LUNCH ROOM.

We're CLOSE UP on an Archos Jukebox 6000. The scrolling LCD
screen will probably get a laugh from modern audiences.

It's on the table in front of ALEX TRAN (18), Skerritsville
High's top DJ. He seems to have an endless supply of jerseys
and baseball caps. He makes a list of songs in a notebook.

GILLIAN (O.S.)
Eve? Mary J. Blige?

ALEX
Nothing too exciting, nothing too
fun, nothing too loud. Orders from
the principal's office.

Alyssa and Gillian sit opposite Alex.

ALEX (cont'd)
My music selections for Fall Ball
must be "respectful of America and
her heroes", whatever that means.

Gillian moves a worksheet to her and reads off the top.

GILLIAN
"When I heard about the events that
transpired in New York City, I felt"
oh for the love 'a god.

ALEX

I think they mass-produced these for every high school in America.

ALYSSA

I wonder if Claire got them.

GILLIAN

She doesn't need a funeral. She lives in the graveyard.

She leans backward on the table. Scanning the room she sees Tommy B. He's at a table by himself. Sunk down low.

Gillian has a moment. Something she recognizes.

GILLIAN (cont'd)

Where are his friends?

ALEX

I think you may be seeing the totality of his friends.

She gets up, moving like a woman on a mission.

ALEX (cont'd)

What are you doing?

GILLIAN

Freshman year, alone, weird. Ring any bells? Nobody deserves that, especially not today.

ALYSSA

Are you aware he has a rather sizeable crush on you?

GILLIAN

No, Ms. Feldman, for I have spent the last two months in a cave. Is the Pentagon okay? How's Aaliyah?

Angle on TOMMY B. slumping down into his arms. Poor kid.

Gillian walks up behind him. No nonsense.

GILLIAN (cont'd)

Tommy B.

TOMMY B.

Gillian! Oh my god, hi! What--

GILLIAN

Get up. You're vacating this table.

TOMMY B.

I got this table fair and square--

GILLIAN
It's not about the table. You're
joining us for the day.

Tommy B. looks absolutely starstruck.

TOMMY B.
I promise not to do anything--

GILLIAN
You're already talking too much.

Gillian walks Tommy B. over by his shoulders and plunks the diminutive freshman into the group.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
Hey I found this.

TOMMY B.
Hi, everybody! Hey! Um, it's...hi.

They stare at him with a mix of pity and confusion. Before anyone else can talk Ms. Robbins passes by on her patrols.

She crouches down next to Gillian for a sotto voce moment.

MS. ROBBINS
Did he get lost?

GILLIAN
I guess I had a sentimental moment.

MS. ROBBINS
First time for everything.

Ms. Robbins does a head count at the table.

MS. ROBBINS (cont'd)
Where's Donny?

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LIGHTING BOOTH.

The lights pop on, catching Megan off guard. There's a loud sustained BEEP from the console as it starts up. Kate wheels herself out from under it and raises a celebratory fist.

Megan returns the bump. There's a KNOCK on the door.

KATE
And that'll be the warden.

Megan opens the door a crack. She turns back to Kate.

MEGAN
Can you check the stage?

Kate shoots her a confused look but goes to leave. As she opens the door wider she sees Donny.

KATE
Oh. Yeah, I'll check the stage.

Kate slips Megan a look. Then Megan and Donny are alone.

MEGAN
Hey, Don. What's up?

DONNY
Hey, um, I know you're busy--

MEGAN
Oh yeah no big. Kate and I just got the board back online.

Donny looks behind her to the board. There's still smoke.

DONNY
Right. Um, so but I was wondering--

There's a knock at the door.

MEGAN
Ignore that, keep talking.

DONNY
Yeah, so I was thinking that--

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK--

Ms. Robbins pops her head in.

MS. ROBBINS
Power's back. Thank you. Now get downstairs.

DONNY
C'mon, Becky, don't--

Ms. Robbins's arm zooms into frame, grabs Donny by the collar, and all but flings him out of the room.

In the HALLWAY

Donny moves to protest. Ms. Robbins is having none of it.

MS. ROBBINS
Ms. Robbins. Try that on for size.

DONNY
Ms. Robbins.

MS. ROBBINS
 Thank you. I don't need people
 looking at me like I'm..."Ms.
 Robbins" will be fine.

They both exhale.

MS. ROBBINS (cont'd)
 Have you heard from your brother?

He shakes his head "no."

INT. NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS - GYMNASIUM. DAY.

An ORIGAMI CRANE. All done but for the bill.

Claire's fingers. She folds the head just so.

She places the crane on the ground at the foot of a line of
 identical cranes in pastel colors.

Track out to reveal hundreds of these and students working
 on them with rote diligence. A hand-painted sign on the wall
 touts "One Thousand Paper Cranes for Peace". Claire sits
 alone, the only student not in a group.

The door to the gym creaks open and a teacher summons the
 students outside.

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS. DAY.

Out in the courtyard. Every student in the school. The
 PRINCIPAL drones out a somber and well-intentioned list of
 those lost. It's muffled and we hear back and forth:

PRINCIPAL
 Kerry Sumpter [inaudible] lost her
 cousin in the [inaudible] Lorna
 Rodriguez [continuing]--

POV Claire. Each person in turn walks to the front of the
 courtyard and places another rose on a pile.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LUNCH ROOM.

Kristin enters and looks around at possible empty seats.
 Gillian and the crew are towards the back.

CUT TO Gillian's group around the table. Donny crashes in
 among them. Gillian doesn't look up from her notebook.

GILLIAN
 Did you?

DONNY
No.

GILLIAN
Moron.

ALEX
What?

GILLIAN
Megan.

DONNY
Gillian!

ALEX
Good luck with that one, buddy.

DONNY
Thanks. Real vote of confidence.

GILLIAN
Ask her out today or I'm gonna punch
you in the goddamn mouth.

Kristin joins them. She sits on the table itself with her
heels resting on the bench.

KRISTIN
What's up, kiddos?

Everyone but Gillian and Tommy B. lets out a hearty "hey!"
Tommy is too nervous to say anything. Gillian ignores
Kristin and angry doodles in her notebook instead. Kristin
sweeps up a worksheet from the table and looks it over.

ALEX
Worksheets to help us understand how
we felt on Nine-Eleven.

Kristin picks up one of the papers and reads from it.

KRISTIN
"As the news sunk in, I found myself
thinking about--" Ugh.

ALEX
Have you heard from Claire?

KRISTIN
Not a word.

DONNY
Did you leave a message?

KRISTIN
Duh.

ALEX
What's her away message?

DONNY
She's not logged on.

ALEX
Jesus.

They all nod.

Tommy B. breaks the silence.

TOMMY B.
Um...who's Claire?

EXT. NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS. DAY.

In the courtyard. Tight and close on Claire. The sound of the principal grows and grows and comes into clarity--

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)
--lost her brother Michael. Class of 1993 and member of the FDNY.

Twelve hundred eyes on her. She doesn't move. Then she does. Her hand grips the rose and the thorns dig into her skin.

KRISTIN (V.O.)
That's our friend. My best friend.

Claire steps forward. Leaning towards the pile of roses. Her eyes. Closing them tight. Dropping the rose.

The whole school is staring. She doesn't turn around.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LUNCH ROOM.

The crew is gathered around.

KRISTIN
When her dad died she went to live with her brother in the city. And now...now she lives alone.

TOMMY B.
Wow. I wonder what it's like to live in the city.

ALYSSA
I hear it smells like dry blood and battery acid.

DONNY
Burnt rubber and sparks.

ALEX

That all used to be people.

KRISTIN

Jesus, Alex!

ALEX

I'm just saying! Like, you ever think about what dying's gonna be like? And then trying to remember that someone you love is dead? Do that for three thousand people.

Tommy B. has his knees up to his chest.

DONNY

Kid. You okay?

TOMMY B.

It's just what Alex said. I've never even been to a funeral. I don't know what happens when we die. I don't want to know.

Alyssa scoops one of the worksheets up from the table.

ALYSSA

"If I could say anything to those affected by the events of September 11th, it would be--"

KRISTIN

Come home.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Ms. Robbins is outside smoking. Megan comes through the door. She acts like she's stumbled upon something illicit.

MEGAN

Ms. Robbins? You're needed inside.

MS. ROBBINS

Thank you, Ms. Campbell.

She keeps smoking, but is aware of Megan's surprised stare.

Ms. Robbins flicks the butt to the ground and stomps it out.

MS. ROBBINS (cont'd)

When I was a kid I was sure I was gonna grow up to be a drummer in a punk band. I wonder whether kids are gonna even have dreams anymore.

Ms. Robbins leaves Megan to contemplate that.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM.

Every student in a seat and rustling, hushed and anxious.

Alyssa has her eyes closed. She's doing breathing exercises.

Ms. Robbins stands behind a podium emblazoned with the seal of Skerritsville High (Motto: "Quod Etiam Discere Nos").

She looks down. Her hands grab the podium.

The PAPER she's prepared. She crossed out nearly all of it.

MS. ROBBINS

I know this has already been an emotional morning. Our hope for you today is that we take time to reflect and to process and to honor those who lost their lives. The administration would like to ask all of you to join in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The students get to their feet. We see their confusion as they turn to each other in groups.

DONNY AND GILLIAN.

DONNY

Have we ever said it in school?

GILLIAN

I don't think I know it.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LIGHTING BOOTH.

Megan looks to Kate. Do you know? Does anyone know?

She shrugs. Puts her hand over her heart. Best she can do.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM.

Donny is the only student who can say the pledge absolutely confidently. Standing erect and proud and sober.

Gillian watches him for cues.

On the STAGE as the pledge ends. Ms. Robbins stares out at the kids. They stare back. No one is in charge.

Back to GILLIAN. She glances across the auditorium to Kristin. There's a longing in that look.

On KRISTIN as she turns to look at Gillian, thinking of her in that uncertain moment. Gillian turns away as quick as they lock eyes. Kristin lingers. Not there yet.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - SENIOR LOCKERS.

Gillian is grabbing her gym bag out of her locker. Donny leans on the locker beside her.

DONNY
Well that sucked.

GILLIAN
It was supposed to.

She gives the Master lock a twirl and lets it land on a random number. Something cool she saw in a movie once.

DONNY
You ready to go?

GILLIAN
Yeah, let's put some distance.

MEGAN bounds around the corner. She has a crowbar in her hand, because why wouldn't she?

MEGAN
Hey, Donny; do you have a sec?

Donny looks back to Gillian for confirmation and she just--

GILLIAN
Of course he does! Of course you do!

--pushes Donny forward.

He looks back at her as he walks. What do I do?

She makes vaguely obscene gestures.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM.

Megan and Donny by the stage.

MEGAN
So.

DONNY
So.

A moment of giddy waiting. Then Megan remembers she actually called him in for a reason.

MEGAN
We're running cues, so I wondered--

Up in the LIGHTING BOOTH

Kate watches through the windows as Donny and Megan enter into the auditorium. She chows down on a bag of Funyuns.

Down in the STALLS we watch Megan act out what she wants to Donny. She might be giving him directions to the moon. He nods along dumbly.

Megan cups her hands around her mouth to yell. Hesitates. Runs up the stairs towards

THE BOOTH

And enters with a flourish. She's gonna say something but stops when she sees Kate giving her a look.

MEGAN (cont'd)
Shut up, I'm allowed to be
transparent and selfish, why not?

On the STAGE

Donny stands waiting for any kind of instruction.

THE BOOTH

Megan smiles. Oh, a little fun.

MEGAN (cont'd)
Kill the lights.

BOOM the auditorium goes completely dark.

MEGAN (cont'd)
Okay, bring up cue...

Megan rifles through her show binder.

DONNY (O.S.)
Hello? Little help?

The STAGE

Donny is bathed in light faster than he was expecting.

The stage is barren save for a few flats and a piano. There are tape lines all over where the set will eventually be. Kate and Megan did a quick turn-around after the assembly.

Megan's voice booms down over the PA system.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Okay, if you'll sit at the piano.

Donny points down at the bench.

DONNY
What, right there?

MEGAN (O.S.)
Yes, where the piano is.

Donny sits down and scoots closer to the keys.

DONNY
Okay, what now?

IN THE BOOTH

Megan leans over to speak into the microphone.

MEGAN
We need to adjust for someone about
your height moving back and forth, so
just do...you know, piano stuff.

DONNY stares up into the lights.

DONNY
Piano stuff. Okay.

He does one of those Chico Marx key-shoot moves. And boom
like that he starts playing some old standard.

MEGAN looks at the stage and smiles.

DONNY closes his eyes. His hands dart across the keys.

He pulls up with a flourish. A glance up to the booth.

KATE drives an elbow into Megan with a know-it-all grin and
a wink. Megan shoos her away while trying not to laugh.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. LATER.

Donny walks Megan to her car. Everyone else has cleared out.

MEGAN
I didn't know you could play piano. I
put you there as dead weight.

Megan pulls out her car keys. They're on a keyring with what
appears to be three dozen other keys.

