

"REALITY BITES"

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FADE IN:

A TELEVISION SET

as the various channels are being surfed, lingering on each for about two seconds. We see fragmented bits and pieces of different programs: "The Brady Bunch," "The Facts of Life," an infomercial, "Too Close for Comfort," "What's Happenin'?"

Then the channels start slipping past us even faster: Whatchew talkin' 'bout Willis--quicker-picker-upper--Weezy--my hands feel like two--Dyn-o-mite--sometimes you don't. They blur together--Then the screen turns a bright blue. And the words "VCR PLAY" appear...

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT./EXT. STADIUM - GRADUATION

A sea of hats: the flat black tops of hundreds of graduation caps. A few of the graduates have decorated the tops of their mortar boards with masking tape in the shapes of peace signs, dollar signs, Greek letters, "U.H.," "Now What?" etc.

It is a windy but sunny June morning at the University of Houston. The graduating students are sitting in rows of chairs. The stands are full of relatives and friends.

LELAINA PIERCE, early twenties, stands at the podium on stage, in cap and gown. One day she could be president, if she could just find her car keys. She is visibly nervous but passionate as she reads her speech off the index cards she holds.

LELAINA

--And they wonder why those of us in our twenties refuse to work an eighty hour week just so we can afford to buy their

(truly repulsed)

BMW's. Why we aren't interested in a counter-culture they invented. As if we did not see them disembowel their revolution for a pair of running shoes!

(applause)

Yeah, instant karma's gonna get them!

Wild applause from graduates.

LELAINA

But the question remains: What are we going to do now? How can we repair all the damage we inherited? How can we outgrow these bankrupt hand-me-downs? Fellow graduates, the answer is simple. The answer...

She turns over the index card. A look of panic spreads across her face. She wildly flips through her other index cards, wide-eyed. She looks around.

The video camera finds a single index card lying on the stage about ten feet from the podium. Lelaina turns to go retrieve it, but a breeze slides under it and gently floats it off the stage.

Lelaina takes a deep breath and faces the waiting audience.

LELAINA

The answer is...

(long beat)

I don't know.

A 1970's song like "I'm Your Boogie Man" starts up...

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE EXT. SKYSCRAPER ROOF - EARLY EVENING

The video camera is set up on a tripod on the roof. The Houston skyline is seen in b.g., fiery as the sun is setting. Lelaina, holding a Diet Coke, dressed in black (she wears all black all the time unless otherwise noted), looks into the camera.

LELAINA

I'm not a valedictorian. But I play one on tee-vee.

TROY

We know you slept your way to the podium.

She rolls her eyes and turns around to find TROY DYER, roguishly handsome, early twenties. He wears jeans and a t-shirt with an open button-down over it. A lit cigarette dangles from his mouth. The one thing sharper than his mind is his tongue.

JUMP CUT

The video camera is now hand-held. A party's going on up here: Rolling Rock six-packs, pizza boxes, a jambox. On the ledge sit

VICKIE MINER, early twenties, wearing a bizarre 70's outfit with big, round sunglasses pushed back on her head, no make-up, her streaked hair parted down the middle. She is smoking a joint. She has long since quit giving a damn.

And SAMMY BUCK, early twenties, dressed in both cap and gown. Riddled with fear and insecurity, he is very handsome, but he has no idea.

The camera finds Troy, who sits next to Sammy.

TROY

Okay, Laney, I think the moment has been captured. Now would you get your face out of the camera?

LELAINA

It's for my documentary!

VICKIE

Her... "documentary."

LELAINA

Hey, this is going to be the history book of the future here. You'll thank me when you see yourself on PBS.

SAMMY

Yeah right. I have a feeling we're all gonna end up on stage with Bob Saget.

JUMP CUT

Vickie is behind the camera now, taping Lelaina and Troy and Sammy. Being stoned, Vickie's camera work is pretty weird: quick zooms, dutched angles, decapitated people, etc. Lelaina looks into the camera, worried.

LELAINA

You sure you can handle that?

VICKIE (O.C.)

Yes!

Lelaina puts her arm around Troy. These two are crazy about each other, but caught in the mire of a platonic friendship.

LELAINA

I brought you back a souvenir.

She pulls a tassel from a graduation cap out of her pocket and hands it to him. Troy grimaces.

SAMMY

Troy, you can go back and graduate next year. You can still get your B.F.A.

TROY

B.F.D. I'm through with the whole wank-a-rama.

He tosses the tassel over his shoulder and off the building--

JUMP CUT

Lelaina is operating the camera again, taping Sammy, who is freaking out. Vickie and Troy are trying not to laugh in b.g.

SAMMY

A liberal arts degree--What does that mean?
I'll tell you what it means. It means, "We're
sorry, Sammy, but we're looking for someone
who's able to make decisions. Have you thought
about telemarketing?"

LELAINA (O.C.)

Sammy, just remember this: you can always go to
graduate school.

Sammy stops, brightens as he considers this:

SAMMY

That's true.

JUMP CUT

VICKIE

(into camera)

My goal? My goal is to be the first white woman
to land on Spike Lee. But seriously, I want to
one day host my own infommercial. ...I don't
have a product yet, but, um--

JUMP CUT

TROY

I want to feel the inside of a black hole before
I die.

SAMMY (O.C.)

Yeah, I think we can arrange that.

JUMP CUT

LELAINA

Okay, I know this is cornball, but...

(sincere)

I'd like to somehow make a difference in
people's lives.

There is a reverent pause... Then:

TROY

And I'd like to buy them all a Coke.

Lelaina smirks, annoyed, but half-expected that.

LELAINA

And you wonder why we never got involved.

TROY

Three words: November sixteenth, nineteen-ninety--

LELAINA

--Yeah, totally drunk out of my mind--

TROY

--It could have been a poetic experience if I weren't such a gentleman.

LELAINA

What!?--You were the one who wanted--

TROY

--You were begging--

LELAINA

--Just let it go, Dyer. Surrender the fantasy.

JUMP CUT

SAMMY

My goal is... that...

(sighs)

Like, to have a career or something? Should I say that? Do you think--Can I change my answer? Or... is that cool?

JUMP CUT

Sammy, Vickie, Troy and Lelaina sit on the ground.

VICKIE

Four years of college and it's coffee jobs for all of us. Except Lelaina.

TROY

Hey, a career is not happiness... Or is it "happiness is not a career"?

SAMMY

Except for clowns.

VICKIE

I think happiness is a warm puppy.

JUMP CUT

Vickie and Sammy talk into the camera, arm in arm.

VICKIE

One day I'm going to take Sammy against his will and straighten him out. If we can put a woman on the Supreme Court, we can put one on you too, Sam.

SAMMY

(sarcastic)

Gosh, Vickie, that would solve all of my problems.

VICKIE

Yes, and just think: I wouldn't have to just pretend to be your girlfriend in front of your parents anymore.

SAMMY

(deadpan)

I'm so totally turned on, I could cut glass with my erection.

Vickie pushes him away as she doubles over with laughter.

JUMP CUT

Lelaina and Troy watch Vickie, who's still laughing.

TROY

She's toast.

LELAINA

She's just buzzed. Watch.

(testing)

Vickie, quick--your social security--

--Vickie suddenly stops laughing and straightens up--

VICKIE

--451-25-9357.

(a disturbed beat)

That's the only thing I really learned in college.

Vickie picks up her Charlie's Angels lunchbox; she pushes her sunglasses down, back over her eyes.

VICKIE

Dude. I'm in trouble.

JUMP CUT

The camera is stagnant on a tripod as the four of them sit on the ledge, laughing and singing "Conjunction Junction":

LELAINA/TROY/VICKIE/SAMMY
Conjunction junction, what's your function?
Hookin' up words and phrases and clauses.
Conjunction junction, how's that function? I
got three favorite cars, they get most of my job
done!--

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

--Dead silence. Everyone is sitting at a table: Troy and Lelaina sit on one side; PAT PIERCE (early 50's), Lelaina's successful-looking dad, is at the head of the table, and CYNTHIA NICKLE (40's), Lelaina's attractive mom, is at the other end. CAROL ANN PIERCE (40's), Pat's clipped, business-like second wife, sits at Pat's right. DALE NICKLE, barely thirty, Cynthia's rough-looking husband, sits at her left. They are eating, staring into their plates. Lelaina sips her Diet Coke...

CYNTHIA

Your sister was really sorry she couldn't come.

Lelaina nods.

DALE

That was a real good talk you gave today,
Lelaina.

CYNTHIA

Didn't you think so, Troy?

TROY

Very hip. Very PC.

DALE

What's PC?

CYNTHIA

(chiding)

Oh, Dale, get with it. Personal computers.

LELAINA

Actually, it's "politically correct."

CYNTHIA

I think so too, honey.

Troy and Lelaina exchange looks. Carol Ann looks into her food, disturbed. She reaches into her shrimp and pulls out a hair.

CAROL ANN

(disgusted)

Uh.

LELAINA

...Maybe it's one of yours.

Pat raises his glass to take a drink. Dale leans over to get a closer look at the hair.

DALE

Maybe it's a puber.

Pat nearly chokes on his drink. Dale laughs at his joke. Carol Ann and Lelaina put down their forks while Troy tries to stifle his laughter. Cynthia glares hard at Dale.

PAT

...Well, I guess I'll go ahead and give you your graduation present.

He hands her a Mobil credit card.

PAT

I'll pay that bill for one year.

Troy whistles as if he's impressed.

LELAINA

Thanks, dad.

Pat looks at Carol Ann and smiles; she nods. He reaches in his suit pocket and pulls out a key. He hands it to Lelaina.

PAT

And since Carol Ann got a new Infiniti, we're giving you her old BMW. You can pick it up at our house.

Troy smirks. Lelaina is crestfallen; she starts to speak--

CYNTHIA

--BMW? Pat, didn't you listen to her speech today? She doesn't want a BMW.

LELAINA

I'll handle this, mom.

CAROL ANN

With your new job, you're going to need a reliable car.

LELAINA

It's not the reliability I--

PAT

--I'm not gonna sit here and listen again to some strange ethical argument about a damn car. It's got four wheels, it runs well, and after you've been in the real world a while, you're gonna appreciate that car.

TROY

(devilish)

Just think of all those starving children in Africa who don't even have cars--

CYNTHIA

--Troy, does your father give you gifts like that?

LELAINA

...mother...

TROY

Actually, my dad's dying of cancer so I don't really trouble him for gifts.

A silence beaches itself on the table for a moment; Dale is the only one who continues to eat.

CYNTHIA

See, Pat?

LELAINA

Mother, please.

CAROL ANN

(to passing waiter)

Check.

CYNTHIA

You don't want a BMW. Tell him, Lelaina.

PAT

(slowly; as if to a child)

Cynthia, she can make her own decisions.

LELAINA

Dad, come on, don't talk to her like that. She's not a child.

PAT

(laughs)

She married one.

Troy tries not to laugh. Lelaina is stunned. Cynthia is speechlessly offended and hurt. Dale looks up.

DALE
 (mouth full, confused)
 What?

Cynthia stands up, about to explode--Lelaina grabs her arm.

LELAINA
 Dad! I'll take the BMW just until I can afford
 to buy a regular car myself. Okay?
 (he nods; to Cynthia)
 Okay?

She nods, and slowly sits back down. Lelaina breathes a sigh of relief. There is a long awkward silence. ...Then:

DALE
 (to Lelaina; sober)
 Get a Ford.

INT. RESTAURANT BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A woman is at the mirrors. Lelaina enters as the woman starts out. Lelaina smiles at her, friendly, as they pass.

She enters a stall, locks the door. Then she doubles over as she puts her hand to her mouth and begins to quietly sob.

CUT TO:

EXT. DIFFERENT RESTAURANT - SAME

Sammy, who's in a U of H sweatshirt, and Vickie are waiting for the valet with his mom JOYCE (40's), her boyfriend (60's), Sammy's dad IRA, (50's), and his girlfriend JENNIFER (30's). Vickie is touching Sammy lovingly though unnecessarily throughout. Sammy is hugging his mom goodbye.

SAMMY
 I'll be home pretty late, mom.

Sammy offers his hand to Ira, who pulls him into a hug.

IRA
 I'm proud of you, son.

Sammy, surprised, nods and backs off, looks at Jennifer.

SAMMY
 Nice meeting you, Jennifer.

Vickie puts her arm around Sammy and looks at Jennifer.

VICKIE
 I hope you two will be as happy as me and Sammy.

Vickie pulls Sammy to her and kisses him full on the mouth right there. Vickie smiles then leads a wide-eyed Sammy off to his car. The parents exchange looks. Jennifer smiles.

JENNIFER

They are the cutest couple.

CUT TO:

INT. LELAINA'S CAR/EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Troy and Lelaina are in her Olds Cutlas. Troy tries to put his feet on the floorboard, which is covered with empty Diet Coke cans. They clatter around. She fishes in her big purse for keys; she is edgy. Troy reads her like a book.

TROY

Lelaina. Don't. Don't let them do it to you.
Not today.

LELAINA

I'm not.

She finds her keys, takes out a cigarette and lights it.

TROY

It's the same meta-farcical Mardi-Gras with my
parents. The difference is, I don't care
because I don't try to run it.

LELAINA

I'm not trying to run it.

She starts the car, backs out.

TROY

Just forget them. Come on, this is your day.
You just graduated. You don't need your parents
anymore. You got the Mobil card, you got the
beamer, under some duress, and I say fuck 'em.

Lelaina thinks about that, realizes it's true.

LELAINA

(buoyed)

That's true. I don't need them anymore--

TROY

--Like an aneurism, you need them.

LELAINA

I just graduated--

TROY

--Valedictorian, man.

LELAINA

(excited, angry)

And that dinner we just experienced is exactly why I've been waiting for this day for twenty-three years--Well, it's finally here, and they can just--

(yells at restaurant)

--kiss my ass!

She takes a drag as Troy sighs--

TROY

There's nothing more beautiful than a generation passing the torch.