MEGAN (cont'd)
Can you do that again sometime?

DONNY
Uh, sure. Of course. Any requests?

CUT TO Gillian watching from across the way. She's leaning
against Donny's ancient Saab.

GILLIAN
Come on. If you see something say
something, Donald.

Megan is leaning in like she's expecting him to say
something and then their conversation just ends.

Donny coming this way. Gillian extends a thumbs-down at him.

DONNY
Oh, just get in the damn car.

INT./EXT. DONNY'S CAR. DAY.

Heading down a mountain road. Gillian rides shotgun.
He downshifts and the car rattles disapprovingly.

DONNY
What was your time today?

GILLIAN
Eighteen flat.

DONNY
Hey, not bad!

GILLIAN
Kris did it in seventeen thirty-six.

DONNY
Shit!

GILLIAN
I think you mean "shit."

DONNY
Yeah...yeah. Shit.

GILLIAN
I was faster before we moved to
Laurens. I was better at North Lake.

DONNY
Does the venue really--

Gillian stares out the window. Donny pushes a cassette into
the car stereo. Pretenders, "Talk of the Town".

GILLIAN
Going to Al's tonight. I'm holding
you hostage until you ask Megan out.

DONNY
Then ice cream and Street Fighter.

GILLIAN
I'm in a Gauntlet mood.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SKERRITSVILLE.

Down the drag and out to the mountains in the distance.

EXT. UNION SQUARE. DAY.

Claire emerges from a bodega on the south side of the square. She's holding a Snapple that she bashes on the bottom with the palm of her hand.

Union Square is quiet and empty. A car passes with its windows down, the radio on enough to hear an echo of the music. Hearing Pretenders' "Talk of the Town" stops Claire in her tracks.

She watches the car as it heads uptown.

POV Claire. Watching the car up and past her, up to the corner where she sees a reflection of days past: CLAIRE AND THE TWINS up the street, a memory of better times. They're in summer clothes. Gillian jumps up and swings from the "Walk/Don't Walk" signal. A few moments of teenage horseplay in kinder times.

CLAIRE. Today. There's nearly a weak smile across her face.

INT. TASKER'S TOYS. DAY.

Gillian has a hold on a classic ray-gun toy. She levels it at Donny and makes a pointed "BAAAAAAA-ZAP!" Noise.

The toy store is a fantastic crowded mom-and-pop place. Nostalgia blogs will freeze-frame this scene and highlight all the toys in the background.

DONNY

Ah, Junior Spaceman! You're not getting away that easy!

He reaches for an off-brand lightsaber and drops into en garde. The beam lights up and makes a WAAW-WEEAWWW noise.

GILLIAN

Gasp! My nemesis, Dork Vader!

DONNY

I'll never join you! You're not my real dad!

He rushes her and she takes off down the aisle. They are admonished by OLD MAN TASKER behind the counter.

OLD MAN TASKER

No running! This isn't the Olympics and you're not Rafer Johnson!

They reach a dead-end near the deep-discount Episode I toys. There's a POSTER on the far wall that breaks their mood. It's been put up hastily, printed locally and smoothed over with plastic. Michael in happier days. Underneath: "Michael O'Connell 1975-2001, We Will Never Forget."

They don't break their gaze on the poster.

Gillian nods and then just kind of keeps nodding.

INT. MICHAEL O'CONNELL'S APARTMENT. DAY.

Claire pushes the front door closed. She drops her keys in a bowl by the door.

The ANSWERING MACHINE. Three dozen unheard messages.

KRISTIN (V.O.)

Claire, it's me. I hope you're there--

CUT TO later. Claire sits in the windowsill looking out onto the street. She has an open soda she's not drinking.

The answering machine sits in her lap. She hits play again.

KRISTIN (V.O.) (cont'd)

Claire, it's me. I hope you're there--

As she listens her hands ball up. She curls inward.

INT. DONNY'S CAR. DAY.

Donny's car pulls up in front of Gillian's house. It's big enough to have a third story on it, and you wonder if Gillian's Mom has the same job as Kevin's Dad in Home Alone.

Gillian has a bag full of toys from Tasker's on her lap.

DONNY

Maybe I should enlist.

GILLIAN

Nah, you hate boats.

DONNY

But with Kenny--

GILLIAN

You don't have to do everything your brother does.

DONNY

You don't have to do everything--

GILLIAN

Everything Kristin does. I'm not.

Donny looks at her incredulously.

DONNY

Sure.

GILLIAN
Okay.

DONNY
Okay!

GILLIAN
(belligerently)
Okaaaaaaay-yuh!

Gillian shakes her hair loose. She pops open her door.

DONNY
Pick you up later?

GILLIAN
Yeah. I'm gonna finish my Bio homework, chill for a minute, get a shower. Mostly get a shower. My hair retains all of the sweat.

DONNY
It looks good on you, though.

GILLIAN
Yeah, you try growing it out.

DONNY
No thanks. My hair just goes up. A month in and I look like Questlove.

GILLIAN
Why not explore your roots?

He lets out a that-wasn't-really-funny snort before he goes.

Gillian walks towards the house. She stops halfway up the yard and looks around. The wind shakes the trees, sending leaves falling to the ground. One deep breath in.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

Disparate parts of a striking figure. A HAND on the KITCHEN TABLE. On the breast pocket of a CCU a surname: BROWN.

Donny enters the house. He's got mail in his hand. And he damn near drops it when he sees his brother KENNY. Older and muscular, but there's no mistaking the genetics.

KENNY
What's up, little dude?

Donny drops his backpack and makes a run at him. Kenny has to have seven inches and eighty pounds on him. A family moment.

EXT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

A few minutes later. Kenny and Donny sit on the front steps, drinking some Lites, watching the world go by.

KENNY

I was gonna surprise you, not tell anyone I was on leave and come home. Then it happened. They needed people on the Comfort, anyone they could spare. Guess they could spare me.

DONNY

You were helping people.

KENNY

It...

He considers what he's going to say. He opts for something more neutral.

KENNY (cont'd)

Yeah. I'm just glad to have some time here.

DONNY

Mom and Dad know you're back?

KENNY

They'll see me in the city. Social obligations this weekend. I'm fine with it. Just want to sleep.

DONNY

You've earned it.

Kenny tosses his empty beer aside and reaches for another.

DONNY (cont'd)

What if I enlisted?

KENNY

You hate boats. Do whatever you want. Go to Boston, go to Chicago, head to sunny Califor-nye-ay.

DONNY

Kenny--

KENNY

I'm gonna be fine. Scout's Honor.

DONNY

You were never a Scout.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. LATER-ISH.

Second floor, vaulted ceilings & an overhang. Matchy-matchy yuppie stylings. A hi-fi with bitchin' speakers.

Megan and Alyssa are smoking out of a stupidly ornate hookah. They're watching some space movie on the TV.

MEGAN

Where did you even find this thing?

ALYSSA

StupendousCon last year. It was used in an episode of Stargate.

MEGAN

No shit. MacGyver smoked this?

ALYSSA

No, the other guy.

They both take a drag. Alyssa coughs first.

MEGAN

You owe me a Coke.

ALYSSA

I will get you a Pepsi.

Megan cranes her head back and lets out a disgruntled yelp.

MEGAN

Ugh, what do ya wanna do this weekend?

ALYSSA

Donald has not asked you to Fall Ball?

MEGAN

That's not a thing yet.

Alyssa giggles mathematically.

ALYSSA

You liiiiiiike him!

MEGAN

Okay I do! Shut up! I don't know. I guess I'm waiting. Seeing what happens. I don't want to be the next senior couple that people gawk at. Not when there's other things in the world to...

She drifts off, both of them lost on the same thought.

BING-BONG. The doorbell from downstairs. Alyssa jumps up. Megan pulls a ten out of her pocket and hands it to her.

MEGAN (cont'd)
You should tip him generously.

ALYSSA
You should ask Donny out.

MEGAN
You should mind your business.

EXT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

Gillian sitting on the porch swing. Her feet are tucked lazily to the side; she's taken off her shoes and she's curling her toes to get feeling back in them. She stares off at nothing in particular.

Her headphones around her neck play loudly.

INT. MICHAEL O'CONNELL'S APARTMENT. CONCURRENT.

Claire watches TV on the couch. Spread out in front of her are real-estate papers with a Skerritsville address.

She looks over at the phone.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

The BBBB-PFFFFT of phone rings explode through the house.

We hear the door open and shut. Gillian rushes the handset like it's good news. Like maybe it's Claire.

GILLIAN
(into phone)
Hello! Oh hi, Mom. [pause] No, sorry, I thought it was--Okay. I understand. [pause] It's good to hear from you. How are you doing? [pause] Yeah, you take the time you need. Accept the things you cannot change, right? [pause] Yeah. No. We'll be fine. I know the number for Dino's Pizza. [pause] I'll try not to. Okay. Love you too.

She puts the receiver down and leans forward just enough to catch her hated reflection in the mirror.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Alyssa and Megan are nearly done with a large sausage-and-mushroom pizza. The box says it's from Dino's.

Megan sweeps her hand in front of the hookah.

MEGAN

Where do you hide this?

ALYSSA

I leave it out in my room. My parents do not care. They have infinity time to humor my stepgramma and zero time to spend here.

The TV. Commercials start with a Post-9/11 NYC tourism spot. They watch it in silence for a little bit.

MEGAN

Do you think it's safe to go in?

ALYSSA

The likelihood of a second terrorist attack is slim to none.

MEGAN

We should go. Take a campus tour at Columbia or something. And maybe we could...we could see Claire...

Alyssa got to that part of the sentence before Megan.

ALYSSA

No, thank you.

MEGAN

Lyss, you're the only one of us old enough to drive into the city--

ALYSSA

Yes, it is on my driver's license.

MEGAN

So you're the only one of us who can get us in to see if Claire's okay--

ALYSSA

MetroNorth is quite reliable.

MEGAN

Alyssa, you're being unfair.

ALYSSA

What happened to her is terrible. But life did not begin on September 12th.

Megan leans forward.

MEGAN

I'm not feeling this shit at all.

She's talking about the strain. We think.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

The LIVING ROOM. The music from Gillian's room plays loud from the basement.

KRISTIN is home. She sighs angrily when she hears "Rock & Roll McDonalds" playing loud enough to shake the floor.

We move to GILLIAN'S BEDROOM

Down in the basement. GILLIAN is parked at her computer, playing non-stop games of Snood. The TV/VCR combo next to her bed plays MTV on mute.

KRISTIN knows that Gillian knows she's standing in the doorway, and Gillian knows that she knows.

KRISTIN

Hey.

GILLIAN

Yo.

KRISTIN

You wanna talk?

Gillian raises the volume on Winamp.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

It's not my fault that--

Louder still.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

Gillian Noland, I swear to god--

Gillian smacks the space bar. The music turns off abruptly.

GILLIAN

How many schools this week?

KRISTIN

Four. I had two today.

GILLIAN

And what was your time?

KRISTIN

Seventeen thirty-six.

GILLIAN

And why does everyone in school think I'm a lesbian?

KRISTIN

Because--

Gillian leaps up and into Kristin's face. Gillian's face.

GILLIAN
Because YOU think you know everything
and YOU can't keep your mouth shut!
Who did you tell?

KRISTIN
Well--

GILLIAN
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO! It wasn't
yours to say.

KRISTIN
You told me you were--

GILLIAN
I said I might and--They called me
that word in four-foot high letters
in the senior hallway. If I came out
now...You took that away from me.

KRISTIN
I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry!

Gillian in disgust, Kristin in defense.

GILLIAN
I hate your stupid face.

KRISTIN
It's your stupid face.

Gillian sits back down and keeps playing Snood.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Listen, I--

She seems to be on the verge of saying something kind when
her cell phone rings. (It's that horrid shrieking Nokia
ring.) She looks down at the number.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
I have to take this. Sorry. [into
phone] Hello? Yes, this is she. Of
course; we spoke earlier...

Gillian sits in silence as Kristin leaves.

EXT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

We're at a distance. Donny's car down the driveway.

As he drives off he passes Ms. Robbins going the other way.

She waves to Donny...then she sees the other brother.

He's standing on the porch and trying to look impressive with an "oh, didn't see you there" expression on his face.

She calmly pulls her car over, puts on her hazard lights, and then she just ABSOLUTELY BOLTS TOWARDS KENNY! She leaps into his arms and they laugh in happiness and relief.

MS. ROBBINS
How long do I have you?

KENNY
Days. Maybe hours.

MS. ROBBINS
We'll make it count.

Her relieved yelp echoes down the twilight.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - KRISTIN'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Kristin gets ready for work. She doesn't heed the famous BLOO-DOOP noise of AOL Instant Messenger on her computer.

There's a NOTEBOOK on her desk. In one column: her 5K times going back every day for months. In the other: Gillian's times. Gillian slower by degrees for the last month.

The sound of a CAR pulling up.

POV Kristin out the window. Gillian runs out to meet Donny.