--She stops, trying not to choke on the smoke as she laughs hard. He laughs with her. She hits Troy, playfully angry:

LELAINA

How many times do I have to tell you--Don't make me laugh when I'm inhaling! God! I think you do that on purpose!

She takes an entire six-pack of Diet Coke out of her purse.

TROY

Hey, I have an idea--Why not have a Diet Coke? You've only had twelve today.

(she pops one open)

I've always wanted to ask you something: Is your urine carbonated?

LELAINA

Wouldn't you like to know.

He smiles, extends his pinky; they engage in a pinky-lock.

TROY/LELAINA

Wonder Twins power activate!

The driving beat of Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" starts.

DISSOLVE TO:

THREE MONTHS LATER

MONTAGE

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Lelaina, dressed for work, is searching the cupboards, holding a Mr. Coffee filter cup. Frustrated, she walks out... and returns with a roll of toilet paper. She lines the cup with the toilet paper and pours coffee grounds into it.

INT. APARTMENT - VICKIE'S BEDROOM - LATE MORNING

Vickie's bedroom is a shrine to the 70's: The Bay City Rollers, Leif Garret, and a life-size poster of John Travolta adorn her walls. Also, bean-bag chairs...mood rings... RICK, 24, is in the doorway. He slips on his jacket and holds his keys. He looks at

Vickie, who is pretending to sleep so she doesn't have to talk with him. He leaves. Vickie opens her eyes and pulls out a notebook from under her futon. She flips to a certain page.

Names cover it like this: August 31 - Sean Marelli - 64; September 14 - Chad... - 66. She writes in: "September 26 - "

She stops and thinks hard, closing her eyes, then resumes: "September 26 - Rich? - 67."

INT. KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

Vickie enters in a kimono. She opens the freezer--a big icicle falls out (it has never been defrosted). She takes out a carton of ice cream and sits on the counter to eat.

INT. HOUSE - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

A COMPUTER MONITOR

The words "SAMMY BUCK - RESUME" glow amber on the screen. Under that, the words "JOB EXPERIENCE." And under that, the unforgiving cursor.

Sammy is in front of the computer, staring into it. The horror, the horror. Joyce enters and puts a load of laundry on his bed. Sammy smiles a strained thanks. She leaves. He snaps off the computer. He runs his hands over his head, trying to relax. He pulls out a catalogue: "UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON. GRADUATE STUDIES."

INT. DOWNTOWN GROUNDS (COFFEE HOUSE) - EVENING

It is a warehouse cum underground coffeehouse with conceptual art, a small bar, and no matching furniture. There is a big sign behind the stage with the band's name: "HEY THAT'S MY BIKE." Troy, leaning on his upright guitar, sweating from the set, is conferring with the four other members of his band. The manager approaches and hands him a large jar: It says "DONATIONS FOR THE BAND" and holds about two dollars in change.

Troy, angry and disappointed, lets his guitar fall to the floor.

EXT. OUTDOOR NEWSSTAND - DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Troy is sitting at register, reading Marleau Ponty's "Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry." He looks around: no one's watching him. He goes to the candy rack and rips off a Snickers. Above and behind him, the skyline lights sparkle like stars.

END MONTAGE

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TV STUDIO - MORNING SHOW SET - MORNING

THE DOWNTOWN SKYLINE AT DAWN - BACKDROP

"Walk on the Wild Side" is drowned out by synthesized, talk-show THEME MUSIC. This is the set of "Good Morning, Grant!", the local morning talk show. It is composed of very homey furniture and a fake fireplace. The AUDIENCE is 99% female. The theme music reaches a crescendo, and GRANT GUBLER, late 30s, runs out on stage, in a suit. There is applause. He applauds the audience.

GRANT

Good morning, ladies--and gentleman. I see a gentleman right there!

He points to the audience. A camera swings to get a shot of an old man in the front row.

GRANT

Good morning!

AUDIENCE

Good morning, Grant!

GRANT

Good morning! Boy, I tell ya, it is a good morning with this audience!

(applause)

Today Dr. Lababera will tell us what you can do to prevent urinary tract infections in your cat.

Lelaina stands off-stage holding up the cue cards for Grant. Next to her stands DAMIEN BROOKS, 30, a black co-worker who wears a headset.

GRANT

We'll also be visiting with a man right here from Houston who is battling Alzheimer's. A beautiful story of the triumph of the human spirit.

Grant wipes at his eyes, choked up.

LELAINA

(whispers)

God, he's so cheesy, I can't watch him without crackers.

Damien stifles a laugh.

GRANT

Now, let's take a peek inside our Video View, and see what we have in store for today.

Grant walks to a standing bookshelf, which holds videocassettes. He pulls one out, looks at it and feigns surprise:

GRANT

It's a special report on children's birthday party themes. Taped on location at eight-year old Timmy Robbin's party exclusively for our Video View collection.

Grant walks over and sits on the couch.

GRANT

So come sit with me. Relax. Have a cup o'joe.

He reaches for his coffee mug. It isn't there. He looks around-- it's nowhere. He looks into the camera, scared like an animal caught in headlights. He skips three beats.

LELAINA

Oh shit.

She looks at the producer, RICH CARDOUCHE, an overweight man with the stub of a stogie pinched between his lips. He looks at her, shrugs, throws his hands up in exasperation.

GRANT

Anyway--it's gonna be a good morning!

(big applause)

You're beautiful!

The THEME MUSIC starts up. A BUZZER sounds.

DAMIEN

(into headset)

We're clear.

Grant rushes over to Lelaina--She knows what's coming, turns away, but Grant grabs her arm.

GRANT

Am I here to amuse you, Miss Pierce? Am I here to make you laugh? Is that the real reason I'm on this show?

LELAINA

Look, Mr. Gubler, when I do cue cards, you're supposed to get your own espresso. Didn't you get my "Espress Yourself" memo?

GRANT

I don't have time for your little mind games. Just remember, we're laying people off, and I can find an intern who will do your job for free like that!

Grant storms back towards the set. Lelaina looks at Cardouche, worried. He puts a supportive hand on her shoulder.

CARDOUCHE

I'll tell you about it later.

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - LATER

An oversized calendar/bulletin board: it's the "VIDEO VIEW SCHEDULE." An index card with a project title is tacked up under each date. One week includes "CONDOM CONUNDRUM," and "POPCORN & CHOCOLATE MIRACLE DIET." The Friday spot is blank.

Cardouche is sitting on a desk, holding a blank index card. Lelaina stands beside him with her clipboard.

CARDOUCHE

Your job is going to be combined with Damien's since he has seniority.

This takes a minute to sink in; her eyes are wide with panic.

LELAINA

I won't have a job here anymore?

He just looks at the floor. She swallows hard, thinks a second, looking at the index card in his hand. She takes a deep breath.

LELAINA

Look, I know there's a staff opening on the Video View. And I have some videotapes I made, sort of a documentary, that really shows what I can do. I know it would be a perfect segment on the View. It's about my friends.

CARDOUCHE

I don't know. Honestly, Lelaina, I don't see how that's relevant--

LELAINA

--AIDS.

CARDOUCHE

What?

Lelaina thinks fast, mentally tap-dancing:

LELAINA

I mean, it's AIDS, and environmental stuff and it's like, you know, the housing shortage, and-- and eternal recessions and it's very issuey.

CARDOUCHE

Issuey?

LELAINA

Oh, yeah, I mean, I mean, like how we inherited more problems than opportunities.

He looks at his blank index card, bending it back and forth.

LELAINA

We're the... the Reparation Generation.

She holds her breath. He hands her the blank card; he's sold.

CARDOUCHE

Okay, look. Go ahead and give it a shot. If it's good, I'll put you on staff.

Lelaina wasn't really expecting this:

LELAINA

Really? I mean, I mean, for real?

CARDOUCHE

Of course it's for real.

LELAINA

Oh, thank you Mr. Cardouche!--I promise it'll be great!

He has to smile at her salesmanship. He leaves. Lelaina breathes a huge sigh of relief.

CUT TO:

INT. GALLERIA MALL - THE GAP - LATER

A woman emerges dressed in a Gap outfit that is too tight for her, looks at herself in the mirrors, then turns to

Vickie, dressed in a Gap uniform, looks at the woman. She tries to smile as she nods in pseudo-approval. She looks over and sees

Lelaina standing at the front of the store. She waves. Vickie waves back. The woman is still admiring herself in the mirror. Vickie looks back at Lelaina and sticks her finger in her mouth, gagging--the woman looks at Vickie--who slyly acts like she's scratching around her mouth.

MOMENTS LATER

Lelaina stands outside The Gap. Vickie, holding her lunchbox, leaves the store and goes to her, smiling impishly.

VICKIE
I'm leaving early.

LELAINA
I can come back.

VICKIE
Nah, I took three No-Doz this morning and I feel like hell.

Vickie walks off. Lelaina follows her.

LELAINA
You say you want a management position there, and you're leaving early--What is that?

VICKIE
That's me, alright? That's me. I'm not you.

A moment of silence. Vickie slips on her sunglasses.

VICKIE
I've gotta get my own car.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - LATER

A 70s song like "I Will Survive" is blaring from the radio. Lelaina drives, smoking, drinking a Diet Coke; Vickie sings along. Her BMW is in dire need of a car wash.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAAB CONVERTIBLE/EXT. STREET - SAME

"NEW YORK" reads the front plate. Hip-hop, rap music plays. We tilt up and find MICHAEL GRATES, 26, very intense and driven, handsome but not slick, he has a kind face, driving. He squints, listening to the music, bouncing slightly to it, biting his lip. His car phone RINGS. He picks it up.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW/EXT. STREET/INT. SAAB - LATER

Lelaina and Vickie are having a great time, singing and bouncing around. Michael's driving in the lane to their left, frazzled: he's reading a map spread over the steering wheel as he searches for the CD he wants as he tries to talk on the phone:

MICHAEL

Can't we just negotiate with--?... You know what?--He's lying. Well, we should probably call his bluff--Wait, I gotta figure out where I am, I think I'm lost or--What? No, listen, he needs us--He makes music videos, we show them--

--He starts to swerve into the left lane as he reads the map--A car HONKS loudly at him--He straightens out--

MICHAEL

(into phone)

Yeah I'm here, I'm just lost--I think I'm lost.

He stops at a red light. Lelaina stops beside him. Vickie and Lelaina look over at the scattered Michael, then they look at each other and giggle.

The light changes. Lelaina pulls forward and carelessly tosses her cigarette out her window...it flies about two feet...and lands on Michael's seat. He doesn't see it; he looks over--

MICHAEL

Well I'm not scared of--Jesus!--

--and sees the cigarette discoloring the leather. He picks it up and leans over to throw it out--and swerves his car into the other lane--and rams the fender of her BMW.

Lelaina, stunned, looks over at him: he's still on the phone.

MICHAEL

--What?--No, my god, I just got in an accident
--I'm in an accident. I'm okay, I think I'm
alright. No, I gotta go--my thing is, my fender
just got... Alright.

He hangs up, untangles himself from his map and, in a panic, runs over to the BMW.

MICHAEL

Some one threw a cigarette into--Are you okay?

Lelaina doesn't move. Vickie tries to discreetly shut the overflowing ashtray.

LELAINA

...Yeah.

MICHAEL

I don't know what happened--Did I?--Is this my fault? I've only been here like two days and-- It was my fault, wasn't it? Did you see what happened? A cigarette flew into my car like a, a ballistic missile or something. Did you see?

--The ashtray finally closes, exploding, and ash flies everywhere. Vickie and Lelaina start laughing hysterically, really out of nervousness. Michael gets it.

MICHAEL

Oh. Okay. Great. This is... great.

They can't talk, they're laughing so hard. He can't help but be somewhat amused by this.

MICHAEL

Are you guys like... stoned or something?

They laugh even harder.

CUT TO:

INT. TEMPORARY OFFICE - LATER

"IN YOUR FACE TV"

reads the logo on the wall. The office is a mess: a blizzard of papers, faxes, CD's, extra phones, etc. Lelaina has stopped laughing. She stares at a ceramic bank/statuette of Dr. Zaius from "Planet of the Apes" on his desk. Michael paces behind his desk, talking into a telephone headset.

MICHAEL

Well, she can say whatever she wants, but we don't have to show it. I don't care if she does twelve books of herself naked, that doesn't mean--... Fine, but that's not my decision. I don't have time--Look, I'm trying to set up an operation down here.

(to Lelaina, friendly)

That's Dr. Zaius. "Planet of the Apes."

She smiles, nods, picks up the bank.

MICHAEL
You can't do that!--Don't do that!

LELAINA
(puts it back)
I'm sorry, I didn't know--

MICHAEL
--What? Hold on--Lelaina, I'm on the phone.

Her face flushes with embarrassment; she looks down.

MICHAEL
(into headset)
Well then tell him I said so.

He presses the hang up button, sighs heavily, looks at her.

MICHAEL
Sorry about that--Can I get you anything?

Lelaina still thinks he's on the phone; she looks at the floor, examines her nails, etc.

MICHAEL
Lelaina, I'm talking to you now.
(she looks up)
Hi.

LELAINA
Hi.

MICHAEL
(apologetic, sheepish)
Let me just tell you the situation here. I got my lawyer guy telling me that I have to sue you? For damages? Not that I want to, but my rates are screwed if, I mean, I hate to...
(off her look)
What?

She's trying very hard to remain calm.

LELAINA
When you say "sue"--?

MICHAEL
--Uh-huh?

LELAINA
You mean like for money in a courtroom?

MICHAEL

I don't know--I've never done this before. Do you have a lawyer or anything?

LELAINA

A lawyer? I don't even have a hairdresser. I only make four hundred dollars a week and--

MICHAEL

--What do you do?

She starts to answer, but his intercom BEEPS. He presses the talk button, signals Lelaina just one second.

MICHAEL

Yeah?. No, I can't talk to him right now.

(hangs up, to Lelaina)

Sorry it's so crazy; we're trying to get the channel set up down here, and it's just... Anyway, what did you say you do?

LELAINA

Actually, I work in television too, at the "Good Morning, Grant" show. Maybe you've seen it?