KRISTIN. Her face falls.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHAEL O'CONNELL'S APARTMENT. DAY.

Close on Claire. She thinks for a moment and gets up.

Cut to CLAIRE'S BEDROOM.

Claire at her computer. She has Kazaa open. A few downloads are in progress, including "Talk of the Town" at the top.

Seconds later. She's pulling a CD-R from the machine.

Jump forward. She takes a Sharpie and meticulously labels the CD: "home. 10/4/01".

INT. GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL. LATER.

Claire. No luggage. She sits and waits for the train.

INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN. DUSK.

Same posture. The train rattles its way upstate.

Claire puts on her wraparound headphones and starts her Discman. She looks out the window as the world zips by.

EXT. HUDSON VALLEY. DUSK.

The forest, the little towns, the river, the lone train.

We listen to The Pretenders with Claire.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - SKERRITSVILLE. NIGHT.

Claire is alone on the platform.

The block-letter "SKERRITSVILLE" sign looms behind her across the tracks. Such a welcome home.

THE PARKING LOT

Claire walks to a dirty Grand Vitara. In the back window there's an FDNY decal next to one for a local radio station.

INSIDE THE CAR. Claire hasn't done this much. She adjusts the rear view mirror, moves the seat up, adjusts the air conditioning. The last move is to put the CD in the stereo.

The car in gear. It grinds and then lurches forward.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD - SKERRITSVILLE. NIGHT.

Claire rolls to a stop outside her childhood home, a two-story Italianate on the outskirts of Skerritsville.

CUT TO Claire pulling into woods down the hill from the house. She pulls some downed branches in front of the car.

The FRONT DOOR. She pats her jacket. Damn, the keys. She reaches behind one of the lamp sconces to grab a spare key.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

The loud push and dulled scrape of opening the front door.

The CALENDAR on the fridge, still turned to August.

In the BROOM CLOSET. Claire ducks her way through cleaning supplies to get to the switch for the well pump. A loud CHR-CHUNK and the rush of water.

The DEN. Claire ratchets the thermostat up ten degrees.

Claire plucks a down vest off of the coat tree.

The KITCHEN. Claire opens the fridge and reaches for a Coke....and grabs a Bud instead. Nobody to tell her no.

She cracks open the beer and listens to it FIZZZZZZZ.

She leans on the counter. Looks around. Listens to nothing.

EXT. AL'S ARCADE - SKERRITSVILLE. NIGHT.

The only indication that it's not 1981 here are the new game posters in the window. The accurate noises of games on JAMMA boards and AM2 hardware, not this bleep-bloop shit every movie has used since time immemorial.

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Alyssa and Megan stand ramrod straight at the counter. They wear paper hats that make them look like they're working at a Waffle House during the Eisenhower Administration.

MEGAN

Did that stuff kick in for you?

From the speakers: The Youngbloods' "Get Together".

Alyssa busts out in song with the chorus. She apes the exaggerated cadence of the singer.

EXT. AL'S ARCADE.

Donny and Gillian sit in his car in the parking lot.

GILLIAN

She wants you to ask. That's one thing left for sure in this world.

DONNY

Yeah.

GILLIAN

Hey. I'm glad he's back.

DONNY

He's just gonna disappear again.

GILLIAN

Give him good news before he does. He's an American Hero, so I hear.

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Alyssa snaps for Megan's attention.

ALYSSA
General quarters.

Megan catches sight of Donny through the window.

MEGAN
Shit! Quick, how do I look?

ALYSSA
You are wearing a tiny paper hat.

MEGAN
YOU'RE wearing a tiny paper hat!

EXT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Donny reaches for the door nope he's totally turning around.

GILLIAN
Not letting you walk out of here.

DONNY
Okay but what if--

Gillian takes him by the ear and pulls him to the parking lot. She steadies him and takes a disbelieving breath in.

Hands on his shoulders. Her voice in a full Hogan growl.

GILLIAN
You gotta fight. You gotta fight like
you're remolding your life, man. Get
your priorities in order!

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Alyssa and Megan are staring at the animated conversation. The arcade noises drown out what Gillian is saying.

ALYSSA
What are they saying?

Megan sees it. Megan recognizes it. Oh my god.

MEGAN
She's doing the Real American!

She straightens herself out. Balls up her hands and starts banging them lightly on the counter.

EXT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Donny and Gillian are bouncing in rhythm as she speaks.

GILLIAN
You're on that mountaintop, man! You
can do anything, but what you gonna
do when that Hulkamania--

GILLIAN AND DONNY
RUNS WILD ON YOU!

GILLIAN
GO GET HER!

They march towards Al's to the opening of "Real American."

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Alyssa punches the air in rhythm like she can hear the song.

DONNY. Pointing. Hero pose. And we--

DONNY
Megan! You. Me. Fall Ball?

Zooming up on Megan and she says--

MEGAN
YES!

Everything stops. She's breathing heavily.

Donny and Megan lock eyes. They both smile.

There's a little bit more silence.

ALYSSA
...Can we have ice cream now?

INT. KELLY HOUSEHOLD - KATE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Kate sits at her desk facing the window. SAT cram session.

Her walls are covered with Yankees posters and paraphernalia
from indie rock bands.

She looks up and gazes out the window.

POV KATE. Looking at the neighbor's house. Claire's house.

Claire in the window. She looks up and directly at us. Eyes
wide. Panicked that she's been spotted. She grabs a pen and
paper and scribbles out something that she holds up.

KATE. She grabs a pair of binoculars from her cabinet.

CLAIRE. The message. "KATE. DON'T SAY A WORD. PLEASE."

KATE holding for a moment. Debating what she was just told.

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Ice Cream! Donny, Megan, Alyssa, and Gillian dig into soft serve covered in grotesque amounts of toppings.

MEGAN

So was that your plan all along?

DONNY

I had figured it out, but--

GILLIAN

You had not. You were gonna thrash about until you asked me to do it for you and then I would have gone off to play Space Ace until you finally asked her, you coward.

MEGAN

Nah, I believe him. C'mon, Donny. Let's hear what you were gonna say.

Donny clears his throat.

DONNY

Megan, would you do me the honor of--

All three girls let out game-show buzzer noises at once.

DONNY (cont'd)

What?

Alyssa draws a square in the air with her finger.

ALYSSA

(mouthing)
Square.

MEGAN

You're lucky I already like you.

DONNY

See that? She already likes me!

GILLIAN

Well somebody has to.

Donny and Gillian shove each other like feuding brothers.

ALYSSA

Gillian?

GILLIAN

Alyssa?

ALYSSA

May I ask you a question?

GILLIAN

Yes, I am.

They all knew what the question was.

Gillian puts her spoon Excalibur-style into her ice cream.

GILLIAN (cont'd)

That's what you were gonna ask, yeah?
I am. I'm a...homosexual person.

DONNY

You've been in this song and dance
with Kris for weeks and--

GILLIAN

(interrupting)

And this is me choosing it, Donny.
This is me just--just with people I
trust. You should be honored or
something. My dad called his own
brother a faggot, threw him out of
the house on Christmas. My pop
sucked, I'm glad he's dead. My Uncle
is a great guy. But that's all Dad
saw. I'm worried that my life is
gonna be insults on a wall. People
telling me what I am.

Alyssa on the verge of confessing something, but--

MEGAN

How do you, like, know?

Pfffffffffflaugh out of Gillian for that absurd question.

GILLIAN

I just do. It's always been there.

ALYSSA

Do you have a girlfriend?

GILLIAN

Nah. But I was on the down low with
Marta Johansson last summer.

DONNY

Wait, Marta's gay?

GILLIAN

She was when I was kissing her.

Gillian pops some nonexistent gum.

Alyssa gauges the temperature of the room. She stays silent.

MEGAN

Thank you for telling us.

GILLIAN

Sure.

DONNY

It's very brave of you.

GILLIAN

Your brother's brave. I'm just gay.

She straightens up.

GILLIAN (cont'd)

Um, anybody want to play Gauntlet?

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

Claire paces the second-floor hallway. Aimless, not angry.

MICHAEL'S ROOM. There's a squeak to the hinge.

Everything is where Michael left it on Labor Day. There's a paperback open on the bed. The sheets are pulled down. A can of Coke he forgot to take downstairs.

Claire enters the room on soft footsteps.

The can. She reaches out but stays her hand.

The HALLWAY. Claire like she's trying to not wake anyone.

She puts her back against the wall and slides to the floor.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - KRISTIN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

There's something brand new and moody on Kristin's stereo.

Kristin is ostensibly doing homework. In sweatpants and a t-shirt she looks like a palette-swapped Gillian.

Around her room are posters detailing her horrendous taste in early-2000s cinema.

When Gillian slams the front door it shakes the house.

KRISTIN

Did he ask her?

GILLIAN (O.S.)

He did!

KRISTIN

Still hate me?

GILLIAN (O.S.)

YUP!

Gillian stomps her way up to Kristin's third-floor bedroom.
She only goes as far as the door. Nobody get any ideas.

KRISTIN
Hey, I left a message with Claire and
called two times after that.

GILLIAN
Maybe you can light the Batsignal.

KRISTIN
What are we, twelve?

GILLIAN
Excuse me for suggesting anything.
Don't go looking for me tomorrow.
I'll bike to practice.

KRISTIN
That'll take you like an hour.

GILLIAN
Thanks, I can count. Have a good
night. Still hate you.

Gillian's faster down the stairs than she is up.

KRISTIN
Love you too.

EXT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. NIGHT.

Kenny and Ms. Robbins are wrapped in the hammock.

KENNY
Have you told anyone?

MS. ROBBINS
I'll be Mrs. Brown when you're out of
uniform, Mr. Brown.

Donny skipping up the stairs and onto the porch. He doesn't
stop as he walks to the front door.

DONNY
Kenny. Ms. Robbins.

MS. ROBBINS
Becky.

DONNY
Sure thing, Ms. Robbins!

Kenny looks to Ms. Robbins. The hell's up with him?

MS. ROBBINS
Megan Campbell.

KENNY
She is entirely out of his league.

MS. ROBBINS
A lot's changed. He'll surprise you.

INT. DONNY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Donny crashes down into his desk chair, doing a spin, totally pleased with himself. He stops, looks at his computer, scrolls through Winamp until he lands on a favorite chill swing composition.

Donny looks out the window at the world. Lights in the houses of Skerritsville start to wink out one by one.

INT. MEGAN'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Total theater kid room. Skerritsville High productions mingle with everything Broadway she could get her hands on.

Megan sits at her desk with a pair of tweezers, trying to dig under her nails to get rid of the gunk.

She grumbles and curses her fingers. She still smiles.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A stack of horror movies on top of the VCR.

Alyssa is dead asleep with two college applications on her chest. Phantom Sever continues on the TV regardless.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - KRISTIN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Kristin at her desk. She's writing something out longhand.

KRISTIN. Her free hand over her eyes. Exhaling heavy.

EXT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. NIGHT.

Ms. Robbins and Kenny in the hammock. Getting cold out here.

MS. ROBBINS
I have to chaperone Fall Ball
tomorrow. Drew the short straw.

KENNY
Do you want help?

MS. ROBBINS
For real?

KENNY
I want to be anywhere you are.

MS. ROBBINS
Then don't leave me. Tell them to
start the war without you.

He holds her close. No way to answer that.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

The living room. Daybreak.

Gillian in breakaway pants and a Carhart. She's threaded her ponytail through the back of her Albany River Rats cap.

As she's on the way out when she spots Kristin's letter on the coffee table. "To G. From K."

She ignores it and walks out the door.

EXT. ROUTE 32. DAY.

Gillian bikes furiously up 32, her workout mix playing loudly in her headphones.

Gillian tilts her gaze up as she turns off the main road.

EXT. LAURENS STATE PARK. DAY.

Cold and overcast.

Running into frame is Gillian. Same moves as yesterday.

Her steps are lighter. She's got to be moving faster.

The LAWN. Crossing the line. She's all by herself.

Looks down at her watch. Time. 18:01.

REVERSE. The whole team getting ready to run. Kristin out in front. Gillian panting. She nods back to the path.

GILLIAN AND KRISTIN. Neck and neck.

The PATH. Same steps. Lighter. Faster.

Kristin pulling away without changing. Gillian dragging.

THE LAWN. Checking her watch. Time. 18:10.

Faster. Running and rushing and oh god faster please--

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM.

Gillian sits on the bench between the lockers.

CUT TO her facing the lockers. She starts screaming, beating at her head with a closed fist, growling and then slamming the side of one of the lockers as hard as she can and then--

CUT TO her back on the bench.

CUT TO the TEAM surrounding her. Kristin approaches.

Gillian bolts up and gathers her stuff. Before she can leave Kristin flicks her letter at Gillian.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - SENIOR LOCKERS.

Back in her street clothes. Gillian is slumped against the bleached-out graffiti. It's a little better scrubbed today.

Gillian has Kristin's letter open.

KRISTIN (V.O.)
Jill, when you say things like "I might be" it means that you are. I know you hate me now. But when I look at you I see us. Dad said that it was wrong and Mom never said at all, but if you're gay then it has to be right. I'm sorry I can't say that in person. I'm sorry I said anything. I love you. KP.

Gillian lowers the letter and nods her head. All right.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - LIGHTING BOOTH.

Kate tests each fuse on its own. She's got a boombox playing something current and hopeful.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK at the door.

KATE
Come!

Megan swings the door open and Kate does not pay any mind to the donuts she's bringing before just up and enveloping her boss in the biggest hug.

KATE (cont'd)
Congratulations it's SO RIGHTEOUS--

MEGAN
Who told you?

KATE

Alyssa Feldman is like those two doors where one always tells the truth and one always lies--

MEGAN

All right. It's...not bad, Katie. I'm feeling pretty good.

Kate does a weird little chop-dance with this next one.

KATE

(half-singing)

Go-on-and-get-it! Make out with him!
With TONGUES--

Megan shoves her just enough that they both bounce. She offers up the apple cider donuts.

KATE (cont'd)

Oh gosh, Claire and I used to riot on these. I should get her some--

Megan looks at her with total confusion.

KATE (cont'd)

...whenever she's back.

Kate shoves the donut in her mouth.

MEGAN

Uh huh. What about you? Do anything interesting last night?

Kate, a mouth full of donut, hesitates before playing dumb.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Claire sits on the couch with an open photo album. She drinks a cup of coffee out of a NYSA mug.

Looking down at the PHOTO ALBUM. That one-screen theater in town showing Episode I. Kate and Claire and Gillian wielding lightsabers. They're all beaming.

Claire looks up out the window at Kate's house.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - FIRST FLOOR.

Donny and Kristin are walking towards class.

KRISTIN

She doesn't know that I'm doing it.

DONNY

Like a rat in a maze. You write down
ALL of her times?

KRISTIN

She would be running the race anyway,
Donny! I want to know why she's
slowing down.

DONNY

Maybe you're just better.

KRISTIN

Identical DNA. No such thing. Will
you help me?

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. LATER.

We're almost set up for Fall Ball. Harvest decorations and
colored lights. A few student volunteers finishing up.

Donny joins the DJs behind the booth.

Tommy B. is testing the mic with a Bob Sheppard impression.

TOMMY B.

Your attention please! Now batting,
the catcher, number fifteen, Thurman
Munson! Number Fifteen!

Alex leans over to the controls and lowers the volume on the
microphone. Tommy is undeterred.

ALEX

(to Donny)

THIS Saturday? Man, I'm gonna have a
DJ hangover.

DONNY

It's for a good cause. You get in the
van, we get the twins running, maybe
they start talking to each other
rather than yelling.

ALEX

Don't you have stuff at home?

DONNY

It's an hour. We help them and then I
get back to family time.

ALEX

I can't believe Roadblock is back.

TOMMY B.

Who?

DONNY
My brother.

ALEX
(overlapping)
Ms. Robbins' husband.

Donny looks at Alex like he guessed a big twist.

ALEX (cont'd)
Nah, dude. You are not that good at
keeping secrets. We figured it out
like a week ago.

DONNY
"We"?

ALEX
Kris, Lyss, Old Man Tasker--

TOMMY B.
I knew.

They both turn around to Tommy B.

DONNY
What do you know about it?

TOMMY B.
Everybody talks all the time in this
town, right? And when you're small
like me nobody notices so I just hear
everything.

DONNY
You gonna talk?

TOMMY B.
No, I want to help, like, anytime
somebody's having problems, right?
That's what we're supposed to do now.
That's what everyone's telling me.
We're supposed to help.

ALEX
Yeah, Tommy. We're supposed to help.

DONNY
Becky's gonna kill me. She'll think I
talked.

ALEX
She has other things on her mind.

EXT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

Ms. Robbins car comes screaming to the front of the house.

Kenny looks up. He has just enough time to put down his beer before Becky walks up and kisses him.

MS. ROBBINS
I have an hour until I have to be
back at school. I need you to do
unholy things to me. RIGHT now.

He's about to ask follow-up questions and she shushes him.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. CONCURRENT.

The guys at the booth. The party lights flick on and off.

DONNY
You gonna help me and K on this?

ALEX
Sure. You've got me and the van
tomorrow morning.

Tommy is going through the records, pulling out an unfamiliar one to look over. INXS' "Kick".

DONNY
That's Becky's favorite record.

TOMMY B.
What is this?

ALEX
What are they teaching in school
these days? I swear...

CUT TO Alex's hands opening the case.

The CD PLAYER as the tray races in. One track forward--

Alex's FINGERS on the sound board. All the way up.

"New Sensation" blaring. Tommy B. starts nodding his head.

And then he's on the dance floor doing CRAZY KUNG-FU MOVES.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Gillian waits by Donny's car. She checks her watch.

GILLIAN
So this is what cell phones are for.

Up walks Kristin. She's got a Gatorade for each of them.

KRISTIN
Hey. I'm driving us home.

She hands Gillian the ruby-red drink. Gillian snatches it away like wary prey.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
C'mon. He's got a thing.

Gillian checks the seal on the drink.

GILLIAN
I read your letter.

KRISTIN
Okay. Good. Um hey, Jill...are you?

GILLIAN
Yeah. I am.

A standoff. Kristin reaches out and squeezes Gillian's arm. Gillian reciprocates. A little bit. Progress.

Gillian moves towards Kristin's car first.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
Know how I know Mom loves you more?

She points at Kristin's car.

KRISTIN
Maybe if you'd learn how to drive.

GILLIAN
Never stopped Mom.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. LATER.

Kate Kelly rides up on her bike. She has a bag on the back from the local Stewarts shop.

CUT TO the front door. Kate knocks and drops back.

A second of silence. Kate knocks again.

KATE
Claire! It's just me!

Another second.

KATE (cont'd)
I got you Stewarts...

The door opens. A puffy-eyed Claire. Kate interrupts with the bag, holding it out at arms length. Claire snatches it out of Kate's hands.

Claire clears her throat.

CLAIRE

Hi. Thank you. I told you I didn't want to see anybody.

KATE

You can't come home and see nobody. So I thought I would be the somebody. I have to run anyway. I'm taking the SATs tomorrow.

CLAIRE

Oh. Good luck.

KATE

Thanks.

Claire's brain finally starts working enough to--

CLAIRE

You'll do great. You always do.

Kate drops back on her heels and smiles.

KATE

Thanks, Claireness. Oh, there's a half-gallon of Butter Pecan in there, so get that in the freezer--

CLAIRE

Of course you'd remember.

KATE

Apple cider donuts, chocolate milk, two bags of Utz, I know the score.

CLAIRE

Thanks. G'luck tomorrow.

KATE

Hey, the twins are all messed up. Could you let them know you're alive?

CLAIRE

Thanks for the grub, KDK.

Claire closes the door.

INT. KRISTIN'S CAR. DAY.

Kristin is taking the state roads so she can go just a little bit faster. Gillian is sorting through the CDs in the center console, trying to find something halfway decent.

GILLIAN

Your music collection should be considered a war crime.

KRISTIN
Don't talk. Your favorite song EVER
is LITERALLY called "Casper, the
Homosexual Friendly Ghost".

GILLIAN
Yeah, but at least I never bought the
98 Degrees Christmas Album.

KRISTIN
Pick something. You're killing me.

Gillian pushes a CD into the stereo. Pretenders again.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Claire gave me this CD.

GILLIAN
Was this a Birthdaypalooza gift?

KRISTIN
Nah, she had it for me that day I
went into the city and Dad made you
stay home and practice for band.

GILLIAN
So glad I ditched the oboe and raced
after you into track. For once you
were making the good decisions.

KRISTIN
For once, huh?

GILLIAN
I wouldn't question your track record
of decisions right now. I'm just glad
Mom let me.

KRISTIN
Speaking of Therese, grab that bag
back there?

Gillian fishes a bag from the backseat. She pulls something
out of it: devil's horns?

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Mom must have snuck it in here before
she left.

GILLIAN
It's way too early for Halloween.

KRISTIN
I think we need it.

Gillian keeps pulling things out: makeup, Jason mask...and a
wig that looks exactly like Kristin's hair. She regards it
curiously before shoving it back in the bag.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

Gillian carries the Halloween bag as the twins walk in the front door. She drops it on the coffee table and turns away to walk back to her room. Kristin stops her. Points to the long mirror on the far wall of the room.

She lines them up next to each other. Staring down. Kris, blonde and preppy. Jill, brown and dressed for the X-Games.

Kristin can't stop staring at Gillian's hair.

GILLIAN

What?

KRISTIN

I couldn't pull it off.

GILLIAN

Sure you could. You just move a little slower and hate yourself.

KRISTIN

Jillie, come on.

GILLIAN

Or maybe you'd like to take a swing at being talk of the town. Too busy being perfect? Oh I'm Kristin Noland and I don't have TIME for boyfriends! Teachers love me and I dress like a forty-year-old widow--

KRISTIN

Oh shut UP Jill! Just--you're gonna dye your hair and hide in big clothes and act like garbage and that's gonna do what? Make you the evil twin? I got news for you, Lore. You've still got this face.

GILLIAN

You have no idea. I look in the mirror and I see you and I know I know you don't feel like this!

KRISTIN

Maybe I don't. But I've been you for birthdays, Halloweens, fake-out sick days. I thought I knew everything about you. I thought it was everything about me. What if we end up at different schools?

GILLIAN

We're gonna. Nobody wants me.

KRISTIN

That's just it. I'm gonna have my life and you're gonna have yours and maybe like you'll have these friends and they'll know you for YEARS and one day they'll see us together and they'll be like "oh my god you have a TWIN?" Like I wasn't just part of the same sentence with you. Michael's dead and the city's on fire and Claire won't talk to me and I don't even know my own face?

GILLIAN

I'm not you. I wanted to know that was okay. I wanted you to tell me that. Just that.

KRISTIN

It's okay, Jill. It has to be.

Kristin shrugs. She looks at the ground.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

You don't have to forgive me. Not ever. Just...don't hate me?

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Alyssa sits at her computer. She's typing furiously.

Stretched out on the desk are stacks of paper, each one with a different school's name tented on top--

But on her MONITOR is her LiveJournal. There's a long post about some fan theory or another that she's composed.

CUT TO Alyssa walking downstairs.

CUT TO the kitchen. Alyssa making herself a sandwich.

She has the TV on the counter tuned to VH1. They're playing the video for "Alive and Kicking", filmed not far from here.

Commercials. A somber ad for the U.S. Air Force.

ALYSSA. She stares at it. Almost like it's a foreign object.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD - KENNY'S ROOM. DUSK.

The decor frozen in time at eighteen years old.

Ms. Robbins and Kenny are getting dressed.

She kneels next to him as he pulls on his shirt. Takes his hand. Turns it over and over in hers.

MS. ROBBINS

I was trying to remember where that scar was. The one when you and Michael were flinging bang snaps at each other on the golf course--

He holds up his other hand. A few dots on his skin.

KENNY

I held this over him for years. Any stupid move he wanted to make. I think he ran into burning buildings just to spite me sometimes.

MS. ROBBINS

I hope that's what they remember about him. About us.

KENNY

Childhood injuries?

MS. ROBBINS

Little things. Anythings. More than names on stone. We're gone so quick, Kenny. Even in the long run.

KENNY

So we spend tomorrow together. All day. Just like we used to.

MS. ROBBINS

We're gonna do whippets and watch Caddyshack a dozen times?

KENNY

We're gonna do things that won't get me dishonorably discharged.

MS. ROBBINS

You're no fun.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

A folding table at center court. Tommy B. and Alex are having dinner before the dance.

Tommy puts down his PB&J and hesitates before speaking.

TOMMY B.

Hey, Alex? So I've been wondering, and um, well, I don't know how you got to be DJ in the first place.

ALEX

Maria Bell. She was a senior when I was a freshman.

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
Her dad and my mom and Reverend
Robbins are all friends, so she sort
of got pushed into taking me under
her wing.

TOMMY B.
Reverend Robbins? Like Ms. R?

ALEX
Yeah, that's her dad. You don't go to
church, I guess.

TOMMY B.
We're Quakers, but there's no meeting
house here, so we go to the one in
Herkheimer.

ALEX
Quakers. Huh. But yeah. Mar brought
me on and dubbed me the next school
DJ, but she told me I had to do the
same thing when I graduated.

TOMMY B.
Oh. So who are you gonna pick?

Oh my god, Tommy doesn't get it. Alex packs up his food.

ALEX
C'mon, let's test the speakers.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

Claire sits in one of the bay windows. The house is dark but
for her reading light. The outside world is pitch black.

She hears a car roll close on the back road. She turns off
the light until the sound of tire on gravel disappears.

EXT. CAMPBELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

Donny sits in his car out front. He's changed into khakis
and a giant button-down shirt from the Gap. Hey, it's 2001.

DONNY
Okay. Things are good. You're good.
You're good at being good. This is
going to be fun, and you're gonna--

It's a good thing he forgot to lock the doors. MEGAN opens
the passenger's side and hops in.