MICHAEL

(thinks)

Oh, wait--yeah, with that: "Good morning, good morning"--What's the deal with that guy?

LELAINA

He's kind of a psycho.

MICHAEL

Well, I really feel really bad about this whole thing--Maybe I can get you some CD's?--We just got the advance on the new Sting thing.

LELAINA

(smiles)

The "Sting thing"?

MICHAEL

Well, I don't know, it's packaged environmentally, in like recycled tree bark or something.

He laughs; she just looks at him curiously. There is a definite attraction between them, though an awkward silence here; he goes for the save:

MICHAEL

You know what? Forget the lawsuit or whatever, the whole deal. Forget it. I don't know, I'll get in trouble, I don't care. It was probably my fault and you seem very sweet and... you like Dr. Zaius, huh?

LELAINA

Oh yeah--He's really cool--

--She picks him up again, looks at it. She puts it back, but only half on the desk as she looks at Michael--

MICHAEL

--Yeah, this friend gave him to me, he's like this walking encyclopedia of "Planet--

--and before she can catch him, Dr. Zaius falls and breaks into several pieces on the floor--Lelaina gasps--

LELAINA

--Dr. Zaius!

Michael just stares at the floor in disbelief. She quickly bends, starts gathering up the pieces, trying not to cry.

MICHAEL

That's okay. He was just a collector's--

LELAINA

(whimpers)

--I can glue him back--I'm sure I can just--I think this is his head.

She tries to fit the pieces together, but no matter how hard she presses, they just don't fit. She tries them in a few different positions. Michael watches her, somehow charmed.

MICHAEL

I think he's gone.

LELAINA

God, I'm like ruining your whole life.

MICHAEL

No, you're not, not at all.

She looks up at him; their eyes lock.

MICHAEL

Just don't touch anything else.

He laughs. She laughs with him. He clears his throat, kneels down beside her.

MICHAEL

You know, I'd really, I don't even... But listen, you want to go out sometime and get a cup of something...?

She smiles up at him, pleasantly surprised.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT/STREET - LATER

Vickie and a very excited Lelaina walk from her badly dented beemer towards their apartment. Lelaina reads a business card:

LELAINA

Michael Grates, Vice President Programming, In Your Face TV. We've seen it--It's like MTV. But with an edge.

Vickie takes the card and looks at it, thinking.

VICKIE

So it is a date?

LELAINA

Oh yeah.

VICKIE

Are you going out for dinner?

LELAINA

For coffee.

VICKIE

And dessert?

LELAINA

I think just coffee.

VICKIE

Coffee or cappuccino?

LELAINA

He ended up saying decaf.

VICKIE

(grimaces)

Early night. Is there a pre-coffee activity?

LELAINA

(now worried)

I, I don't think so.

VICKIE

Well, did he ask you to go out or hang out?

LELAINA

I think... I can't remember exactly. Why?

VICKIE

Hmm. I'm sorry, Laney, but it doesn't sound like a real date.

Lelaina stops at the door, confused, kind of bummed out. Then she looks at Vickie, who has on a Cheshire cat grin. Lelaina smiles as she realizes Vickie was stringing her along.

LELAINA

You little mind-fuck.

She just smiles, opens the front door--and sees Troy standing there with a hand-dolly, about to exit.

VICKIE

(hits her head)

--Oh shit!

LELAINA

What?

VICKIE

I forgot to tell you.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It is sparsely furnished: couch, TV, a Ouija board coffee table. There are four big moving boxes sitting around the couch. Lelaina enters, sees them, almost implodes. Vickie enters.

LELAINA

--Are you out of your mind!?

VICKIE

He was fired from the newsstand, Lelaina. He just needs a place to stay until he gets a job and can pay for an apartment.

LELAINA

That's the American Dream of the nineties! That could take years!

VICKIE

Just look at it like a security system: we'll have a man in the house.

LELAINA

We'll have a hall monitor! That's what we'll have.

Troy and Sammy enter, each holding a box.

LELAINA

We don't even know if this is allowed in our building.

TROY

It's not like Mr. Roper's gonna burst in here. I'll just stay on the couch.

LELAINA

Wait a minute.

(to Vickie, doesn't want to say it but...)

He will turn this place into a den of slack.

Angry, Troy drops his box.

TROY

What the fuck is your problem?

LELAINA

I have to work here. And unfortunately, Troy, you are a master at the art of time suckage.

TROY

(to Vickie)

I'd rather check into a shelter than deal with her shit.

Troy gathers up his stuff. Sammy and Vickie look at Lelaina, betrayed. Lelaina looks at Troy; she sighs, giving in.

LELAINA

...no, it's okay, Troy... You can stay.

VICKIE

It's cool, Troy. Welcome to the maxi-pad.

SAMMY

You don't mind if I crash here this weekend, do you, Laney? Just kidding.

Troy laughs. Lelaina tries not smile, but can't help it.

TROY

You won't even know I'm here.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. DOWNTOWN GROUNDS - NIGHT

LOUD MUSIC: An industrial riff BLARES through the club as Troy and the band rehearse "I'm Nuthin'", an original song about the perils of being neither a Democrat or a Republican.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: TROY

(NOTE TO READER: The video segments are not static; they are hand-held and have a documentary feel.)

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - LATER

Troy sits on the edge of the stage, drinking a Pabst Blue Ribbon, talking into the video camera.

TROY

Hey That's My Bike will fully dominate the Houston underground, then we'll take it up to Austin and cut a deal. Then we're gonna travel the countryside like Woody Guthrie. A lot of people, like my parents, they don't think it'll ever happen for us. And when they tell me how adolescent it is, I just smile and look them in the eye and say...

(smiles)

Nobody can eat fifty eggs.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Troy sits on the couch watching the local news on TV.

ANCHOR (ON TV)

Coming up--

TROY

--Everything I ate for lunch.

ANCHOR (ON TV)

A special report on a disease that strikes millions of women each year: Breast cancer.

TROY

Alright! I love breast cancer reports.

(explains to camera)

Frontal nudity.

LELAINA (O.C.)

...I have never been so offended in my life.

He gets up, playfully moves towards the camera, as she moves backwards and falls on the couch--

TROY
--C'mon, you're turned on, admit it.

LELAINA (O.C.)
(laughing)
Get away from me!

He grabs the camera from Lelaina, and turns it on her. She fake-smiles, very annoyed.

LELAINA
Very funny. Now give it back.

He doesn't; he laughs and backs away. She follows him, angry.

LELAINA
--You know what your problem is, Dyer? You suffer from the philosopher/cheerleader syndrome. You're this guy with a one-eighty I.Q., ten units away from a degree in philosophy, and you always fall for these dumb cheerleader types.

TROY (O.C.)
They're not all dumb. Most of them are very depressed.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - EXT. GALVESTON BEACH - DAY

Troy sits on the seawall, a cigarette tucked behind his ear. He is holding a book: a well-worn, ragged copy of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance as he talks into the camera.

TROY
My parents got divorced when I was five, and I only saw my dad about three times a year after that. When he found out he had cancer, he took me here. He handed me this big pink seashell and he goes, "Son, the answers are inside this." And I'm all, "What?" Then I realize that it's empty, the shell is empty. There is no point to any of this. It's all a random lottery of meaningless tragedy, a series of near escapes. So I take pleasure in the details. A Quarter Pounder with cheese, the sky ten minutes before it rains, the moment when your laughter becomes a cackle.

(lights his Camel)
I just sit back, smoke my Camel straights, and ride my own melt.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

The streets are slick with rain. Troy, wearing his trench coat, smoking a Camel, makes his way down the alley.

TROY (V.O.)
Life sucks, but it doesn't swallow.

INT. EDITING BAY - MORNING

Lelaina is proudly watching her video on the monitor. She moves the toggle to rewind--when Grant enters, tight-lipped.

LELAINA
Mr. Gubler, do you have time to take a look at what I've done here?

GRANT
(totally ignores that)
I need my questions.

She expected that. She hands him a sheet of paper.

LELAINA
Here's the research I did. You should really try to read it--this guest has quite a history in politics.

Grant skims it in a nanosecond, then tosses it in the trash.

GRANT
Just give me my questions.

Lelaina shakes her head and gives him a stack of index cards.

INT. TV STUDIO - MORNING SHOW SET - MORNING

Grant is on stage with a guest, a newspaper EDITOR; their interview is in progress. Lelaina stands next to Damien, following Grant on her clipboard.

EDITOR
--In fact, in today's paper, we have a special insert devoted to the problems in the Fifth Ward.

As Grant says anything to a guest, he discreetly reads it off notecards on the coffee table.

GRANT
(reads cards)
The Post seems alot more liberal than the Chronicle. How do you feel about that?

EDITOR

How do you feel about it?

Grant looks at the cards, kind of laughs.

EDITOR

What do you think, Grant?

GRANT

(not off cards)

I think... it's...

Cardouche holds his breath. Grant is unprepared for this; he looks around. Lelaina runs into his line of sight. She gives him a thumbs-up and nods, exaggerated, as if to a chimp.

Grant mimics her, nods and gives an exaggerated thumbs-up. The audience applauds. The editor smirks. Cardouche finally breathes. He puts a thankful hand on Lelaina's shoulder.

CARDOUCHE

Thank you.

She smiles, proud.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hendrix's "The Wind Cries Mary" streams out of a jambox. Overflowing ashtrays, empty soda cans, dirty laundry, et al. surround the couch like a moat. The TV is on but muted: a rerun of "One Day at a Time." Vickie, Troy and Sammy sit around the set, zoning out, sharing a joint.

TROY

If only I could bottle the sexual tension between Schnieder and Bonnie Franklin--I could solve the energy crisis.

Lelaina enters, home from work, carrying her video camera.

VICKIE

(to Troy)

Don't Bogart that joint, my friend.

LELAINA

This is a Kodak moment.

Vickie jumps to her feet:

VICKIE

Lelaina!

SAMMY

Vickie was--

VICKIE

--No! I want to tell her.

(to Lelaina)

You are looking at the new--

SAMMY

--manager of The Gap!

Lelaina is overjoyed. She shrieks, hugs Vickie.

LELAINA

I'm so proud of you! You made it happen!

VICKIE

Well, it really happened by default. The old manager tried to kill herself: she ate a whole pot of poinsettias.

(excited again)

But anyway, I got a raise, and I hired Troy to work for me part-time.

TROY

She blackmailed me.

VICKIE

He's getting about two hundred a week, and I'll be pulling in around four.

LELAINA

My god--before taxes, that's one thousand dollars a week between us! We'll never have rent problems again! We can totally pay our phone bill too!

(to Troy)

Isn't this great!!--Aren't you excited!?

TROY

I'm bursting with fruit flavor.

Sammy laughs. Lelaina fixes the camera on the group and begins taping. Vickie talks into the camera, mugging.

VICKIE

Sometimes I get that not-so-fresh feeling.

SAMMY

Come on, Laney, what are you really gonna do with a videotape of us getting stoned? It's not like anyone here is gonna run for president one day.

TROY

But we should use code language just in case:
 (into camera)
 Ix-nay on the ack-cray.

LELAINA

Come on--this is for work.

TROY

Work, work, work. You better be careful--That's how all those Woodstock veterans sold their principles up the down escalator.

Vickie takes a drag off the joint, thinking.

VICKIE

What exactly were their principles?--I've never been really clear on that.

Troy and Sammy look at each other, a little unclear themselves.

LELAINA

Didn't you people ever watch "Family Ties"? It was all explained on "Family Ties".

(off their looks)

The parents were hippies.

They all nod, "oooh", like this makes total sense. Vickie passes the joint to Sammy. He looks at it, very hesitant.

SAMMY

I just don't understand why this moment has to be memorex'd.

TROY

Hey, Sam, don't you realize this is your chance to play some small part in what is destined to be greatness? Lelaina here's going to revolutionize "Good Morning, Grant."

SAMMY

Oh my god. I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

Sammy and Troy laugh. Offended, Lelaina goes behind her camera.

LELAINA

(to Troy)

Look who's mocking. All you do around here is eat and couch and fondle the remote control.

TROY

I am not under orders to make the world a better place.

LELAINA
 (sharp)
 Then what good are you?

TROY
 You are a pathological optimist.

LELAINA
 You are pathological.

VICKIE
 God--Would you guys just fuck and get it over
 with?--I'm starving.

Lelaina shoots a look at Vickie. Troy crushes out his cigarette and looks down. There is an awkward pause... The phone RINGS. Troy answers it:

TROY
 You've reached the winter of our discontent.
 ...Hold on.

TROY
 Some "Michael" guy?

LELAINA
 (quickly takes phone)
 Michael?

She tries to move into the other room, but the cord won't stretch. Troy carefully watches her. She laughs.

LELAINA
 Yes, you can drive.

TROY
 (to Vickie)
 Who's Michael?--Do you know?

VICKIE
 Let's order a pizza--

LELAINA
 --Okay, I'll see you tomorrow. 'Bye.

She hangs up, squelches her smile, doesn't look at Troy as she rejoins the group. He's still trying to read her.

SAMMY
 Laney, if we swear to pay you back this time,
 can you spot us a pizza?

LELAINA
 I don't have any cash.

TROY
(pointed)
Domino's takes checks.

She glares at him, thinking of how to get out of this...

LELAINA
Domino's supports Operation Rescue.

VICKIE
No one gives a shit right now, Lelaina, we're hungry.

LELAINA
(sighs...then remembers)
Oh!--Wait. Wait a minute.

She digs through her purse until she finds... her Mobil credit card. She pulls it out, smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. MOBIL MART - LATER

Lelaina and Troy look at the candy display. He looks at her...

TROY
So who's this Michael--

--Vickie and Sammy approach, bursting with news:

SAMMY
Vickie just figured something out. Something wonderful.

Vickie holds up a bottle of Evian water, points to the label.

VICKIE
"Evian" is "naive" spelled backwards.

MOMENTS LATER

An old, upbeat 50's song is on the radio behind the counter, where an old man is working. Lelaina dumps an armful of junk food on the counter and hands him her Mobil credit card.

VICKIE
Can you turn that up?