MEGAN
What's up?

Donny lets out a shriek of surprise. Megan wears a metallic-dot dress she picked out at Woodbury Common. Her nails are painted in harvest colors. She's still wearing her chunky G-Shock watch, because Batman always has his utility belt.

DONNY
I mean uh hi yes good evening.
How's...stuff?

MEGAN
I'm tired of dress rehearsals. Let's
just do the damn thing.

Donny nods. Okay, good. Cool.

The car sputters forward.

EXT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO. NIGHT.

A grocery cart travels wayward across the empty parking lot.

INT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO. NIGHT.

The linoleum-and-florescent aesthetic is strong. There's ADULT CONTEMPORARY MUZAK playing softly overhead.

American flags hang over every aisle.

INT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO. - BY THE SOFT DRINKS. NIGHT.

KRISTIN has her sales-associate green apron on.

She's pushing a cart of six-pack sodas down the aisle. She stops at the refrigerated shelves and pulls out a Slice.

INT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO. - CHECKOUT COUNTERS. NIGHT.

Patriotic garland on the counter. There's not a single other person in here. Kristin leans over the intercom.

KRISTIN
Attention shoppers. For the next
thirty seconds, bananas are free.

The terrible music continues uninterrupted.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. NIGHT.

A steady stream of kids enter the school for the dance.

Our view is cut off by DONNY'S CAR lurching into frame. He stops just in time for him to be perfectly in our view.

Megan opens her own door and gets out. Donny planned to get her door in a gentlemanly move, and now he's scrambling.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

The lights are down, making the rented lasers and disco balls show up spectacularly.

Ms. Robbins gives Megan a thumbs-up as they enter.

Megan turns to Donny. Say something, dude! He gulps.

DONNY
You look beautiful. I mean, you're
beautiful all the time, but you--

MEGAN
Thanks, Donny. You look good too.

He smiles bashfully.

CLOSE ON Alex and Tommy B. Alex sees Donny and gets an idea.

ALEX
Hey, pull out Number--um--113.

Megan and Donny are still approaching the dance floor hesitantly. Some NOSTALGIC 90S POP HIT blasts out.

MEGAN
Oh shit, I love this song! C'mon!

Megan whips Donny forward and onto the floor.

INT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO - CHECKOUT COUNTERS. NIGHT.

Kristin sits at checkout reading the newest Nicholas Sparks novel. She reaches to grab her drink and wildly misjudges where it is, smacking into it with a loud THUD.

She nearly curses but keeps it left at a muted "Sh-". It takes a sec to find the paper towels under the register.

Kristin pops back to clean up the spill to find KENNY standing there with groceries. She yelps in surprise.

KENNY
Noland! How are ya?

KRISTIN
I'm good. I--didn't--

KENNY
Know I was home, nobody does. I just
want to, you know...

He holds up some disgusting junk food and terrible soda.

KRISTIN
Yeah, all I can do is snack when I'm
on vacation. Not that you're on
vacation. I mean, you are, but--

Kristin takes a deep breath and scans his groceries.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Sorry. Been a stressful month.

KENNY
Yes. Yes it has.

KRISTIN
Oh my god, I didn't mean to say what
I've been doing is anywhere near--

KENNY
Kristin. You don't have to kowtow.
It's just me.

KRISTIN
Okay. Okay. Sorry. Sorry. It's just
between school and track and--

KENNY
I've heard you're fast. D-One?

KRISTIN
I talked to Northwestern today.

KENNY
Hey, Chicago. Not too bad.

KRISTIN
I've actually never been. That'd be
weird, right? Go somewhere you've
never been to?

KENNY
You'd be good as a Wildcat.

KRISTIN
Yeah. College and speed and such. Not
that important. Not like you.

KENNY
Kristin, I spend most of my time
making Top Gun jokes and doing heavy-
machine maintenance.

KRISTIN
Better than being here. Seventeen
eighty-three is your total.

Kenny hands her a twenty and takes his bags.

KENNY

Thanks!

KRISTIN

Oh, and thank you. For your service.

The silent THUNK where that landed.

KENNY

Sure. See ya 'round, Kris.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

The dance is in full swing. It's not totally lame.

Everything in red, white, and blue.

CUT TO Tommy B. and Alex. They survey their domain. Both of them wear studio headphones.

ALEX

Dude, go out there for a song. It's your first fall ball. Live it up.

TOMMY B.

The only person I'd want to--

ALEX

Gillian, yes, I'm aware.

TOMMY B.

Oh. Well, do you think she's--

ALEX

Dude, don't take it personally, but that ain't happening.

TOMMY B.

Oh...I get it. Her and Donny--

ALEX

She's gay! She's power gay, dude!

Tommy B. looks like he just lost the Super Bowl.

ALEX (cont'd)

Man, I'm sorry. Look. You're what, fourteen?

TOMMY B.

Next month.

ALEX

Okay, Valentine Baby, listen up. You've got time. Go be weird. Be you in your weirdness.

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
Have crushes on lesbians. You were
probably a huge fan of Xena: Warrior
Princess.

TOMMY B.
I mean, everybody's a huge fan of
Xena: Warrior Princess--

ALEX
No! Not everybody is, and that's
okay! You got time. Someday somebody
is gonna love your weirdness.

Tommy B. nods mournfully. Ugh, we can't leave him like that.

ALEX (cont'd)
How about you pick the next song?

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. NIGHT.

The pile of HALLOWEEN STUFF on the coffee table. Gillian's
HAND dances over it and grabs out the blonde wig.

KRISTIN'S ROOM

Opening the CLOSET. Gillian in the walk-in space, rifling
through her sister's clothes. A black asymmetrical skirt. A
crisp white blouse. She pulls down a pair of three-inch
heels and turns them over in her hands.

She's not even sure if she knows how to walk in these.

The DRESS. The BLOUSE. The HEELS.

KRISTIN'S CD COLLECTION. Gillian closes her eyes and picks
through them from memory. BNL. "Stunt."

Into the stereo. She queues track four and turns it up loud.

She pulls her hair under a wig cap. She puts the blonde on
while looking away from the mirror. Then she turns around.

It's KRISTIN in the mirror. Gillian as shocked as we are.
She looks herself up and down, unsure in her movements.

She brushes her hair behind her ears. She leans forward and
regards herself. Stares into her eyes.

Then she pulls up. Her hands cupped behind her back. Up in
the air, fingers locked and arms stretched.

Arms out. Now she's starting to sway.

Up on her toes. The swing sending her into a spin.

Bounding, throwing herself up into the air, kicking,
lunging, the remains of a dance education.

She's smiling. Really smiling. We hit the chorus and she lip-syncs like her life depends on it. Air guitar. The Frug! The Monkey! The Dancing Fool!

And that's when she loses her balance, crashing onto the bed. One of the heels goes flying.

We don't see her for a moment. We only hear her laughing.

She rolls up off the bed and catches a reflection of herself in the mirror. The wig slightly jaunted. She takes her blonde imposter accessory and pulls it off.

She can't stop staring at herself. Now just Jill in Kristin's clothes. Disgusted.

INT. KELLY HOUSE - KATE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Kate enters from a quick open and loud slam of her door. She's in formal clothes, almost like a waitress.

There's the sound of a cocktail party downstairs. Kate glances back at her door in disgust.

She drops on her bed in a huff. When she leans over to set her alarm clock her gaze drifts to the house across the way.

POV KATE through her binoculars. CLAIRE.

KATE'S MOM (O.S.)
Katherine! We're out of ice and
crackers! Run to the store, please!

The girl takes a minute to gather her thoughts.

INT. HUDSON SAVE 'N' GO. NIGHT.

SMACK of grocery items onto the conveyor belt. Looking up to Kristin. She looks across to Kate and smiles.

KRISTIN
Hey, Cus.

KATE
Hey, Kay.

KRISTIN
How's the party?

KATE
Dr. Sanderson tried to grab my ass.

KRISTIN
God, he sucks.

Kristin passes the items across the scanner. Kate hesitates before she speaks next.

KATE

Hey. So those those binoculars you got me for Christmas '98? I saw the lights across the way were on and...

Kristin looks up. What's Kate babbling about?

KATE (cont'd)

I saw Claire O'Connell. She's home.

Quick succession in close-up: the BAG FULL OF GROCERIES. Kate's SNEAKERS as she's rushed out the door. The sign in front: SORRY WE'RE CLOSED.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE - KRISTIN'S CAR. LATER.

Kristin didn't even bother to take off her apron. We still see her name tag pinned to it.

The outside world is dark. The stars light her way.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

Donny and Megan are dancing close. She whispers something in his ear. He smiles and they take off towards the exit.

Ms. Robbins pretends to raise objections. Go Donny Go.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. NIGHT.

Kristin stands outside. She can see Claire in the window. She's asleep on the couch, the book on her chest.

Kristin takes a step towards the house. Backtracks. Walks forward again. Stops. A frustrated punch into her palm.

KRISTIN

I need backup. Yeah, okay. Shit. I need backup. Light the Batsignal.

She's storming back towards her car.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

Shitting damn hell ass crap--

EXT. NOLAND HOUSE. NIGHT.

Kristin is zooming up the driveway. No time to slow down! She slams on the brake and the car lurches to a stop.

HONK! HONK! HONK HONK HONK HONK HONK--

KRISTIN
Jill! Get in the car! Batsignal!

The window opens on the third floor. Gillian sticks her head out like she's the world's angriest Laugh-In joke.

GILLIAN
KRISTIN! SHUT THE--

KRISTIN
Claire's back, idiot!

There are zero frames of film between Gillian shutting the window and running out the front door.

She's pulling on her jacket while stumbling into the car.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Hey, is that my skirt?

GILLIAN
It's a long story we'll talk on the way GO!

Gillian's door isn't shut when they peel out.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. NIGHT.

Cars jam the parking lot. Megan and Donny sit in Donny's car passing a joint back and forth.

DONNY (O.S.)
I didn't know you had moves.

MEGAN (O.S.)
I spend all day with theater kids.
Even Alyssa knows how to break dance.

INT. DONNY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Donny's holding the expert roll. Megan's handiwork.

Puff pass. Donny breathes deep. Here we go.

She looks at him expectantly. Donny kisses her.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

They turn around. The Twins are too close to the window.

GILLIAN
ATTENTION K-MART SHOPPERS!

MEGAN
BUSY HERE, Gillian!

KRISTIN
Batsignal.

DONNY
Shit! The Batsignal!

KRISTIN
Meet us there. Half hour.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

Ms. Robbins pops a Nicorette into her mouth.

The DOORS bust open. The Twins are bathed in light.

It's too loud. Gillian grabs a whiteboard off the wall. She erases this week's gym schedule and writes one word.

Over her head: "BAT SIGNAL"

DJ BOOTH. Alex turns to Tommy B.

ALEX
I'm gonna need you to take over.

TOMMY B.
It's the part I was born to play.

He shoots overconfident-to-hide-terror finger guns.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE - DONNY'S CAR. NIGHT.

But Megan is driving. She's moving quick, but she's fighting the column shift all the way.

MEGAN
Why do you drive a three on the tree?
It's the Twenty-First Century.

DONNY
We're tiny children this car cost two
hundred dollars you insisted on
driving please don't kill us!

MEGAN
You didn't know the way we are both a
little high I need you to be cool!

DONNY
I'm totally cool!

MEGAN
Be cool!

DONNY
You be cool!

MEGAN
I'm totally cool!

INT. SKERRITSVILLE - KRISTIN'S CAR. NIGHT.

The Twins ride in relative silence.

GILLIAN
The hell are we gonna say to her?

KRISTIN
I missed you? We love you?

GILLIAN
Sorry terrorists murdered your
brother?

KRISTIN
Jesus, you're the worst.

GILLIAN
Just saying. It's gonna come up.

A beat.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD - DRIVEWAY. NIGHT.

Kristin's car Donny's car Alex's van--

They all come running. Kristin gets in front to temper them.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD - FRONT PORCH. NIGHT

The kids gather.

Donny waits for a nod from Kristin. He raps on the door.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. NIGHT.

A loud THUMP THUMP THUMP on the door. It jolts Claire awake.

She doesn't respond to it.

Three seconds pass. The opening rhythm of "Just a Girl".

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD.

The sound of feet shuffling across the floor.

They don't move or change facial expressions or breathe.

CLAIRE opens the door.

Claire looks out at all the expectant faces--

And she shuts the door on them.

They all look to Kristin. Say something!

KRISTIN

Clairebear? If you wanted to be left alone you would have stayed in the city and you can come out and fight me if you think otherwise!

Rustle rustle rustle.

The door opens. Claire regards them. A quiet moment then--

GILLIAN

Oh thank Christ you're alive.

Claire and Kristin in a stare down. Kristin knows she's got Claire opening up. A cocky eyebrow raise. Claire hates it.

Claire steps out of the doorway. She makes a face like she's angry they're not walking in already.

CLAIRE

Well, come on, Speedster.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

The group filters into the living room.