He turns up the radio. Vickie starts to do a weird dance around the counter. She grabs Lelaina by the hand and they start dancing around. The old man bounces up and down in rhythm. Sammy grabs onto Lelaina's hand, Vickie tries to grab onto Troy's, but he stands off, watching them dance around and sing.

EXT. MOBIL MART - SAME

They are seen through the windows, everyone except Troy dancing around the Mobil Mart as stars pepper the night sky above...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A sexy black dress slides down Lelaina's body. Her foot slips into a high-heeled black pump. Her long fingernail is being painted with red nail polish.

Her bedroom is sparsely furnished yet still cluttered: a futon, laundry scattered about. Lelaina is sitting in her lawn chair, all ready except for the white bleach on her "moustache." She carefully puts a cigarette in her mouth.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

A "Good Times" rerun is on TV: the opening credits/theme song.

Vickie, Troy, Sammy and some friends are playing the "Good Times" drinking game; each PLAYER has a beer. Troy has a pretty girl hanging all over him. Michael carefully walks in, unnoticed.

PLAYER 1

--Thelma's husband Keith has vodka hidden in the toilet--

SAMMY

--James dies--

TROY

--That's a two-parter--

VICKIE

--I'll allow it--Go--

TROY

--Alderman Davis judges...

Troy sees Michael watching them.

TROY

Oh god--Are you a collection agent?

VICKIE

(calls)

Lelaina!

IN THE BEDROOM

Lelaina quickly wipes off the bleach on a nearby shirt sleeve.

LELAINA
Be right there!

IN THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

Lelaina and Michael are standing by the group, watching them as they prepare to leave.

VICKIE
--Willona dates a deaf guy--

Michael jumps in, pre-empting Troy:

MICHAEL
--J.J. donates blood for Sweet Daddy.

The flow has been interrupted; they stop. Troy looks at Michael disdainfully.

TROY
We've already done that one.

MICHAEL
Oh. Sorry.

Lelaina glares at Troy, then leads Michael to the door as the play goes to Sammy--

SAMMY
--Uh...um... wait--wait--

VICKIE
--Too late, drink up, Sam.

They laugh as Sammy finishes the last of his beer. He thinks a second, then hits his head as he realizes too late...

SAMMY
Penny!--Willona adopts Penny! Shit.

Troy watches as Lelaina and Michael are walking out.

TROY
(calls out; mock-scolding)
Lelaina, you know the punishment for premature evacuation.

Lelaina just shuts the door behind them. Troy stops and stares after them stonily. He lights a bitter cigarette.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

A WALLET PHOTOGRAPH

of Michael standing in a doorway with a befuddled young voter and a goat on a leash.

MICHAEL

That's Vote or Goat.

Lelaina studies the picture as she sits with Michael in a booth. He has a salad and Evian; she a cheeseburger and a Diet Coke.

LELAINA

Vote or Goat?

MICHAEL

It was a promotional at In Your Face TV to get young kids to vote. We called up random people and asked them if they'd registered to vote, and if they hadn't, then we showed up at their house with a camera crew and gave them a goat. Kids were really freaked out. We gave out almost two hundred goats, and who wants a goat, right? Anyway, it was a big success.

LELAINA

And you thought of the whole thing--That's great.

He puts the photo back in his wallet.

MICHAEL

Well yeah, I know it sounds kind of ridiculous.

LELAINA

Well, you know, look where I work. We have to compromise ourselves to get by.

Michael's brow knits ever so slightly.

MICHAEL

Oh... Yeah, I guess I never really thought--

LELAINA

--But I mean, that's why it's important to have your own things that aren't compromised.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I think it's definitely important to have your own things.

LELAINA

Yeah, like, I'm making this documentary? Of my friends?--But it's really more about people trying to figure out who they are, like, how they form an identity without any real role-models or heros or anything.

He's nodding, squinting, impressed.

MICHAEL

Wow. Yeah, you know, that's true. And your friends are a great subject for it--Like that guy Troy?

LELAINA

Troy, yeah.

He's trying to subtly mine this information.

MICHAEL

So you guys live together in the same place?--Is it just you and him there?

LELAINA

No, no, no--It's me and Vickie. He just needed a place to crash 'cause he got fired from his job. They caught him stealing Snickers.

MICHAEL

He stole Snickers bars?

LELAINA

Yeah, but he can rationalize it, like, the establishment owes him a Snickers.

He's trying to get a handle on this guy, but there's no way around it: he's going to have to just ask:

MICHAEL

And he has--Does he have a girlfriend?

LELAINA

I don't think so. Well I know he doesn't. He would tell me. We're like best friends.

MICHAEL

(relieved, smiles)

That's good, that's really--You know, you're... you're really beautiful, no really, I'm serious.

She smiles, but looks away, uncomfortable.

LELAINA

Anyway... I have problems with compliments.

(trying to change subject)
So, but, um, so are you religious?

MICHAEL
You also have problems with segues, huh?

She laughs hard, so does he, and the first date tension melts.

MICHAEL
No, actually, I'm a non-practicing Jew.

LELAINA
(blurts it out)
Hey, I'm a non-practicing virgin.

CUT TO:

INT. SAAB/EXT. LELAINA'S APARTMENT - ALLEY - LATER

The car is parked in the alley by the apartment. The radio is on but low. Lelaina and Michael are sitting on the backs of the seats, drinking Big Gulps from 7-11, having fun just talking:

LELAINA
The most profound, important invention of my lifetime: the Big Gulp.

MICHAEL
Where would society be without it? I won't even hazzard a guess.

LELAINA
I'm serious. Because you get one in the morning, I'm talking the forty-four ounce, and you've got your essential beverage for the entire day.

MICHAEL
It doesn't take much to make you happy, does it?

LELAINA
No--Well... No. I'm not materialistic. I don't care about money or houses. I'll never have a house. My credit is shit.

MICHAEL
Yeah, I'm not materialistic either--I mean I'd be working even if I wasn't getting paid--but I also want to kind of have a nice house. And I'm not really into cars, but I do like my car.

LELAINA
Yeah? I don't really like cars like this. They just seem kind of wasteful to me. I only got the BMW 'cause my stepmom got an Infiniti.

MICHAEL

See, I hate Infiniti's too. I agree with you. They're really ridiculous. I mean, this Saab, I got it, it was just that I wanted a convertible.

LELAINA

Oh no, no, you don't have to justify--

MICHAEL

--No, no, I could've gotten, the other car I was gonna get was an old Mustang. I should've gotten that, right?

LELAINA

(laughing)

No, it's good to have things you want. I mean, I really like nice sheets. I have a sheet thing.

MICHAEL

You know what? I think I'll sell the Saab. I'm gonna sell it.

LELAINA

(cracking up)

No, no, don't sell it.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I'll sell it, and with the money, I'm gonna buy you sheets.

She can't stop laughing.

LELAINA

You crack me up. You crack me up, you really do. It's funny--I had you pegged as this total MBA type.

MICHAEL

Are you kidding?--I dropped out of college after nine months. I was impatient.

LELAINA

Wow.

MICHAEL

Yeah but, I mean, there's a point, like now, where I wonder if I should've stayed in college and gone for an astronomy degree or something.

LELAINA

Oh!--I love astronomy. But the math is--

MICHAEL

--I know, right? I started to get into it but it was all, like, three squared equals the root of x or something, and all I wanted to do was look at the stars.

LELAINA

Oh my god, same here exactly.

MICHAEL

I remember being so happy on the roof of our old house, just staring at the sky. I want to do that again, you know, just look at stars and smell, you know... everything, I've just gotta find the time.

LELAINA

No, you have to make the time to do those things. Honestly, it seems like you work so hard that if you don't just look at the stars, you'll totally lose perspective.

MICHAEL

I know. I know. It's like, do you ever have those moments in life where you just feel okay? Where you just find yourself happy in a moment and you go, "Oh, I'm happy here"? And then it goes away? Like really quickly? I always seem to forget those moments, but I've had a couple of them.

LELAINA

Yeah, me too. ...Like right now.

She caught him off-guard; he smiles, realizing that this is indeed one of those moments. They are both suddenly aware of the chemistry at work here.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Like right now.

He leans in and kisses her softly, just for a couple of seconds. They look at each other, then she kisses him. They start to really get into it; they slide down into the seat without breaking. The opening strains of "Beth" by Kiss fill the car... When his car phone RINGS. He opens his eyes, looks down, torn. Lelaina's like the Energizer bunny: still going. It keeps ringing. Michael picks it up, but as he talks, Lelaina continues to softly kiss him.

MICHAEL

(trying to concentrate)

Yeah. No, the video is, um--Doesn't he know it's set at a pre-apocalyptic bomb shelter? What's the difference, pre or post? Well they should've thought of that before they shaved his head--

--She cuts him off, kissing his mouth.

MICHAEL

(into phone)

Look, uh, I gotta, I can't--I'm about to go through a tunnel.

He doesn't even hang up; he just drops the phone and passionately responds to her.

EXT. APARTMENT ALLEY/SAAB - SAME

Troy walks up the alley, partied out, heading home. He hears "Beth"; he stops. He sees the Saab and the two forgotten Big Gulps sitting on it. He quietly walks over to it. Michael and Lelaina are inside, wrapped around each other.

His face registers no dramatic change of emotion, just the slightest crook of an eyebrow. He turns and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - BEFORE DAWN

Lelaina very quietly enters the dark apartment, carrying her shoes as she tip-toes across the living room.

TROY (O.S.)

(sings loudly)

--Beth, I hear you calling, but I can't come home right now--

--She jumps ten, maybe twelve feet. He turns on a lamp.

TROY

Been up all night?

He sits up suddenly, alert, like he just smelled something.

TROY

You know, I am definitely picking up weird vibes in here. They're of the I-just-got-laid variety.

He walks towards her. She's getting annoyed.

TROY

Did he dazzle you with his extensive knowledge of mineral water? Or was it his in-depth analysis of Marky Mark that finally reeled you in?

She eyes him threateningly.

TROY

I just wish I could've been there to hear how you rationalized sleeping with a yuppie-head cheese on the first date.

LELAINA

He is not a yuppie!

TROY

He is the reason Cliff's Notes were invented. He thinks DesCartes is something you put before de-horse.

LELAINA

Yeah, well that pales in comparison with all those tweaked out little skanks you date:

(mimics valley-girl bimbo)

"Troy, talk to me about phenomenology while I try on my add-a-bead necklace."

TROY

(waves her off, dismissive)

Ah, fuck it. What do I care?

LELAINA

What do you care?

He's back on the couch, absorbing himself in Alistair MacIntyre's "After Virtue." She rips it from his hands.

LELAINA

Why are you suddenly acting like a jealous boyfriend or something?

He takes his book back, starts reading calmly.

TROY

I'm not acting like anything. I'm calmly reading.

LELAINA

If there's something bothering you, you should at least be man enough to tell me.

TROY

Oh right: "Lelaina, I'm really in love with you." Is that what you want to hear?--Well don't flatter yourself.

LELAINA

That's not what I want to hear!--Don't flatter yourself.

TROY

Okay. Whatever.

LELAINA

Fine whatever.

(a beat, on second thought)

Go to hell.

She pivots and walks out. Troy looks up, watches her go. Her door SLAMS O.S.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - VICKIE

VICKIE

I think that being really in love would be like you're stranded on the most wonderful, beautiful, exotic island in the whole world that has everything you could possibly want. But you'd still be stranded.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: VICKIE

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sammy and Vickie are sitting on the floor. A globe sits on the coffee table between them.

VICKIE

I'm going to spin this globe and wherever I stop it is where I'm going to die.

She sets the globe in motion, closes her eyes. She stops it with her finger. She opens her eyes, sees where she's pointing. She examines it closer, shocked. She looks at Sammy.

VICKIE

Houston. I'm going to die in Houston.

Sammy starts laughing and Lelaina does too, O.C. Vickie dramatically puts her head between her knees, pulling her hair.

VICKIE
Aaaargh! I'm so depressed!

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV EXT. CLINIC - DAY

Vickie stands in front of the clinic.

VICKIE
Well, I just took the test. The test. It didn't really hurt. It was nothing compared to bikini waxing.

LELAINA(O.C.)
Tell us why you took it.

VICKIE
Because one of my, um, friends? He tested positive so... I just wanted--

LELAINA(O.C.)
--Are you nervous?--

VICKIE
--to be sure. What?--Um, no, I'm not really nervous. I use protection: I always do it in a condominium.
(no response)
Thanks, I'll be here all week, folks--Try the veal.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. VICKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

PHINEAS, a long-haired, hippy-type guy, who sitting in a bean bag chair in his underwear, reading an old Dynamite magazine with intensity. The camera finds Vickie sitting on her bed.

VICKIE
(into camera)
I probably won't get married because I see how my parents are, they've been married twenty-six years, and they're like brother and sister. My dad sleeps in the den 'cause he snores, my mom doesn't close the bathroom door. I want passion, and passion dies quick.
(to Phineas)
Phineas, you want to add anything?

Phineas looks up, confused. He looks into the camera, brow knit.

PHINEAS

Yeah.

He goes back to reading the Dynamite.

INT. TV STUDIO - GRANT'S DRESSING ROOM - MORNING

The monitor goes black. Cardouche and Grant are sitting in Grant's dressing room, watching the TV. Cardouche smiles, impressed with the tape. Lelaina waits nervously.

GRANT

You can forget it.

Lelaina looks to Cardouche, panicked.

CARDOUCHE

Grant, come on, it's an incredible--

GRANT

--It's junk. Depressing junk. You know my rules for the Video View: Light and perky.

CARDOUCHE

Lelaina, maybe it's better if Grant and I talk alone.

She half-nods, leaves the room.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lelaina almost closes the door behind her, then decides to leave it slightly ajar so she can eavesdrop.

CARDOUCHE (O.S.)

Look, she's got real talent, and I want to put her on staff for the Video View.

GRANT (O.S.)

I will not have Miss Pierce on staff. I will walk out if that happens--You watch--

CARDOUCHE (O.S.)

--Okay, okay--calm down. It was just an idea. We don't have to have her.

Her mouth drops open with the betrayal.

GRANT (O.S.)

Besides, having to stare at that girl's fat thighs all day would make me ill.

Lelaina, confused, looks at her rather thin thighs. She looks around to see if anyone else heard the comment: nobody.

GRANT (O.S.)
 Just get rid of her like I asked you to do in
 the first place.

INT. TV STUDIO - MORNING SHOW SET - LATER

The show is at a commercial break. Grant is on-stage, a washcloth
 over his face as he repeats his mantra:

GRANT
 If I don't know where to go, I'll get there, if
 I don't know where to go I'll get there--

Lelaina sets a book and notecards in his lap. He removes the cloth
 and stares at her stonily. She just smiles sweetly and walks off.
 LIBBY CUMBA is ushered into the guest spot. The THEME MUSIC starts
 up.

GRANT
 (holds up book)
 With us today is Libby Cumba, the author of this
 book, Your Child's Self-Esteem.
 (reads off notecard)
 Good morning, Libby.

LIBBY
 Good morning, Grant.

GRANT
 Good morning. Now, Libby...
 (reads off notecard)
 I'm concerned with self-esteem. Personally,
 I've always had an odd preference for very, very
 young girls--

--Libby's eyes widen as Grant realizes what he's just read. He
 clears his throat. Cardouche's cigar falls out of his mouth; he
 sprints off. Lelaina and Damien are trying not to laugh. Grant
 turns the notecard over and tries to laugh lightly.

GRANT
 What I mean is, uh...
 (off notecard)
 Being a total prick--
 (goes for a save)
 --kly... pear.

Grant stops, clears his throat again. He puts away the cards and
 smiles at the confused guest.

GRANT
 (not off cards)
 Good morning.
 (she stares at him)

So... um... Do you like writing books?

LIBBY

Yes.

GRANT

...Good. Um, very good. That's... yeah. I like, uh... Maybe we... Let's welcome this audience again.

(to audience)

Good morning!

Silence. Except for Lelaina's and Damien's laughter.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Cardouche bursts in, frantic; everyone is guffawing in here.

CARDOUCHE

Good God--go to commercial!

INT. CARDOUCHE'S OFFICE - DAY

A very composed Lelaina sits in the hot seat in front of a desk; Cardouche and Grant sit on the desk, staring at her.

LELAINA

It's called lookism, and people have been sued for that.

GRANT

I didn't hear anyone say anything about "thighs." Did you, Rich?

CARDOUCHE

Doesn't matter. The stunt you pulled--

LELAINA

--proved how much Grant relies on me. Nothing damaging went out on the air. I'd like to be seriously considered for a staff position. And we can just forget this whole thing. What do you say?

They are silenced by her chutzpah. Cardouche smiles, impressed.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET/WENDY'S / INT. BMW - DAY

"HELP WANTED"

reads the sign in the Wendy's window at the intersection. Lelaina looks at it with intensity from her car. Her knuckles are white around the steering wheel. Her eyes are reddened.

DISSOLVE TO:

WENDY'S COMMERCIAL - INT. WENDY'S - DAY

DAVE THOMAS, founder of Wendy's, stands behind the counter.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: "DAVE THOMAS, FOUNDER OF WENDY'S"

DAVE

At Wendy's, we're concerned with premium quality customer service. All of our associates must pass our rigorous courtesy exams. Watch this:

He turns to a girl whose back is to us as she flips burgers.

DAVE

(barks)

Hey, where's my food!?

The girl turns around: it's Lelaina. She smiles brightly as she hands Dave a burger.

LELAINA

Here you are, sir. Please enjoy it.

DAVE

See? And she's even a valedictorian.

BACK TO SCENE

The car behind her HONKS. Lelaina snaps back, drives on.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKSIDE TREATMENT CENTER - NIGHT

A GIRL, 16, is dramatically performing a lip-synch to "Comfortably Numb" by Pink Floyd. A classroom has been fashioned into a theatre. Written on the blackboard: "PATIENTS' TALENT SHOW!"

Lelaina quietly enters the crowded room via the back door. On the far side of the room, she sees Cynthia, sitting alone. Pat is on the opposite side of the room, also alone.

Lelaina walks to Cynthia, takes a seat beside her. Cynthia fake-smiles at her, then looks back at the performance.

LELAINA

(whispers)

Mom, I have to talk to you.

CYNTHIA

(sighs, doesn't look at her)

I tell ya, it likes to break my heart watching this. That girl up there is your sister's best friend here.

LELAINA

...Uh, I need to talk to you about my job.

CYNTHIA

Patty doesn't belong in this place. But no one listens to me.

LELAINA

(to herself, sarcastic)

I know how you feel.

CYNTHIA

(pats Lelaina's leg)

I know you do, darlin'. Maybe I'm just tired. Maybe I'm just old. Maybe I'm just a failure at all of this.

Lelaina sinks in her seat, dejected. The girl finishes, bows and leaves the stage. A COUNSELOR in the front row stands up.

COUNSELOR

Our next talent is Patty Pierce--

PATTY PIERCE, 18, takes her place on stage. She is deceptively innocent looking and has a larger than average build. She wears sweats and a heavy metal t-shirt. She is either frenetic or somber; there is no in between.

COUNSELOR

She will be singing "The Twelve Steps of Recovery."

Patients in the audience cheer loudly, shouting her name.

PATTY

Okay, y'all shut up now.

Several fellow patients laugh in recognition as she sings her a cappella to the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas":

PATTY

On the twelfth step of recovery, my counselor gave to meee eleven people I had to apologize to, ten pats on the back, nine slaps on the wrist, eight goals to achieve, seven early bedtimes, six friends to turn to, fiiive codependents to get rid oooof, four paperback bibles, three positive attitudes, two black outs remembered, and an inner child who lives inside of meeeee!

Everyone applauds; the patients stand and cheer. Patty is beaming with pride. Lelaina stands up with the crowd, applauding. Pat applauds lightly. Cynthia just sits there.

Patty waves to Lelaina, then she sees Cynthia, and her smile fades somewhat.

INT. PARKSIDE LOBBY - LATER

There is a cookies and punch reception. Lelaina stands off to the side of the crowd. Patty runs up to her, frenetic.

PATTY

--Hey, man, did you see that!!--Standing ovation! I'm the most popular girl on the acute ward!

LELAINA

You must be a very proud young woman.

PATTY

(laughs)
Yah, dude.
(suddenly somber)
Mom didn't even clap for me. Bitch.

Lelaina looks at Patty's pouting face.

LELAINA

Yes she did, Patty; I was sitting right next to her--I saw her clap. She even said you sang like on the radio.

Patty decides to believe this, brightens a little. Pat approaches; he offers his hand to Patty. They shake hands.

PAT

When're you gonna make a record, big stuff?
(to Lelaina)
Hi baby.

LELAINA

Hey dad. Can I talk to you about something?
It's about my job at the--

--Pat's watching Cynthia as she approaches and hugs Patty in a non-affectionate way (lightly patting her back).

PAT

I better get going now.

CYNTHIA

(to Pat, not looking at him)
That's okay, I'm leaving--

PAT
 (same as Cynthia)
 --No, I'm going--

CYNTHIA
 --Huh-uh, Dale's waiting for me, so--bye, sugar--
 -

--Cynthia lightly kisses Patty then starts off--

PAT
 (to Lelaina)
 --We'll talk tomorrow, baby. Okay?

She half-nods knowing they won't. Pat pats Patty on the shoulder as he leaves... Patty and Lelaina just stand there, alone together. They watch all the other families talking and hugging... Lelaina puts her arm around Patty, who looks at the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Several bags of groceries sit on the floor. Troy, Sammy, and Vickie are putting them away. Lelaina enters, serious.

LELAINA
 We have to have a family meeting. Something's happened.

They slow down; Troy hands her a six-pack of Diet Coke.

TROY
 Oh no. They discovered Nutrasweet causes you to grow a third eye.

LELAINA
 First let me say that everything's gonna be fine.

TROY
 She can just wear a patch over it.

LELAINA
 I'm already working out a plan.

TROY
 There's this plastic surgeon in Paris who will remove it for free.

LELAINA
 So don't panic.

TROY
It's not contagious.

LELAINA
Would you shut up!?!--I was fucking fired!
They stop, shocked; Troy puts his arm around her.

TROY
Laney, I'm sorry. I had no idea.
Vickie's mouth is agape. Sammy shakes his head in disbelief.

SAMMY
This... this really throws off my whole concept
of the universe.
She looks at their stunned faces, a little annoyed and embarrassed.
She puts the six-pack in the fridge.

LELAINA
Well. I mean, it's not like I had a
hysterectomy or anything. I'll find something
else--No big deal.
The phone RINGS--Lelaina jumps for it, crosses her fingers:

LELAINA
Let this be a job offer--
(answers it)
Hello?... Hi Michael.

TROY
(low)
It's a jerk offer.

Lelaina heard, rolls her eyes. He watches her.

LELAINA
Well, not so great... No, I'd
rather get together and talk.

VICKIE
(to Troy)
I just had a great idea.

Troy acts like he's listening to Vickie as he strains to hear
Lelaina, who has lowered her voice.

LELAINA
No, no, I'm okay--I'm fine.
It's nothing like that...
(laughs)
Yeah, me too... Okay, I'd
love that... Okay, 'bye.

VICKIE
Well, since you're always
bitching about working nights
why don't I schedule you for
mornings, and Lelaina can
work nights?

Troy blankly nods at Vickie as Lelaina hangs up. Vickie claps her
hands to Lelaina's arms in sincerity and friendship.

VICKIE
Lelaina. You're hired.

LELAINA
(confused)
What?

VICKIE
I need another part-timer. You can start tomorrow. It's only five an hour at first, but it's a great opportunity.

Vickie goes back to putting up groceries. Lelaina looks at Troy. He knows exactly what she's thinking; he smiles sarcastically.

TROY
It's a dream come true.

LELAINA
Look, Vickie, I said I'm already working out a plan.

VICKIE
So what's the plan?

LELAINA
(blurts it out)
--I'm not gonna work at The Gap!--I was valedictorian of my class, for Chrissake!

Vickie freezes, looking like she's just been slapped. Lelaina almost bites her tongue off.

LELAINA
I didn't mean that like--I wasn't saying--
It's too late.

VICKIE
How stupid of me to try and drag you down to my level.

Vickie briskly walks out. Lelaina follows her to her bedroom, but Vickie shuts her door in Lelaina's face. She finds herself staring right into the eyes of an old Sean Cassidy poster, and a typical 70's song like "Boogie Nights" begins BLARING within.

Lelaina leans her head against the door. Troy approaches and gently takes her arm, pulling her away. He leads her off...

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Troy and Lelaina stand in front of a tall building, smoking, each with a cup of coffee. Troy points up at the building.

TROY

This is where Troy was fired from his eleventh job--He was an illustrious office cleaner. Now, come this way please, and we'll continue our walking tour of "The Short and Happy Career of Troy Dyer."

He offers his arm to escort her; she takes it, giggly. He's doing his best to amuse her. He leads her to his old newsstand.

TROY

Aha! The newsstand. Yes, this is where they caught Troy capping one too many Snickers. In total, he has been fired from, count 'em, twelve jobs. So you shouldn't feel so bad.

She smiles; she doesn't feel that bad anymore. They continue their walk down the dimly lit sidewalk.

TROY

One of these days, I'm going to wake up before noon--

LELAINA

--Yeah right.

TROY

--and turn on the tee-vee, and you'll be sitting there with Bryant Gumbel: "Today, the Pulitzer-Prize winning documentarian Lelaina Pierce. Lelaina, after your first film, 'Why Barbie is Bad,' you seem to have completely forgotten about your best friend Troy Dyer."

LELAINA

Troy who?

He covers his heart as if he's been wounded.

TROY

I'll probably still be working at The Gap, playing warehouses, hanging around, like, Radio Shack screaming that I used to know you, and you'll be beautiful, the lights all on you and shit.

LELAINA

Come on, Dyer. That's not true--Vickie will have fired you by then.

They laugh.

TROY

See, Lane, this is all we really need in this world: a couple of smokes, a cup of coffee, conversation. You and me and five bucks.

LELAINA

You got it.

TROY

(a beat)

You know what?

LELAINA

What?

He leans in and before anyone can think about it, they're kissing full on the mouth; they were both dying to do this, somewhere inside, hungry for each other--But Lelaina breaks it, gets ahold of herself. She steps back; her hands are shaking.

LELAINA

Troy, wait--I can't do this--

TROY

--You've never thought about it?

LELAINA

Of course, yes, I have, but I don't want to not be friends anymore. I can't not be friends with you, you know?

TROY

Neither can I. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about evolving.

LELAINA

I just, I can't deal with this right now. I can't evolve right now.

TROY

...Because of Michael.

LELAINA

No. Well, yeah. Yes.

He didn't want to hear that. He walks on. She walks with him.

LELAINA

Can't you cut me a little slack here? We were having so much fun, and now--

TROY

--Forget it. Let's talk about something else.

LELAINA

Okay.

...They walk in silence for quite a while. Then they reach Troy's car, a beat-up old Dodge Dart. He quietly opens the door for her. She gets in. He gets in the driver's seat.

INT. DODGE DART - CONTINUOUS

Troy starts the car. They drive off in total stony silence.

CUT TO:

INT. MICHAEL'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

"Beth" is playing. The room is dimly lit and desperately lonely: half-unpacked suitcases, unopened boxes, too many empty take-out containers, a half-eaten room-service dinner, work papers, etc. Michael is sitting on his unmade bed with several new cassette tapes and his boombox. He checks the dual cassette deal to make sure it's recording. He takes a sip of his Big Gulp, then goes back to making the cassette label: He carefully writes on it:

"FOR LELAINA"

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - AN OLD FAMILY PORTRAIT

Cynthia, Pat, Lelaina and Patty. All young and fresh-faced and faking smiles at the Sears Portrait Studio.

LELAINA (V.O.)