MEGAN

You're here, so who's DJing?

ALEX

I gave it to Tommy B.

MEGAN

I hope he's not screwing it up.

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. CONCURRENT.

Something Top 40 playing. Tommy is panic rushing around the booth trying to keep up. He spots that INXS record.

Into the CD player. Track Two. Those first smacking chords.

Ms. Robbins looks up. Is it? Already moving her shoulders.

Tommy is grooving to it. The kids on the floor are confused.

Ms. Robbins gets up. This may be the first time a teacher chaperone has danced at one of these things.

Tommy doffs his hat. Saluting Becky on the floor.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE - KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Claire and the Twins. Empty Bud cans line the counter.

We hear everybody else shuffling around in the other room.

CLAIRE
(to Gillian)
You look so different.

GILLIAN
That was the point.

CLAIRE
I think I like it.

GILLIAN
Thanks.

Gillian can't read Claire. She's going to hug her anyway.

Gillian just sort of clamps around her.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
I'm sorry.

CLAIRE
I know, Jill.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Everything in the bookcases was put there before 1993. The TV is from 1982.

ALEX
Shit, we should have told Alyssa.

MEGAN
I don't think she would have cared.

DONNY
Of course she would care--

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Hey, everybody.

We spin around to see Claire in the doorway.

DONNY
Hey, Claire.

ALEX
It's good to see you.

CLAIRE
Yeah. You too.

They all look at each other. Look away from each other.

MEGAN
I'm sorry, Claire.

CLAIRE
We're all sorry. Everyone's sorry.

DONNY
You're not picking up your phone.

CLAIRE
It's tough. I'm trying, all right?

GILLIAN
We're all trying. Everyone's trying.

CLAIRE
What do you want? We're not convening
the Dead Dad Club here. I've got
nobody now.

GILLIAN
You've got us.

CLAIRE
Maybe I did.

Nobody knows how to move here.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Come back later.

They all look to each other.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
...Please?

Everyone looks to Kristin. She nods. They begin to file out.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Krissie. Stay. For a little bit?

Kristin looks back at Gillian.

KRISTIN
'sat okay?

GILLIAN
I can ride with Donny. Love you.

Kristin is taken aback. Then she smiles. Gradual thaw.

KRISTIN
Love you too.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. LATER.

Kristin and Claire sit on the porch. Kristin has yet to take off her apron.

KRISTIN
Have you gone to see Becky yet?

CLAIRE
No. I was just here getting ready to...I wanted to see the house.

KRISTIN
You know Kenny's back.

CLAIRE
What, to stay?

Kristin shakes her head no.

KRISTIN
Anyone with you in the city?

Claire shakes her head no.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
I thought you'd want more people around with all of this.

CLAIRE
No. After the funeral--

KRISTIN
I would have come if you told me.

And now their sentences rushing and cutting each other off--

CLAIRE
It was all so fast--

KRISTIN
I would have gotten in the car and rushed in. I would have--

CLAIRE
I know, Kris--

KRISTIN
Honestly I'm a little insulted--

CLAIRE
And I didn't I couldn't I wasn't ready or able to--

KRISTIN
Claire, it's me--

CLAIRE
I KNOW WHO IT IS!

Kristin flinches back.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
I don't know anymore. They tell me
Michael's a hero. Would he be a hero
if he died in a fire on St. Mark's?
If Co-Op City had collapsed on him?

KRISTIN
He didn't die in a fire. He died in a
war.

CLAIRE
This can't be a war. I won't live in
a battlefield.

KRISTIN
You could move back here.

Claire choke-laughes.

CLAIRE
And do what? Hang out at the arcade
with Loopy Lyssie? Crash golf carts
with you and Jill?

KRISTIN
Yeah, not while we're like this.

CLAIRE
That's your dumbass fault for outing
her as a lesbian.

KRISTIN
She is a lesbian.

CLAIRE
Say it louder, there are some kids in
China who haven't heard yet.

She shakes a cigarette loose and offers one to Kristin. She
raises a hand to decline.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
That was the last thing I thought
before--before everything, you know?
I kept thinking how it was gonna be
for her up here. You can be gay in
the City. Easy. Y'know, not easy,
but. When I moved in with Michael
that's the first thing he told me.

KRISTIN
"You can be anything here."

CLAIRE

Bingo. But up here? I love this town,
Kris. It's home. YOU'RE home. But I
don't wanna be trapped in the past.

KRISTIN

Look what you're wearing.

Claire looks down at herself. Michael's giant shirt.

CLAIRE

There's years of his old clothes in
the attic. All the comfortable stuff.
Up there are all of my teenybopper
attempts to be cool.

KRISTIN

Trying to be Gwen Stefani?

CLAIRE

A? We don't talk about that. B? I'm
always trying to be Gwen Stefani.

KRISTIN

I have more Koool-Aid than I know what
to do with still--

CLAIRE

Oh god, just thinking about--

KRISTIN

With the bleach--

CLAIRE

I should never be let near industrial
cleaners--

KRISTIN

Then Michael? With the pitchers?

CLAIRE

Busting in and he's just--

KRISTIN AND CLAIRE

"OH YEAH!!!"

Claire giggles but it doesn't last long.

CLAIRE

Never forget. That's what they keep
saying. Everybody who wasn't there.
Never forget. Who's gonna remember?

KRISTIN

We will. Is that enough?

Claire shrugs angrily. She takes another drag.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
What are we supposed to do? We're just kids.

CLAIRE
Do you know any kids anymore?

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Kenny is the only person at the counter. He's enjoying an ostentatious ice cream flavor with a dumb pun for a name.

Alyssa watches him with maybe too much fascination.

She's commandeered the TV. Phantom Sever plays above us.

ALYSSA
Thank you for coming in. I had not had a single customer tonight.

KENNY
Hey, this is sanctuary. Ice cream and Phantom Sever? It's a classic.

ALYSSA
THANK you! No one ever says that!

Alyssa leans in like she's asking something confidential.

ALYSSA (cont'd)
What did you do in peacetime?

KENNY
There's no such thing as peacetime.

ALYSSA
Oh. I see.

KENNY
You go where the boat goes. Do some good, hope that you're helping your country.

He looks up. Whoops, he's shaken her a bit.

KENNY (cont'd)
Why do you ask?

ALYSSA
All I knew about nautical tradition was from Star Trek. You are going to be fighting for all of us and I wanted to know.

BANG! Angle on THE DOOR where Gillian, Megan, and Donny are busting in. Gillian carries a bottle in her hand.

KENNY

What's up, little dude? Did you need
a chaperone for your date?

Gillian makes a pronounced fart noise with her mouth.

GILLIAN

Anyway, Claire's back.

KENNY

Shit, what?

DONNY

She kicked us out.

GILLIAN

The mere fact that she's here is
cause for celebration. Behold!

She holds up the bottle and uncorks it.

KENNY

If that's your sample, I'd talk to
your doctor immediately.

GILLIAN

Mom drank all the good liquor, but
she left a lot of bad. Get some cups.

KENNY

I have to add a cursory objection
because you're all underage.

GILLIAN

So noted.

Alyssa brings out five sno-cone cups. They all stare at her.

ALYSSA

Best I can do.

Gillian pours them out. They all raise their cones.

GILLIAN

To. To. Um...

KENNY

Absent friends.

They all take a drink. The kids gag on their first taste.

KENNY (cont'd)

That'll put hair on your chest!

MEGAN

What IS this?

Enter KRISTIN with a quick step through the front door. They don't have a chance to greet her before she snatches the bottle out of her twin's hand and gulps it down.

The sick cough comes a split-second later.

KRISTIN
Mom's rejects. Yuck.

GILLIAN
Hey! How is she?

Kristin puts the bottle down on the counter. She purses her lips. She's looking for the right answer.

KRISTIN
Remember sophomore year when the kids from the city came up and we had--

GILLIAN
What did Alex end up calling it?

MEGAN
Claire Play '99.

KRISTIN
But my point...that night was the first time I had seen her smile since her dad died. She's gonna say she don't need it. But she need it.

GILLIAN
You're the bestie. That's a sacred position. So when and where?

KRISTIN
Tomorrow. Before she can disappear.

GILLIAN
No room for a dance floor at our place.

MEGAN
I'm out. My folks are back home.

KRISTIN
Lyssie?

Alyssa wavers. She looks down at her feet.

ALYSSA
There is a new episode of Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda tomorrow night--

MEGAN
Alyssa Tovah Feldman--

ALYSSA

I suppose I could tape it--

GILLIAN

Come on--

ALYSSA

I feel bad for her! Of course I do! Michael was a good person. I liked him way more than I have ever liked her. I am worried about college and I am worried about my grandfather and I am worried about war and New York and whether you all secretly hate me--

MEGAN

Lyss, I could never--

ALYSSA

I KNOW, okay? All right?...Forgive me if I do not drop everything for a girl who tormented me for years. Loopy Lyssie is too weird, Loopy Lyssie is too tall, Loopy Lyssie got held back because she is...I am only friends with her because...because you are all the best family I have.

This is probably the most Alyssa has ever spoken at once. Everyone stays quiet until she speaks again.

ALYSSA (cont'd)

So let us convene at my house. But let us keep the guest list small.

GILLIAN

I'll get a pen.

KRISTIN

And hey, where's Alex?

INT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM. SECONDS LATER.

Alex and Tommy B. are grooving in sync. They rule from the booth as the dance builds to a riotous peak.

INT. AL'S ARCADE. NIGHT.

Megan, Alyssa, and The Twins are hunched over the counter. Alyssa takes notes as they mention names.

KRISTIN

So the Three Katherines definitely.

MEGAN

Kate, Katie, and Katherine with a K
or Catherine with a C?

KRISTIN

...Four Katherines.

We pan away from them towards Donny and Kenny. They're deep
in a match on MORTAL KOMBAT.

KENNY

I swear to god, these low kicks.

DONNY

I don't know Kano's special moves!

KENNY

Then why did you pick him DAMN IT!

Kenny's avatar gets punched halfway to space, then flies
downward into the famous Spike Pit Fatality.

DONNY

(with the game)
Fatality!

KENNY

All right, best five out of seven.

DONNY

Pssh, face it, you lost.

KENNY

Ahem.

DONNY

You lost, LIEUTENANT.

KENNY

There we go.

They slap their grips together Dutch-and-Dillon style.

They smile. They nod. Years of shorthand in a grip.

Kenny points towards another arcade machine.

KENNY (cont'd)

Karate Champ.

DONNY

You always win!

KENNY

Exactly.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. NIGHT.

Tommy B. helps Alex load up his van.

A couple of upperclassmen stop to pat Tommy on the back for a job well done. The kid can't believe it.

Ms. Robbins walking by. She's already got a cigarette lit.

MS. ROBBINS
Well done, Mr. Tran. Mr. Bridger. See
you on Tuesday.

She is off like a shot.

A square SEDAN pulls up near them. The Bridgers, Mom and Pop who feel like they've dropped in from a simpler time.

TOMMY B.
That's my parents.

ALEX
You've done a man's job, sir. I can
finish packing up.

Tommy nearly hugs Alex and then pulls back so he just does this stupid hat tip thing and then before he goes--

ALEX (cont'd)
Hey. How would your parents react if
I asked for your help on sort of an
unsanctioned senior field trip?

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. NIGHT.

Claire and portable radio on the porch. She smokes her third cigarette of the night while Bad Company plays to the cold.

The unmistakable sound of Alyssa's car. She comes walking up the path and onto the porch.

ALYSSA
Hello, Claire.

CLAIRE
Hey, Lyss.

Claire gestures to the videos in Alyssa's hand.

CLAIRE (cont'd)
Not in the mood for slashers.

ALYSSA
Do you think I am that dense? I
brought you comedies. In French,
since you speak it.

CLAIRE

That's sweet of you, I guess, but I really just--

Alyssa slaps the tapes down next to the radio.

ALYSSA

Let me do something nice for you.

Claire offers her a smoke. Alyssa has her own.

ALYSSA (cont'd)

I do not know how to help. I do not know why you came back.

CLAIRE

I needed to--

Alyssa waves her hand. She does not care why.

ALYSSA

Come over tomorrow night. Seven. We will gather a few people and take your mind off of everything.

CLAIRE

I don't know, Lyss.

ALYSSA

It was not a request.

She takes a moment to breathe in the smoke.

ALYSSA (cont'd)

I would start with Le Placard. I liked it quite a bit.

CLAIRE

Thank you.

Alyssa moves to leave but stops at the steps.

ALYSSA

Everyone loved your brother. I am so sorry he is dead. But you are not. Remember that, please.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. NIGHT.

The Twins lean over either side of the kitchen island. Kristin has found the really good stuff.

They've poured into old cartoon collector cups.

They clink their glasses together. Gillian picks up the bottle and reads the label.

GILLIAN
Twelve years old.

KRISTIN
A gift from Mr. O'Connell. Mom must
have forgotten this one.

GILLIAN
Makes me feel fancy.

KRISTIN
I was gonna save it for a special
occasion.