My parents got divorced when I was fourteen. My dad remarried in six months, my mom threatened to kill herself in front of me, and Patty started getting drunk in her closet every morning before junior high-school. Somebody had to remember to take out the trash and buy the milk and sign the report cards. That ended up being me.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: LELAINA

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

Lelaina and Sammy are taking part in a big pro-choice demonstration, yelling and holding signs.

LELAINA (V.O.)
 I'm pro-choice, but I'm not political. I believe we're all part of one great soul, but I'm not religious. I don't do drugs, but I have never been high on life.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Troy pulls Lelaina into his lap, and tries to force-feed her a piece of cake. She pulls back, laughing.

LELAINA
 No, I can't--I'm on this new diet where I can't eat after two p.m.

TROY
 But you had Dorito's for breakfast--I saw you.

LELAINA
 That was before two p.m.

Troy shakes his head, laughing.

TROY
 (to camera)
 You gotta love this girl--

Snow fills the TV screen as...

INT. HOTEL SUITE - MORNING

Lelaina quickly turns off the VCR, upset after watching her and Troy. She has a towel around her wet head. Michael is sitting in front of it, squinting with intensity.

MICHAEL
 Why'd you turn it off?

LELAINA
 That's all there really is.

MICHAEL
 Really? Okay. Well it's just--Wow. It's amazing, that's really amazing.

LELAINA
 Yeah? You think?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I mean you really captured these people, and Troy, look at him, this guy who represents everything that's wrong with America.

LELAINA

(kind of disturbed)

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

But it's like, it's not his fault--He's a product of whatever. Listen, I think I could really do something with this. We could really use a show like this, it's perfect for the channel.

Lelaina freezes--she doesn't think so.

MICHAEL

In fact, I'm gonna take this thing to New York next week and show it.

LELAINA

Oh, um, you know what?, I don't know, I don't think that's a good idea.

She turns away and pulls on a pair of pantyhose.

MICHAEL

What?--It's a great idea. You could even come with me--why not?

LELAINA

Michael, it's just... this isn't Vote or Goat, okay?

Michael walks over to her, enthusiastic, as she pulls on a skirt under her robe.

MICHAEL

I know! That's what's so great about it--it's not Vote or Goat, it's totally different, it's totally you and your stuff.

LELAINA

Exactly, and I already have my own plans for it.

MICHAEL

What are you gonna do? Put it on public access, channel ninety-nine, three a.m., right between the, uh, call-in therapy show for, you know, Hopi bed-wetters and the animal balloon guy--I mean, come on.

LELAINA

(very terse)

No, thank you, I'm going to get it on PBS.

She brushes past him, picks up her skirt. Michael is surprised by her anger.

MICHAEL

Alright, you know, hey, maybe you'll get a grant or something, but listen, you should still come with me. We can stay at my apartment--it'll be fun, you know, you'll meet my mother and that's, forget that--she'll love you, and my father would, you know, be jealous of me. He couldn't deal with it.

She laughs, despite herself.

LELAINA

I would love to make your father jealous, believe me, but I just can't right now.

She removes the robe, slips on her blouse, starts buttoning it..

MICHAEL

Don't you want to go, just to get away?

LELAINA

Yes of course I do, I would die to just run off and, I don't know, go hiking in the desert or something and not think about anything, but I can't--I don't have any money, I was just fired--

--She stops, rests her face in her hands.

LELAINA

I can't believe this. I'm getting dressed for work. What am I doing? God.

She sits down, slides the towel off her head, dejected.

MICHAEL

Well I have money--

LELAINA

--I'm not gonna take your money--

She takes a Diet Coke out of her purse.

MICHAEL

--I'm not saying you have to...

She pours the Diet Coke. He tries to read her.

MICHAEL

(almost frustrated)

What is it?--Is it that, I mean, is Troy gonna get pissed off that you're actually doing something fun and not being all like miserable with him or--

LELAINA

(very irritated)

What are you talking about? My God, this has totally zero to do with--I mean, Troy doesn't have anything to do with anything at all, Jesus Christ.

MICHAEL

"Jesus Christ." Okay. Alright, I was just...
(sighs)
I probably shouldn't even try to give you this.

Michael hands her the cassette he made.

MICHAEL

I don't know, this whole thing has just been--I haven't made anyone a tape since I don't even know when, when I was seventeen and acne and here I am, twenty-six. I just, I never met anyone like you before.

Genuinely touched by the gesture, she kisses him softly.

MICHAEL

It's got KISS and I don't know why, but I stuck the Hershey's jingle on there:

(sings)

Nothin' like the face of a kid eating a Hershey's bar, nothing like it you'll...

She reaches out and gently touches his face, charmed.

LELAINA

(soft)

--Michael, I love this. But I just can't go, okay? I just can't do it. I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

Alright, forget it. I just thought it would be fun and funny and you and me, that's all.

He starts out, hurt. She looks over and sees that snow is still on the TV. She turns the set off and follows him.

CUT TO:

JOB INTERVIEW MONTAGEINTERVIEW #1: INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE - DAY

It's very messy in here with audio-visual equipment strewn about everywhere. ROCK sits at a table with Lelaina.

ROCK

First of all... call me Rock.

(she nods)

Now. What do you know about industrial filmmaking?

LELAINA

Well, I was a communications major, I--

ROCK

--How tall are you in stockinged feet?

She starts to protest--when his phone RINGS, a Garfield phone.

ROCK

(answers it)

Yeah?

(laughs naughtily)

Hang on a coup--

(to Lelaina)

Can you wait outside, hon?

INTERVIEW #2: INT. RADIO OFFICE - DAY

There is a sign on the wall: "KRBE-FM". ROGER sits behind his desk. He lifts a bottle of nasal spray to his nose, and sprays some in each nostril. Lelaina sits across from him, waiting.

ROGER

To be honest with you, Lelaina, I think you're overqualified for this position.

LELAINA

(a little desperate)

Oh, I don't know. I'm not really that smart.

INTERVIEW #3: INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

An office in the Houston Chronicle headquarters. LOUISE a burly woman, sits behind a desk cluttered with papers. Lelaina sits on the other side of the desk, waiting.

LOUISE

No offense, sweetie, but you don't have experience on a paper. You're tee-vee.

LELAINA
I'm trying to make the transition to print journalism.

LOUISE
Why?

LELAINA
(prepared)
Newspapers are the last watchdogs of our government--they enforce the checks and balances. And a half-hour of tee-vee news only adds up to one page of newspaper copy. And this country is turning away from their local papers to their tee-vees for info-tainment. I want to help turn that around.

Louise raises her eyebrows, very impressed.

LOUISE
Well then. I just need to ask you one test question.

LELAINA
(confident)
Of course.

LOUISE
Define irony.

LELAINA
Irony?
(she nods)
Irony. Irony... It's a noun that means when something is... ironic... Um, it's... like... like... that... I don't... I really can't define irony, but I know it when I see it.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO PESOS CAFE - DAY

Lelaina enters the outdoor seating area of the hip, very crowded cafe, armed with the Classifieds and a plate of nachos. She looks around for a place to sit and sees

TROY

who's also alone, smoking, reading Heidegger's "Being and Time."
He's dressed in a Gap uniform.

Lelaina's eyes light up; she's very happy to see him. She makes her way across the cafe. She waves at him, smiling:

LELAINA

Troy! Troy!

He's surprised to see her, though not necessarily pleasantly. She reaches his table, sits, talking a mile a minute:

LELAINA

Thank god--I have never been so glad to see anyone in my life. You would not believe what I've been through, Troy, okay? Those interviews, okay? The word "vivisection" is a staggering understatement. I mean--Hey, can you define irony?

TROY

It's when the actual meaning is totally opposite from the literal meaning.

She slaps the table.

LELAINA

I knew that. I knew it. God.

TROY

(looks around)
So... where's Mike?

LELAINA

What?--No, no, he's not here, I'm just... I'm eating chips.

She eats a chip. There is an uncomfortable silence.

TROY

I should get back to work.

LELAINA

Wait a minute. Isn't there some statute of limitations on embarrassing incidents?

TROY

(sharp)
Your bravado is embarrassing.

He marks his page and stands up. She grasps onto his arm.

LELAINA

Please don't go. Come on, talk to me. I know you can sit with me for one cigarette. Just one cigarette, some conversation, you and me and five bucks, right?

TROY
(tired)
Laney...

LELAINA
(charming)
Whatty?

He really does want to stay, but he stiffens his resolve.

TROY
I gotta go.

And he's gone. She slumps in her chair.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Lelaina enters, depressed, flops down on the couch, and turns on the TV. She starts channel-surfing. She hits on In Your Face TV where "WEDGIE", the network's fashion magazine is on. She lights a cigarette, sets it in the empty ashtray...

TIME DISSOLVE - LATER

...the ashtray is about half-full. Lelaina's still watching In Your Face TV, thinking. Sammy enters from Vickie's bedroom. Lelaina sits up, glad to see him.

LELAINA
Hey, Sammy!--Come sit with me. Have a cup of joe. Let's talk, man, let's have a fucking great conversation.

SAMMY
(hesitant)
...Um, okay.

LELAINA
Okay.
(beat)
So when was the last time you talked to Troy?

--Vickie enters, rushed, dressed for work. She glares at Lelaina, then grabs Sammy's arm.

VICKIE
I'm late for a jeans folding seminar--Let's locomote.

And they're gone. Dejected, Lelaina goes back to the TV...

TIME DISSOLVE - LATER

...An infomercial is on: "Psychic Psensations." Information flashes on the screen: "CALL A PSYCHIC PARTNER NOW! 1-900-820-1550 3.99perminuteMustbeovereighteenThisisapaidprogram".

WOMAN (ON TV)

My psychic partner put me back in control of my personal and professional lives! And watch how she helped me solve a crime!

The images turn dreamlike as we see two masked men running up to a house with a saw and the words "DRAMATIC PSYCHIC REENACTMENT".

Lelaina is on the couch, talking on the phone with her partner.

LELAINA

It's just that nothing is going down according to plan. Even my best friend, I'm afraid that I've lost him forever and, I mean, that's, he was my... like my touchstone, you know?

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

What does your gut tell you?

LELAINA

...Eat. I don't know, I don't know. I just want to know what's going to happen.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

Well, I'm feeling that you're near something very powerful.

Lelaina looks around: nothing but Troy's junk. Then she sees her foot resting on the Ouija board coffee table.

LELAINA

(gasps)

Oh my god. Right now at this second, my foot is touching a Ouija board.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

Well, would you look at that.

LELAINA

I can't believe this. Can I have your extension number please?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LELAINA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Lelaina's lying across her bed, in pajamas, on the phone again.

LELAINA

I had a strange dream last night. I was an air traffic controller, and I was guiding this plane into a hangar, but the plane wouldn't fit. It was too big. But I was desperate to get the plane inside or I would lose my job, but it just wouldn't fit. What do you think, Denell?

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

(grave)

Lelaina. Can I say, my ex-husband was an air traffic controller.

LELAINA

No way. Is this the same jerk who locked you out of the Winnebago?

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

No, this was Monte, my third husband.

LELAINA

Your third husband? We've been talking for almost two weeks and you never told me about a third husband.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

It's a long story...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Lelaina is on the couch in the same pajamas, on the phone.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

--And then he took the money we had hidden in the La-Z-Boy cushion--our savings, don'tcha know--and ran off to San Diego to join the Navy.

LELAINA

Hmmm. You know what I think? I think you still really love Monte.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)

Yeah... You're probably right. But it don't matter now.

LELAINA

Yes it does, Denell. I know you're afraid, but you've got to find him and tell him how you really feel...

Vickie and Sammy enter from the hall. Vickie is sick with a cold. She and Sammy sit by Lelaina on the couch.

VICKIE
Lelaina, we need to talk to you.

LELAINA
Hold on, Denell.
(to Vickie)
What?--I'm on the phone.

VICKIE
Well, the phone bill this month is four hundred and six dollars. It's mainly because of some calls to a one-nine hundred number.

PSYCHIC PARTNER (V.O.)
Lelaina? I'm sensing you're in some--

--Lelaina hangs up on Denell. Grief-stricken, she rests her forehead in her hand.

VICKIE
I'd help you out, but I haven't been able to put in as many hours 'cause I've been sick. ...And we can't afford a new deposit if the phone's disconnected.

Lelaina won't look up. Vickie looks to Sammy for help.

SAMMY
...Maybe you could borrow the money from Michael.

LELAINA
No.

VICKIE
What are you doing, Lelaina? You run up a four hundred dollar phone bill in less than a month, those pajamas have become like your uniform, I can't remember the last time you went outside, I can't even remember the last time you ate anything. I mean you are in The Bell Jar.

LELAINA
(defensive, sharp)
Don't worry about it.

VICKIE
Okay fine. So how are you gonna pay rent.

LELAINA

Hey, this is my apartment. I signed the lease. I let you move in when you had no job, no money and you sponged off me for two months. And now, suddenly, the big power-monger, Ms. Manager-of-The-Gap, you think you can push me around like this!?

SAMMY

She's not pushing--

LELAINA

What are you even doing here, Sammy? You don't live here.

SAMMY

Lelaina, god...

VICKIE

Hey Laney--you're the one who's out of work.

Lelaina looks at them, taking all this in.

LELAINA

You're really enjoying this, aren't you?

VICKIE

I think you really need to get some fresh air.

LELAINA

You've been waiting for this day ever since we met.

VICKIE

(fed up)

Who told you that? Your psychic partner?

Sammy accidentally laughs. Vickie wishes she hadn't said that. Lelaina stands up, stung. She looks at them coldly. She leaves. They watch her go down the hall. Her door SLAMS off-screen.

SAMMY

Let's go talk to her.

VICKIE

No. I have to call into work--I left Troy in charge.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GAP - SAME

Troy is standing next to a table of shirts. He is absently straightening the shirts as he absorbs himself in Kierkegaard's "Sickness Unto Death." There is a CUSTOMER, looking around, trying to find help. She approaches Troy, taps his shoulder.

CUSTOMER

Excuse me...

TROY

Oh--I'm just browsing.

CUT TO:

INT. CYNTHIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dale and Lelaina sit at the table. She's drinking a Diet Coke.

LELAINA

Dale, can I bum a cigarette off you?

He hands her one from his over-all's front pocket.

DALE

A smoke and a Coke, huh? Yeah, you got it. A smoke and a Coke.

He laughs heartily. He laughs alone. Cynthia enters.

CYNTHIA

It likes to break my heart watchin' you smoke in my house.

Lelaina averts her eyes. Dale looks at Cynthia with distaste.

CYNTHIA

Okay, but that's okay. I'm gonna be happy now.

She pats Dale's arm and fake-smiles as she sits down.

LELAINA

I need to talk to you about a loan.

Cynthia and Dale exchange looks.

DALE

Is it for drugs?

LELAINA

No, it's not for drugs. I was fired.

CYNTHIA

(gasps)

Oh my lord.

(to Dale)
Well, it's going around.

DALE
Yeah. I just got fired off my trucking route last week.

Cynthia looks down, shakes her head at the injustice of it all.

LELAINA
Dale, I'm sorry. I didn't know.

DALE
But I picked myself up and enrolled in real estate school.

CYNTHIA
(pats his back, proud)
Yes he did. I tell ya, when life hands Dale lemons...

DALE
...I always look for the silver lining.

CYNTHIA
(to Lelaina)
But you shouldn't have any trouble finding another job, darlin'.

LELAINA
No, see, I've tried--I applied for every single opening in my field. Nothing.

Cynthia and Dale consider this. Cynthia sighs.

CYNTHIA
Well then, I hate to say it, but times are hard so you'll just have to swallow your pride. Why don't you get a job at McDonald's? They'll hire anyone--I saw it on the tee-vee: a little retarded boy working the cash register.

LELAINA
Because, mother, I am not retarded--I was valedictorian of my university.

CYNTHIA
And me and Dale are just proud to death of you, sugar-booger. But we don't have any money to loan you. Why don't you ask your daddy for a loan? He's the one who--

LELAINA
--No, just... forget it. I have to go.

Lelaina exits. Cynthia shakes her head, wide-eyed.

CUT TO:

INT. WENDY'S - DAY

Lelaina sits at a table with JOHN QUATTLEBAUM, the burly manager. He eats a Wendy's Frostie as he reviews her resume.

JOHN

Miss Pierce, do you know what it is to be a cashier at our restaurant?

LELAINA

I think so. It's... taking orders and... making change and... taking...

John is shaking his head; she stops. He leans forward.

JOHN

(dead serious)

It's a juggling act.

LELAINA

A juggling act. You mean... like, metaphorically right?

JOHN

You got people coming at you from over here, over there, up front, in back, at the window, the tables, the condiment exchange. They're all depending on...

(testing her)

Who?

LELAINA

Me?

JOHN

And you gotta be a hundred and fifty percent on your toes a hundred and fifty percent all the time.

She nods, absorbing this.

JOHN

Now I'm gonna throw a few numbers at you, and you add 'em up, quick as you can.

(she nods)

Eighty-five and forty-five.

LELAINA

(quick)

--One forty--

JOHN

--Nope--

LELAINA

--One fifty--

JOHN

--Nope--

LELAINA

--One sixty.

JOHN

Hey, this isn't an auction.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKSIDE - GAZEBO - EARLY EVENING

Lelaina sits alone in a white gazebo that's in the middle of an open expanse of green pasture. The Parkside building is in the background. Patty exits the building and heads for the gazebo. Patty and Lelaina hug when she gets there.

PATTY

Hey, can I bum a pack of smokes?

LELAINA

That is so bad for your asthma.

PATTY

I don't ever smoke them, Lelaina. I sell them, I gamble with them, I get extra food for them, I bribe the night staff with them--They're like little ATM cards.

Lelaina hands her a pack from her purse and they sit down.

LELAINA

So how are you?

PATTY

Caffeine, sugar and sodium free. You can lower your cholesterol just from talking to me. I'm like oat bran, man. Fuckin' oat bran.

LELAINA

You look like oat bran.

PATTY

Mom told me you got fired.

LELAINA

Yeah, and I was just turned down for a job at Wendy's. So my sense of self-worth is just-- it's off charts.

PATTY

Which Wendy's did you go for?

LELAINA

Sugar Creek mini-mall.

PATTY

Man, look at us. I'm in the whacko-ward with a wallet full of cigarettes and you can't get a job in the asshole of the Sugar Creek mini-mall.

(beat)

It's all mom's fault.

LELAINA

Yeah right.

PATTY

It is!--She's a total enabler!

LELAINA

Would you give me a break with the AA newspeak? Okay, she's an enabler, okay, she's fucked up. Okay. But... I don't even know why I'm defending her. I'm sorry, I'm just freaked. I have to ask dad for a loan.

PATTY

Can't your b.f. help you out?

LELAINA

He's in New York. Besides, he's not really my boyfriend.

She looks off. Patty stands, reaches down her pants, into her underwear, and pulls out a ten dollar bill. She holds it out, offering it to Lelaina. Lelaina looks around, worried.

PATTY

Here. My life savings.

LELAINA

Patty, you're not supposed to have money here-- They'll take away your privileges.

PATTY

I kept it in my underwear.

(Lelaina hesitates)

Don't worry--I just showered.

Lelaina looks around again, then takes it quickly.

LELAINA

I'm only taking this so you won't get in trouble--And it's just a loan, okay?

PATTY

Cool your pits--It's not a B.F.D. You can have it.

Lelaina stands and hugs Patty.

LELAINA

Thank you, Patty. I love you.

PATTY

Well, I gotta go to occupational therapy.

LELAINA

Wait--Don't go yet.

PATTY

If I'm late I get an E.B.T.
(off her look)
Early bedtime.

Patty starts back to the building; Lelaina watches her, envious. She steps out of the gazebo, then turns back to watch Patty in the distance. Lelaina shakes her head knowingly, almost smiles: Patty is smoking a cigarette.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

A tee is driven into the grass. A golf ball is poised on top of it... Pat steps up to the ball with a club, lining up his shot. Lelaina stands off to the side. She looks at her dad nervously.

LELAINA

(rehearsed)

As I get older, I realize that honesty is the most important thing. And I want to be honest with you, Dad. The truth is... I was laid off.

--Pat makes his shot: the ball goes off to the side.

PAT

I know how you feel. I had to lay off two people just last week.

Pat takes another ball from his pocket, sets it on the tee.

LELAINA

I need to talk to you about a loan.

PAT

I don't make loans. If I have the money and think it's right, I'll give it to you. But I never ever make loans.

LELAINA

I'm just really short this month.

He makes a good shot: They watch as the ball disappears...

PAT

I'm sorry, baby, but I'll tell you what my daddy told me: If you don't learn to stand on your own two feet, you'll never walk out of my house.

LELAINA

--But I've never asked you for money!

PAT

But I gave you a car. And I pay for your insurance and I pay for your gas.

He pulled out the trump card. She thinks of a new tack.

LELAINA

I know, and I'm totally grateful--

PAT

--Why don't you get a part-time job?

Lelaina looks down. She knows this conversation is over.

LELAINA

...Yeah. Maybe I'll do that.

Pat puts his arm around her, leads her back to the cart.

PAT

What you girls need to learn is ingenuity. There is always more than one way to solve a problem.

LELAINA

...Yeah.

PAT

(tries to cheer her up)
So you get out there and show a little ingenuity.

CUT TO:

MOBIL MONTAGE

- A Mobil gas station sits at an intersection, a beacon.
"She Works Hard for the Money" by Donna Summer starts up.
- Lelaina at Mobil; she is pumping gas into Sammy's Peugeot. She finishes, and Sammy hands her some cash. Lelaina goes inside the Mobil Mart and pays for the gas with her card.
- Lelaina at Mobil; she is pumping gas into Troy's Dodge Dart. She finishes, and Troy gives her some cash. She goes inside and pays for his gas on her card.
- Lelaina at Mobil; she is pumping gas into a stranger's car. She finishes, and the owner of the car, a surly old man, hands her the cash.
- Lelaina is at the Mobil Service Center with a BUSINESSMAN who is having engine work done on his Acura. Lelaina is holding her card.

LELAINA

So you give me the cash, I'll pay for this on my card, and you get a ten percent discount.

The businessman shakes her hand.

- Lelaina in her room, counting her money. She writes down the total: \$389.64.
- Lelaina in the Mobil Mart; she is picking up almost every kind of candy bar and junk food they have, until her arms are full. She goes to the counter, where a fat woman waits for her.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. DINING AREA - NIGHT

Vickie and Sammy are hanging out at the table; she is going over bills. Vickie is still sick, a stuffed nose. Lelaina enters with a bag full of four hundred dollars worth of small bills and lots of change. She is visibly relieved, almost happy. She proudly sets the bag down in front of Vickie.

VICKIE

Well that solves our first problem.

(beat)

Rent's due this week.

Lelaina forgot: she mouths the word "fuck" as Troy enters.

LELAINA
We can't cover it?

VICKIE
(very pointed)
"We"? No, "we" can't cover it because "we"
maxed out "our" Mobil card.

Lelaina is stung; she looks to Troy.

TROY
I already pay for all the utilities.

Vickie sighs, rubs her face.

VICKIE
Then I don't know what to do. I can't work
anymore hours than I already do.

SAMMY
(honestly trying to help)
Hey, Troy, what about your savings for the music
video?

Troy glares at Sammy. Sammy bites his lip; stumbles:

SAMMY
I mean, what did I say?--I meant that--

VICKIE
--What!!--You mean I've been working my ass into
a grave, making myself sick to cover all this
shit--
(holds up bills)
--and you've been holding out because of a
fucking music video pipe dream!?

Lelaina just looks at him in disbelief, betrayed.

LELAINA
You just sat there and watched me grovel and
pump your gas, and never once offered to help
me--Not one goddamn dime? After everything I've
done for you? My god.

TROY
(walking out)
Thanks alot, Sam. 'Preciate it.

SAMMY
(tired of this)
Oh, fuck you.

Lelaina, angry, follows him into

THE LIVING ROOM

where he's searching through one of his boxes.

TROY

Why don't you just ask Mister MTV for the cash--

--Offended, Lelaina starts to say something--

TROY

--Oh I'm sorry--I forgot about your bullshit principles: You can't take money from the rich people you screw, but you can screw the poor people you know right out of it.

LELAINA

So that's what this is about, isn't it? You punishing me, that's what this really is.

TROY

No, listen, you want the money?--You got it, babe. Pipe dreams be damned if they interfere with your personal comfort.

Troy finds a shoebox. Lelaina folds her arms across her chest.

LELAINA

Forget it. I don't want that.

TROY

No really, I insist. Take it.
(she won't)
Fucking take it--

--He hurls the box at her--money (bills) fly everywhere as he storms out, slamming the door behind him.

Lelaina just stands there for a minute... Then she picks up the shoebox and starts putting all the money back into it. Sammy and Vickie enter, and without a word, they all work together gathering up the money and putting it back in the box.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. "GOOD TIMES" SET - EVANS' LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The "Good Times" THEME SONG plays. J.J. Evans is asleep on the couch. We can only see his denim cap peeking out from under the blanket. Thelma Evans enters, wearing her robe. Wait. It's not Thelma. It's Lelaina dressed as Thelma. She goes to the couch and slaps him several times, yelling:

LELAINA

Get up! J.J., get up! GET UP!

Troy, dressed as J.J. with a turtleneck and jeans and a thin moustache, pulls the blanket off and sits up, groggy.

TROY

Girl, this better be good. The ebony prince needs his...

(mugs)

...beauty sleep!

LELAINA

The only beauty sleep that'll work for you is a coma!

Troy sneers at her. Vickie, dressed as Willona Woods (tight pantsuit, scarf around her neck) enters.

VICKIE

Hooo-weee!--I just got back from the boutique and I can hear you cats fighting from the elevator! What'd you do, J.J.?

He mugs again: me? Lelaina rushes over to Vickie.

LELAINA

Oh, Willona, I lost my job and J.J. had to sell his art supplies!

Sammy, dressed as Nathan Bookman, the custodian (a janitor's jumper, tool belt, and lots of padding), enters the front door.

VICKIE

Booger, don't you know the meaning of the word knock?

Troy gets up and puts his arm around Sammy.

TROY

Mr. Bookman, my friend, my main man, my brother... We are currently experiencing what you might call--How shall I put this delicately? Poverty.

SAMMY

Oh, gee, look at the time!

Sammy opens the door, and someone's there. It's Michael as the bald Alderman Davis dressed in a nice suit, wearing specs.

SAMMY

Alderman Davis!?

VICKIE

Well if it ain't the colorized Kojak!

MICHAEL

I'll ignore that, Wynona.

VICKIE

That's Willona, chrome dome.

MICHAEL

Thelma dear, I heard you were having money problems. And I'd like to help you out.

Troy claps his hands, then bends his arms with his hands out:

TROY

Dyn-o-mite!

(beat)

Uh, will this be check or money order, Balderman?--Uh, I mean, "Alderman."

VICKIE

(to Michael)

What's in this for you, billiard head?

MICHAEL

Just extending a helping hand to my...

EVERYONE

...favorite project family.

MICHAEL

And of course, Thelma must agree to run away to New York with me.

LELAINA

I'll do it!

She jumps into his arms.

SAMMY

But, Thelma, what about your bullshit principles?

She just shrugs.

TROY

You can't take my sister away! You'll have to get through me first!

Troy jumps in front of Michael and starts hopping around, throwing exaggeratedly feeble punches, doing wildly ineffective karate chops. The CANNED LAUGHTER is raucous. Michael simply walks around him, Thelma opens the door, and they leave.

TROY
Thelma! Thelma! Get back here, girl!

The phone RINGS. Lelaina pops her head back in.

LELAINA
 That's for me...

CUT TO:

INT. LELAINA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

...The phone is ringing as Lelaina slowly wakes up, still wearing yesterday's clothes and make-up. She tries to pick up the phone, but her hand can't get a grasp on it: it's asleep. She slaps it, pinches it until she gets a little feeling. She answers it:

LELAINA
 Hello?