GILLIAN
Here it is.

Kristin takes a drink. When she's right, she's right.

KRISTIN
Hey. I was thinking about what you
said. Coming out on your terms.

GILLIAN
I already hate where this is going,
but continue.

KRISTIN
What if you don't have to come out on
your own? What if I helped? Sort
of...made up for how much I suck?

Gillian keeps eye contact as she pours another drink.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
We're gonna finish this whole bottle
tonight.

GILLIAN
Good. Mom doesn't deserve this.

KRISTIN
(after a beat)
I like that skirt on you.

GILLIAN
I don't know how you wear these.

KRISTIN
Gotta keep up appearances.

INT. CAMPBELL HOUSE. NIGHT.

The front door as Megan sneaks in. She swings around, a
little more theatrical than usual from this stage manager.

The light upstairs clicks on. It's her parents. She gets a little quieter as she rushes to her room.

FADE TO:

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - GILLIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Gillian stumbles in. They have indulged quite a bit.

Gillian sits down on the edge of her bed. She flicks on the TV, joining Letterman already in progress.

She pulls the tie from her ponytail and shakes her hair free. One clump strand falls right in front of her eye.

Gillian blows it off her face. Falls back down. She flicks it away. And back. Sweeping it behind her ear. And back.

She inhales. Holds it for a few seconds. Lets the breath go slowly and opens her eyes. The strand falls right back down.

Nope. NOPE!

Up on her feet. She grabs scissors off her desk. Into the

BATHROOM

Where she wastes no time at all. Gillian holds the offending strand out and just chops it right off.

But now it looks weird. She shakes her head to try to cover it and everything falls everywhere. Soon she's chopping at another strand. Then another.

Gillian grabs her hair and pulls it back. She takes the scissors and just hacks right above her pinky finger.

Inches fall to the ground. The floor covered with hair.

Close on Gillian's eyes. From "yeah, that'll show it" to "OH. OH NO" in an instant.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - KRISTIN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Kristin is decompressing. Her work apron is balled up on her desk chair. And then she hears just SCREAMING.

GILLIAN (O.S.)
Krissie! HELP!

Feet across the floor. Down the stairs. Into the basement.
Down the hall to--

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - GILLIAN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Kristin turns the corner so fast that she has to grab the door to stop.

KRISTIN
Jill! Are you okay? What's the--

She sees it before we do.

Shock turns to disbelief turns to a cackling guffaw.

GILLIAN (O.S.)
It's not damn funny!

KRISTIN
What did you even DO?

And REVERSE to GILLIAN. Her hair is hacked to hell. Up near her ears, cut in waves up her head, just all over the place.

There's a sudden waver in Gillian's stance. She puts her hand on the sink to steady herself.

GILLIAN
It was in my way.

KRISTIN
I guess it's not terrible. You could start a new fashion trend.

GILLIAN
K.P., I swear to god.

KRISTIN
Uncle Ted's salon kit is upstairs.
Let's see what we can do with you.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Close on Kristin's hands. She fumbles with a comb.

KRISTIN
So when did you know? I can't believe I've never asked you.

GILLIAN
When did you know you liked boys?

KRISTIN
I just do.

We're catching glimpses. The flick behind Gillian's ear, the last little trim on the nape, the comb above her forehead.

GILLIAN

See? I think I always knew but I didn't know, you know? I saw her and it was like "shit, am I gay?" Everybody learns how to be straight. I gotta fumble around.

KRISTIN

I don't understand why I'm not gay.

GILLIAN

That's not how genetics work.

KRISTIN

Sometimes I wish it did. Open 'em.

Gillian opens her eyes. We see her reaction in the MIRROR.

Her hair is short. Like really short. Kristin has formed Gillian's hair into a slick side-part and it looks awesome.

GILLIAN

Oh my god.

She covers her face with her hands. She's crying?

KRISTIN

I'm so sorry. I did what I could--

She looks up and yells halfway-happy-halfway-relieved.

GILLIAN

I love it! I look like Karen Duffy!

KRISTIN

Is that good?

GILLIAN

I feel like a rock star.

KRISTIN

God, everyone's gonna flip.

INT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

The sun's not yet up. Claire lets some Folgers run through the Mr. Coffee. She looks out the window and spies--

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD.

Kate just down the way getting her bike helmet on.

CLAIRE (O.S.)

Katie!

Reverse to Claire standing outside her front door.

CLAIRE

Hey. If you want I'll drive you.

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR. DAY.

Kate in the shotgun seat. She looks around at the car.

KATE

Hey, when did you get your license?

Claire puts the car in gear and it lurches before she catches the brake. She smiles. I got this!

Kate isn't so sure.

INT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

The living room. Gillian in running clothes. She opens a large Gatorade and drinks the entire thing down in one gulp.

She does a swoop with her hand to move her hair out of the way only to remember she doesn't have long hair anymore. Confusion followed by euphoria.

Kristin enters, dead to the world.

KRISTIN

How are you so peppy?

GILLIAN

Mind over matter, and I got a whole lot less on my mind.

She whistles as she motions her hair getting cut.

KRISTIN

I can't believe I did that tipsy. I guess we needed Scotch to craft the new Gillian Noland.

GILLIAN

Does this look like Gillian to you? I'm like...Nega-Jill. Mirror Jill.

KRISTIN

Jack!

GILLIAN

What's that?

KRISTIN

Jack. Like Jack and Jill. Like Gillian Jacklyn Noland. Jack.

GILLIAN

Yeah...I think I like that.

She walks forward and hugs her sister tight.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
Thank you.

Gillian picks up her backpack and walks towards the door.

GILLIAN (cont'd)
Sleep it off. I'm gonna get a run in.

It clicks in Kristin's mind what day it is. She scrambles.

KRISTIN
Hey, it's Saturday! You don't want to
stay in a little bit?

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK on the front door.

GILLIAN
Who's that?

EXT. NOLAND HOUSE. DAY.

Donny and Alex and Tommy B. waiting outside the door. Tommy B. is in yet another jacket/hat combination.

Alex's van is parked farther down the driveway.

Gillian opens the door. She's shocked because it's these guys early on a Saturday. They're shocked because--

DONNY
Jill, we were hoping that you--wow.

ALEX
What are we wowing at--Dude. Hair.

Tommy B. takes one look at her and has everything he's ever thought about himself challenged.

TOMMY B.
Oh. Oh. Oh my god. Oh my god--

He takes off his hat and wanders in a circle for a moment.

GILLIAN
Cool. Anybody want to explain what's
happening here?

DONNY
We're running an experiment, Alex is
providing the van, Tommy B. is here
because he's a good person and
invested in your evolution.

Kristin shepherds a hesitant Gillian out the door.

GILLIAN
Any idea what we're doing?

KRISTIN
I have no idea what this could
possibly be.

GILLIAN
Uh-huh.

DONNY
C'mon. It's like The A-Team said to
Mr. T before they got in the van.

KRISTIN
And what was that?

DONNY
Get in the van.

EXT. NORTH-SOUTH LAKE CAMPGROUND - HAINES FALLS. DAY.

The sun is trying to break through the clouds. Red, yellows,
and golds pop from the trees covering the mountain.

Alex's van speeds past the empty ranger station.

EXT. NORTH-SOUTH LAKE - SCUTT ROAD. DAY.

The van stops at a long chalk line on the road. "START!"

The back panel opens up and the twins jump out.

Donny looks to the driver's side. Alex in the rear-view.

DONNY
Cruise control set?

ALEX
This van ain't got cruise control!

DONNY
Tommy B.? You ready?

Tommy B. leans out the back. He has a stopwatch in his hand.

TOMMY B.
Ready, willing, and able, good sir!

GILLIAN
Donald. You just hiked me up the
clove at the ass-beginning of
Saturday. Please. Details.

DONNY
Uh. Okay.

Donny takes a step backward to the other side of the line.

DONNY (cont'd)
From right here! We are exactly five kilometers from the Catskill Mountain House! Exactly the same change in elevation as Laurens, paved all the way until the last run up towards--

GILLIAN
I said I was faster at North Lake, oh my god, you do listen.

DONNY
Jill, I take this dead serious. All you need to do is catch the van--

GILLIAN
I'm sorry, do what? CATCH the van?

ALEX
You ain't catching this van!

Tommy B. jogs to the side of the line.

Kristin moves towards the van, but Gillian grabs her arm.

GILLIAN
Was this your idea?

KRISTIN
I want you over the line with me. Always have. It's us, right?

GILLIAN
Yeah. It's us.

KRISTIN
Now run your ass off.

CUT TO seconds later. The van is slowly moving away. Gillian shakes her arms. She doesn't break her gaze on the van.

GILLIAN
Thanks for being here.

TOMMY B.
Yeah. Glad to be here.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

Tommy B. Doesn't even have a chance to say "GO!" before Gillian takes off. She's at a faster pace than before.

BOOM and off we go with her and here are her sneakers with those initials and here we are with "Alive and Kicking" blasting right where the video was filmed--

KRISTIN AND DONNY from the open doors of the van. They stomp their feet and cheer.

GILLIAN exhales and throws herself into a forward sprint.

The end is in sight. Kristin holds out her hand.

Gillian sees it, smiles, and BOOM! One last push. Up and grabbing her sister's hand. They brace and Gillian gets pulled up into the back and--

They cross the line. Gillian lays down on the van floor.

GILLIAN

Time?

DONNY

Seventeen thirty-six.

Gillian smiles. She looks up at Kristin.

GILLIAN

Mirror images.

KRISTIN

Do it again and we'll talk.

GILLIAN

Ugh, you dick.

They both laugh.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL. DAY.

Claire in the car outside the school. Kate turns and waves as she walks in with the vast throng taking the SATs.

Claire leans out the window and looks the building up and down. A lingering glance to take it all in.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SKERRITSVILLE.

Claire drives down the drag. She stares at each storefront.

INT. TASKER'S TOYS.

The ring of the bell over the door as Claire enters.

She looks around the place. Familiar and not.

Old Man Tasker looks up from his copy of the Times-Union.

CLAIRE

Hello, Mr. Tasker.

He walks around the counter to greet her. He holds her by the shoulders and they have a moment.

CUT TO the shelves. Claire wanders aimlessly. She looks at old toys and new, trying to spark something inside her.

She dead-ends at the poster of her brother. They seem to stare at each other. Her heart races.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD. DAY.

DING-DONG. Donny enters with a Pop Tart in his mouth.

The DOOR. Donny. Claire. Donny's reaction to Claire.

CLAIRE

...I heard your brother was home.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD - LIVING ROOM. FOLLOWING.

Claire has pulled up a chair. She sits opposite Kenny and Ms. Robbins on the couch. They've both dressed quickly.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry I didn't come here first.

MS. ROBBINS

I should have come to see you.

CLAIRE

No. No, you've been working. You don't have to come to the city. Nobody should have to.

KENNY

You were going to come back and just sit in the house?

CLAIRE

I don't know what to do. I already got into college. I'm marking time.

MS. ROBBINS

You didn't tell us.

CLAIRE

Nobody knows. Didn't even tell Kris.

KENNY

Can you keep us in the loop?

CLAIRE

You're gonna be gone.

KENNY

I'm here now.

Claire adjusts in her seat, looks down, tenses.

CLAIRE
I'm gonna sell the house.

MS. ROBBINS
Claire--

CLAIRE
When I'm gone I'm gone. Dad's dead,
mom's gone, Michael...I'm gonna go.

MS. ROBBINS
That's it? No more New York? Your
friends? Your family?

CLAIRE
I don't have a family.

MS. ROBBINS
I'M your family!

CLAIRE
Becky, please. I go home and it's not
even my name on the door.

Ms. Robbins gives him a glance. She's scared different.

Kenny squats next to Claire.

KENNY
We loved him, Claire. You're our
family whether you like it or not.

Ms. Robbins gets up and hugs Claire.

MS. ROBBINS
Will you stay for lunch?

The KITCHEN TABLE

Claire, Donny, Kenny, and Ms. Robbins join hands in prayer.

MS. ROBBINS (cont'd)
For the gifts we are about to
receive, Lord make us truly thankful,
in Christ's name, amen.

After a grunted "Amen" everyone digs in.

DONNY
What did Alyssa bring over?

CLAIRE
(in French)
Some French comedies.

MS. ROBBINS
(in French)
My brother-in-law doesn't speak French.

CLAIRE
(in French)
Brother-in-law?

DONNY
Guys, I don't speak French.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Alyssa steps to dead center. She clears her throat and does a pretty spot-on impression of Megan.

ALYSSA
Okay. Gimme Two.

She's bathed in purple and orange light.

Alyssa smiles wide but strangely.

ALYSSA (cont'd)
I am very impressed.

CUT TO Megan. She's hooked up a portable board in the living room to a half-dozen gel-covered lights around the space.

MEGAN
Best I can do without Kate Kelly backing me up.

ALYSSA
We really do have to thank her for snitching Claire out to us.

MEGAN
I'll get her something nice. Maybe I'll steer Travis Fraser her way.

ALYSSA
Travis with the really big--

She motions out measuring a gigantic appendage.

MEGAN
You don't know the half of it.

ALYSSA
I do not believe I want to.

Megan grabs a bag of Doritos from the kitchen counter and pops it open. She angles towards Alyssa so they can share.

MEGAN

Okay, tell me if this is too much--

ALYSSA

Nothing is off limits for you.

MEGAN

Do you, like--I mean, I never see you even look twice at a boy.

ALYSSA

No need. I will leave this place and I shall write great stories and I will share that with whomever I choose as my family. Like you.

She crunches down impressively on a chip.

ALYSSA (cont'd)

Now. I believe we should have one of the many beers in the fridge, choose some choice tuneage, and begin readying this party.

MEGAN

And we'll see if Claire shows up.

Alyssa says nothing, but pulls a remote from her pocket and zaps it up towards the second floor. The whole house floods with the sounds of "Ruby Soho". Alyssa bops along with it.

EXT. O'CONNELL HOUSEHOLD. LATER.

Ding-dong.

Claire opens the door to reveal THE TWINS, identical down to the last detail. Pleather jackets and matching wigs. They stare with a terrifying expression.

Claire straight screams when she sees them.

GILLIAN AND KRISTIN

Come play with us, Claire. Forever and ever and--

SLAM. Claire yells bloody murder through the door.

GILLIAN

We got you so good.

The door opens.

CLAIRE

Okay. I'm gonna look right between you and you just say whatever.

KRISTIN

Alyssa has sent us to collect you!

CLAIRE

Oh, yeah. Look, tell her thanks and I appreciate it, but I'm gonna--

Gillian looks over Claire's shoulder into the house.

Moving boxes.

GILLIAN

What the shit?

She pushes past Claire who tries to put up objections.

The LIVING ROOM. Half the shelves are bare. Gillian gestures between them and the boxes to entering Claire and Kristin.

CLAIRE

What am I supposed to do, keep the house? Maintain it?

GILLIAN

You could still be here. You don't know where you're going to college.

CLAIRE

Chicago.

KRISTIN

Wait, what?

CLAIRE

I already got in. Northwestern, early d. The journalism school--

KRISTIN

I'm going too.

Gillian and Claire look at her incredulously.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

They came to see me this week. Recruiters. My grades are good enough. I'll get in. I have to. Somebody's gotta look after you.

CLAIRE

You're not my...

KRISTIN

Your what, Red?

CLAIRE

...I'm out of authority figures.

KRISTIN

Charter members of the Dead Dad Club.
I'll be the adult here.

CLAIRE

Cos you're what, forty-five days
older than me?

KRISTIN

Forty-six.

CLAIRE

Touche. What about you, Jill? You
gonna join this adventure?

GILLIAN

Pfft, nah. I'm getting into like SUNY
Skerritsville at best. Jack Noland
will make her own way.

CLAIRE

Who's Jack Noland?

KRISTIN

We'll explain in the car.

CLAIRE

I'm not going.

GILLIAN

We're taller than you and run sixty
miles a week. I wouldn't struggle.

Claire makes a stutter-step move before admitting defeat.

EXT. SKERRITSVILLE MANOR. NIGHT.

MS. ROBBINS and KENNY are outside the gates of the colonial
manor. It's one of those 18th-Century landmarks that New
York schoolchildren are forced to tour ad nauseam.

The pair lean up against Ms. Robbins's car. They have a
spectacular view up the Hudson Valley as they smoke.

MS. ROBBINS

I thought you were gonna quit.

KENNY

I'll quit if I get on a submarine.

MS. ROBBINS

You said I had to quit, full stop.

KENNY

So what's your excuse?

MS. ROBBINS
I'm surrounded by teenagers.

KENNY
I'd rather get shot at.

It's clear enough and quiet enough that we can hear a single car gunning it up the Thruway.

Ms. Robbins pats herself down for a lighter. Kenny has it.

MS. ROBBINS
Hey. We're the adults now.

KENNY
...When'd that happen?

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Alyssa and Alex look over her impressive stereo setup.

ALEX
You wired it to play in every room?

ALYSSA
Four rooms, twelve speakers, yes.

ALEX
Oh I think I love you.

ALYSSA
I am sorry to hear that.

Kate pokes her head up over the landing.

KATE
Guys. They're coming.

EXT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The twins walk in front of Claire, bodyguard positions.

GILLIAN
So what, are you gonna put pickles on your hot dogs? Become a Cubs fan?

CLAIRE
Hey, maybe.

KRISTIN
Oh, gross.

CLAIRE
I'm trying to put some distance--

She's still talking when they open the door and step INSIDE

To twenty of Claire's nearest and dearest jumping out.

EVERYBODY

Surprise!

A beat. Claire tries to run out the door. Kristin grabs her.

KRISTIN

Claire, please.

CLAIRE

They'll find out I'm leaving and then it's nothing but questions.

KRISTIN

What if it wasn't all about you?

Kristin looks to her sister and gives a nod.

KRISTIN (cont'd)

Gillian.

GILLIAN

Yes, Gillian?

KRISTIN

Can I make it up to you?

CUT TO the living room. Close on two dining-room chairs being dragged forward. The twins' FEET climbing up. Two pairs of Chuck Taylors in orange and blue.

CLAIRE plunked down in a lounge on the opposite side of the room. Kate stands by her side.

CLAIRE

How did it go?

KATE

Murdered it. Destroyed that thing.

CLAIRE

Attagirl. I'm gonna kill you for telling Kristin.

THE TWINS. They stand up on the chairs and mirror each other's body language exactly.

THE TWINS

One two three eyes on me!

An old school move they--and most everybody here--learned in kindergarten. Everyone stops and pays attention.

GILLIAN

First things first! Alyssa Feldman!
You are a mensch, we love you, and
I'd like to thank your folks for
being total delinquents.

KRISTIN

Second! We know why we're here. We
know who brought us here.

Claire sinks into the chair. She doesn't want to be here
doesn't want this doesn't want to be seen--

KRISTIN (cont'd)

There's all those signs up: "Never
Forget". I want to do one better. I
want to remember. All of it. Even the
good times. Even the bad. Even when
we screw up.

She looks to her sister. Gillian smiles, just a bit.

Gillian looks down. There's Megan. She tosses up Bud Lights
to the twins and starts to distribute them in the crowd.

Gillian pops hers open and raises it in a toast.

GILLIAN

We're gonna get out of this town.
We're gonna go where there's real
people and big dreams and an actual
mall! But...there's a chance that the
next time we get together there'll be
an empty seat at the table.

Gillian shakes a little. Kristin picks up the slack.

KRISTIN

So a toast! To Michael. To people who
do the right thing. To heroes. And to
Claire Siobhan O'Connell, who is one
of us forever no matter what--

Claire wants out. THIS is distracting people away from her?
Kate keeps her hand on the girl's shoulder--

GILLIAN

And who is my best friend!

KRISTIN

She's my best friend!

GILLIAN

Wait, I thought I was Kristin?

KRISTIN

Here, ready one two three--

The twins reach for their wigs with a great flourish, bending down and pulling them off with a great "TA-DAH!"

EVERYBODY is stunned by Gillian's look. She sticks her tongue out and rocks her head side to side.

KRISTIN (cont'd)
Wait, so you're Gillian?

GILLIAN
Pffft, Gillian? Screw Gillian!

Gillian turns to Kristin. Tell 'em.

KRISTIN
I've got something to say! Her name is Jack Noland and--

GILLIAN
I'M SUPER FUCKIN' GAY!

There's a collective adolescent gasp. And then Alyssa:

ALYSSA
Called it!

UPSTAIRS. Alyssa clicks her playlist to "Just a Girl".

DOWNSTAIRS. Claire looks up, tracking the dozen speakers around the house playing the song. She shakes her head.

ANGLE ON The Twins. Kristin uses the wigs as pom-poms. Gillian has her hard-rock look down as she strikes a pose.

KATE leans down right next to Claire singing.

THE STAIRS. Alyssa slinks against the banister.

CLAIRE looks up at her friends. The whole thing is ridiculous. How can she not smile?

The twins run forward and pull her up out of her chair--

KRISTIN
C'mon, Gwen Stefani!

And MEGAN has a bottle for Claire that she tosses--

And CLAIRE catches but before she opens it--

CLAIRE
Wait, so you're really--

Gillian nods her assent. They both take a moment of "yes? Maybe? Do we? Let's not."

CLAIRE (cont'd)
We gotta get you a fake ID. We'll go
to Stonewall and teach you this.

A trick she learned from Michael: she opens the bottle with
her eye socket. Everybody LOSES THEIR FUCKING MINDS.

Claire downs the entire beer during the synthesizer solo.
Then she turns it over to use it like a panto microphone.

CUT AWAY TO UPSTAIRS.

Everyone on and around the couch staring at the TV. Focusing
in on something we can't see but can hear. PHANTOM SEVER.

VOICE ON TV
Watch out for that corpse! It's dead!

Everyone cheers and drinks in bad-movie celebration.

CUT BACK TO DOWNSTAIRS!

As Claire dances through the lights, as Gillian fades into
Kristin and back, as Alyssa opens up, a rotoscoped
celebration of fluidity and color.

The last flourish. Twenty faces screaming around Claire.

FADE TO Later--

The unmanned light board. Alex wanders by. He looks around.

CUT TO just outside the GUEST BEDROOM. Megan and Donny rush
down the hall towards the door. Into the room. Donny finds
something that makes them both laugh.

MEGAN sticks her head out and looks side to side. She hangs
an old-style DO NOT DISTURB sign on the doorknob.

Back to the LIVING ROOM

Alyssa has taken control of the music. "Ruby Soho" blaring
in full. She pulls shapes with wild abandon.

Claire taps Alyssa on the shoulder.

CLAIRE
These speakers are bitchin'.

She extends her hand out for Alyssa. After a considered
moment Alyssa takes it. Truce.

They let loose with Gillian as they bounce excitedly in the
middle of the living room. Everyone follows suit.

The party continues into the morning.

FADE TO:

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Alyssa stands in the aftermath of the party.

Alex is still asleep on the couch.

ALYSSA
(to herself)
Sorry, Mom. Okay, not so sorry.

Enter Kristin, shoes off, jacket shucked. Her hair is a mess. She looks around at the aftermath.

KRISTIN
Can I make breakfast or something?

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM. DAY.

Donny and Megan sneak out like cartoon burglars.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM. SECONDS LATER.

Alyssa and Kristin assemble a makeshift breakfast.

Donny and Megan try to sneak in and past...

A moment broken by Alex talking in his sleep.

ALEX
Monsignor, I demand an explanation.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD - KENNY'S ROOM.

Kenny and Ms. Robbins lay in bed. A last lazy morning.

The intrusive shrill nonsense of a CELL PHONE ring.

Kenny checks the number on the display. Oh shit.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Alyssa and Kristin work in the kitchen, Megan and Donny talking to them at the pass-through.

In walks Gillian, her new hair just so.

ALYSSA
Oh hello, Jack.

That makes Gillian stop in her tracks. She starts giggling.

GILLIAN
Say it again.

KRISTIN
I think you broke her.

Claire follows close behind. Everyone focuses on her. She gives a small wave.

DONNY
We heard you're selling the house.

CLAIRE
Yeah. If anyone's buying.

KRISTIN
You can stay with us. Any time you want. I'm sure mom would want to see you when she gets back.

CLAIRE
Yeah. Hey, can we have some music?

Alyssa pulls out the remote and switches on the radio. A local station pumps out Haircut 100's "Love Plus One".

In moments Gillian is full-on dancing in the living room.

INT. BROWN HOUSEHOLD - KENNY'S ROOM.

Ms. Robbins and Kenny sit on his bed. They say nothing. Their hands grip tightly. Their jaws clench.

INT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Kristin with chocolate-chip pancakes and eggs. Doling out plates to the beat. "Ring-ring! LA LA LOVE PLUS ONE--"

The music cuts out.

ALYSSA
I had this wired perfectly--

The dead air is replaced with the President's address. It's October Seventh, and we're going to war.

It takes a moment for Alyssa to understand. She looks to ALEX. He's awake and leaning forward. They're listening.

Megan. She closes her eyes and clenches her jaw.

Donny moves for the door.

GILLIAN
Donny wait--

They're all going after him.

EXT. ALYSSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Donny's going for his car. He's going for Kenny.

No need. He's there with Ms. Robbins. He's in uniform.

Everyone stares at him. It's all real. It's all very real.

Alyssa is shaking and she'll be the first to explode--

She she grabs a stone off the ground and launches it about a thousand feet. Her growl follows like a piercing javelin of total hate.

There's a moment to let that echo.

DONNY

Don't go.

He rushes forward and hangs onto his brother.

DONNY (cont'd)

Don't go. Don't go don't go--

CUT TO Claire. Regressing. She's starting to cry.

The twins exchange a glance. They embrace Claire on either side. Holding her tight.

GILLIAN

Don't go.

CUT TO BLACK.