INTERCUT:

INT. PHONE BOOTH/EXT. CROWDED STREET - SAME

Michael is standing in a phone booth, but he talks on his cellular phone.

MICHAEL
 Lelaina. Hi--Did I wake you up?

LELAINA (V.O.)
 Michael!?

MICHAEL
 Listen. Don't kill me. Okay, I took your tape, I showed it. Don't--just--They freaked out. Okay? They want to do it, they want to buy it-- They want more stuff, more tapes.

LELAINA

sits up, excited, but still trying to make sense of this.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 Do you hate me? I'm sorry, really.

LELAINA
 They liked it? For real?

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 What am I, gonna make it up? They pyschotically loved it. Is this okay? I mean, I know it's not PBS, but--

She stands up, swallows, excited. She smiles.

LELAINA

Okay!? Are you kidding? I was this close to selling fruit at intersections.

MICHAEL

MICHAEL

Well, don't, don't. Just keep working, and I'll be there in a few days, and I'm like, I'm thinking about you every second here--

(his phone beeps)

--Oh shit. My batteries are going.

LELAINA (V.O.)

Where are you?

MICHAEL

I'm, where am I? I'm in a phone booth.

LELAINA (V.O.)

Why are you on a cellular phone?

That's a good question. He thinks.

MICHAEL

I have no idea.

LELAINA (V.O.)

(laughs)

Michael, I really miss you.

MICHAEL

I'll call you back tonight. I love you.

LELAINA (V.O.)

No, I love you!

MICHAEL

You're amazing.

LELAINA

is twirling herself up in the chord and spinning, happy.

LELAINA

No, you're amazing!

MICHAEL (V.O.)

We're both amazing. I'll see you--Oh no, I think it's about to--

--His voice cuts off.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lelaina's on the couch, putting a tape in her camcorder, dusting the lens, etc. Her camera case is opened on the coffee table. She closes it and finds Vickie's notebook underneath. Curious, she picks it up. She looks around, then opens it:

most names have been "X'd out, the word "CONDOM" written over them. A couple have a big question mark beside them.

INT. VICKIE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lelaina worriedly enters Vickie's bedroom, notebook in hand. Sammy's lying on her bed, resting his chin on his hands, wearing dark shades. He is eye to eye with Vickie's phone.

LELAINA

...Sam?

SAMMY

She wouldn't let me go with her.

LELAINA

Where is she?

CUT TO:

EXT. CLINIC - LATER

Vickie emerges from the clinic, stone-faced. She walks down the steps, but stops, surprised, when she sees

LELAINA

in the distance, waiting for her. Lelaina sees Vickie. They just look at each other for a moment, then Lelaina begins walking towards her...

Vickie comes down a few steps. As Lelaina approaches...

VICKIE

What are you doing here?

LELAINA

What am I doing here?--I'm freaking out worried about you.

VICKIE

(almost disbelief)
Really?

LELAINA

I'm sorry, Vickie. I'm sorry about being such a macro-bitch. God, I just kept thinking how you have that cold and... I started to think, you know...

VICKIE

...I'm sorry too, Laney.

There is a quiet moment; Lelaina is trying to read Vickie...

VICKIE

You know, I don't know why I keep thinking about this, but remember sophomore Thanksgiving when we bounced a check on that thirty pound turkey?

LELAINA

(hesitates)

Yeah?

VICKIE

(nostalgic)

And we tried to cook it on the hot-plate--

LELAINA

--Uh-huh.

VICKIE

And then we went to Popeye's with that sock full of nickels. Goddamn. I wish we could do that again.

Vickie sighs nostalgically; Lelaina is now very worried, interpreting Vickie's sentimentality to mean the worst--She grabs Vickie's shoulders--

LELAINA

--Vickie, what are the results?

VICKIE

(dismissive)

Oh, negative.

Lelaina half-laughs, relieved:

LELAINA

Oh god. Why didn't you just tell me?

Lelaina laughs; Vickie laughs with her as they hug.

LELAINA

Hey, are you hungry?

VICKIE

I'm starving.

LELAINA

Then fuck it: Let's go to Popeye's right now.

VICKIE

(smiles, definitely)

Okay.

Lelaina puts her arm around Vickie as they walk off.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV INT. CAMPUS BUILDING - U OF H - DAY

A long computer print-out sign reads: "GRADUATE REGISTRATION." There are tables for each discipline, each with a very long line of people waiting to sign up. Sammy surveys the room.

SAMMY

This is gonna take forever.

LELAINA (O.C.)

Have you decided what to get your master's in?

SAMMY

Yeah. I'm going to get my master's in... the shortest line.

MOMENTS LATER

"MASTER OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY - COURSE REQUIREMENTS" reads the cover of the packet handed to Sammy. He shrugs: could be worse.

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Sammy is sitting on the hood of his car, drinking a Coke.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: SAMMY

SAMMY

I was always terrified of the "Permanent Record." You know how everyone tells you in school, "This will go down on your permanent record." I imagined that one day I would go into a job interview and the boss would look at my permanent record then ask me, "Well, Mr. Buck, do you plan to write on our desks? Are you going to talk when I'm talking? Are you thinking about passing notes during our board meetings?"

CUT TO:

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV EXT. U OF H - SMALL CAMPUS BUILDING - DAY

Sammy is standing next to a statue of a Gargoyle. The glass door of the building says "DEPT. OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY."

SAMMY

I've been celibate for five years now. I'm ready for a relationship, but it's so hard to meet people--I refuse to go to bars or have casual sex because I'm terrified of you-know-what. That's part of the reason I'm staying in school. I have a better chance of meeting someone here.

(a beat; to Gargoyle)

What are you doing this Saturday?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Troy is reclined on the couch, absorbed in "Aesthetic Theory" by Theodor Adorno, smoking, looking a little grunged out. Michael pokes his head inside...

MICHAEL

...Hello?

Troy looks up and finds Michael standing there, dressed in a nice suit, looking very handsome.

MICHAEL

Hi, how ya doin'--Sorry to just walk in, but your door's open and--

TROY

--Lelaina's getting dressed.

Michael sits down on the arm of the couch, then decides to stand, very uncomfortable under Troy's disdainful stare.

MICHAEL

I'll just--I don't know if she told you, but I was just up in New York with the tapes she made, and the stuff she shot of you is really, it's great stuff. The whole thing about nobody eating the eggs...

TROY

I was quoting.

He goes back to his book.

MICHAEL

That's okay, it's still, you know, and anyway, the airtime will be a good thing for your band too. By the way, I'm looking forward to seeing Hey That's My Bicycle.

Troy looks up, just for a second, then goes back to the book, lets this one slide: too easy.

MICHAEL

'Cause we're really into new bands at the channel, especially underground.

TROY

I'll remember that next time I'm on a subway.

Michael thinks about that first, then courtesy laughs. Then he wonders if he should've laughed at all. He looks at Troy, irritated, starts to say something, but

Lelaina enters, and for the first time, she is not dressed in black. She wears the light-colored crochet dress. She looks stunning, but she doesn't look like herself. Both Troy and Michael almost gasp. Lelaina stops, looks at them watching her.

LELAINA

What?

TROY

What happened to your normal clothes?

MICHAEL

Wow. Lelaina, look at you. Where'd you get that dress?

LELAINA

I don't know, I just bought it, I thought for the premiere and stuff I should--It looks stupid, doesn't it?--I'll go change.

She starts out, but Michael stops her.

MICHAEL

No, no, you look beautiful. You look like...I can't even think of, like, like...

TROY

A doily.

LELAINA

I'm gonna change.

MICHAEL

No, don't, don't change.

TROY
And don't go thinking for yourself either,
Lelaina.

Michael turns on Troy:

MICHAEL
Hey, man, what is your glitch?

TROY
(smiles)
My... "glitch"?

Lelaina takes Michael's arm, pulling him towards the door.

LELAINA
We're already late, let's just--

MICHAEL
--No, wait a minute, whoa, hang on a second. If
you have a problem with me, I mean, let's just
get this out. Do I like offend you? Have I
stepped over some line in the sands of coolness?
Well excuse me if someone doesn't know the
secret handshake with you.

TROY
There's no secret handshake. There's a secret
IQ prerequisite, but there's no secret
handshake.

MICHAEL
(stumbles)
Wha--You--oh man, wait a minute.

TROY
Hey. Rest those synapses.

LELAINA
Troy, please--

MICHAEL
(flustered)
--You've just got a thing with the world, man,
and hey, that's great, but you're dealing with
people here, okay?--Not just, like,
intelligence, uh, uh, you know--
(searches)
--intelligence quotations.

Troy just laughs: Is Michael really this lame?

LELAINA
Just ignore him!

TROY MICHAEL
Done. No.

They both look at her; even she isn't sure whom she was addressing. Michael takes a breath, calming himself.

 MICHAEL
 Look, let's just--let's go, Lelaina. You don't need this.

They go to the door.

 TROY
 You don't know what she needs.

Michael takes the bait.

 MICHAEL
 Oh, I think I know what she needs in a way that you never will.

 LELAINA
 My god!--What is--

 TROY
 (dismissive, waves him off)
 Ah, fuck you and buy me dinner.

 MICHAEL
 Well someone should.

For once, Troy does not have a comeback. He is rendered mute. Lelaina looks down, caught, embarrassed. Troy smirks, then walks out of the apartment, slamming the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. SCREENING ROOM - LATER

Many of Michael's associates, in their 20s and 30s are gathered around a big-screen TV; they talk, laugh, munch on hors d'oeuvres.

Lelaina is standing alone at the back of the room, very nervous. Michael approaches, holding up a remote control.

 MICHAEL
 You ready?

She nods. He dims the lights. People look over, stop talking.

MICHAEL

Okay everybody. It's a special night, 'cause as you know, we're entering into a new phase at the channel, and getting into real programming. And the first step is this remarkable piece by Lelaina here. And all I can say is, hang on, 'cause this is gonna change the face of In Your Face.

Everyone settles in to watch. He starts the tape, turns up the volume. The TV screen turns blue...

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - OPENING

We fade in on a bowl of Alpha-Bits cereal, where the cereal has been arranged to spell out the words: "REALITY BITES".

COMPUTER VOICE

Reality bites.

The image dissolves into computer animation/graphics with the words "Reality Bites" filling up the screen in different fonts.

JUMBLED COMPUTER VOICES

Reality bites, reality bites, reality bites,
reality bites, reality bites--

Then we cut back to a the bowl of cereal, but this time the Alpha-Bits spell out: "BY LELAINA PIERCE".

COMPUTER VOICE

By Lelaina Pierce.

BACK TO SCENE

People clap. Lelaina smiles, proud to see her name.

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - HOUSTON

Lightening speed cuts of different images of Houston: quick zoom-ins, upside down, crazy angles of the Montrose/Westheimer area. None of it from her documentary. Cool alternative, but still "pop" music plays underneath.

BACK TO SCENE

LELAINA

(whispers)

What's this?

MICHAEL

Oh, just transitional stuff.

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - LELAINA'S DOCUMENTARY

The music stops. The following footage is from her documentary, though the images and sounds have been cut up and manipulated:

TROY

My parents got divorced--

LELAINA

My parents got divorced--

VICKIE

They've been married twenty-six years--

SAMMY

I don't think my parents ever really loved each other.

VICKIE

--and they're like brother and sister.

LELAINA

--when I was fourteen.

TROY

--when I was five.

TROY AND LELAINA

The music starts again as we see shots from Lelaina's documentary of her and Troy being physical:

- Troy trying to feed Lelaina cake
- Lelaina putting her arm around Troy
- Troy pulling Lelaina over, feigning passion
- Troy and Lelaina side by side on the couch
- Troy and Lelaina playfully swatting each other
- Troy pulling Lelaina into his lap

The music stops, and we cut in and out of different documentary sections:

VICKIE

God, would you guys just--
 ("dubbed in")
 --"do it"--and get it over with?

LELAINA

You know I don't do that anymore.

TROY

You gotta love her.

BACK TO SCENE

People laugh. Lelaina is looking very worried.

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - APARTMENT

The music continues under quick cuts of Lelaina's apartment; all from her documentary, but now all jumbled together.

LELAINA (V.O.)

--I swore to myself I would never get married.

Then the music stops again as we cut in and out of different documentary sections:

SAMMY

I'm ready for a relationship--

VICKIE

See, relationships are--

SAMMY

--so hard--

VICKIE

--too complicated--

SAMMY

Except for clowns.

VICKIE

--or too simple.

SAMMY

I've been celibate--

TROY

I'm through with the whole wank-a-rama.

SAMMY

--because I'm terrified of you-know-what.

VICKIE

--bikini waxing.

TROY

Frontal nudity.

SAMMY

--this erection.

VICKIE

I'm so depressed!

TROY
I love breast cancer reports.

VICKIE
I use protection--

TROY
And when they tell me how adolescent it is, I
just smile and look them in the eye and say...

VICKIE
Sometimes I get that not-so-fresh feeling.

VICKIE
I think being in love would be like--

SAMMY
--casual sex--

TROY
--a black hole.

VICKIE
--a warm puppy.

SAMMY
What are you doing this Saturday?

BACK TO SCENE

Lelaina is now very confused and somewhat angry. She looks to Michael, but he's enjoying the show.

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV - UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

The music starts again under several quick cuts of the U of H campus, all at weird angles, none of it from her documentary.

The music stops as we see the sea of hats at graduation off Lelaina's documentary.

TROY (V.O.)
They're not all dumb.

We see Lelaina at the podium, giving her speech.

VICKIE (V.O.)
Four years of college--

TROY (V.O.)
Most of them are very depressed.

VICKIE (V.O.)
--and it's coffee jobs for all of us.

TROY (V.O.)
We know you slept your way to the podium.

SAMMY (V.O.)
"This will go down on your permanent record."

LELAINA
Fellow graduates, the answer is simple. The answer... The answer is..

--Cut to Troy--

TROY
Frontal nudity.

--Then Phineas in Vickie's bedroom--

PHINEAS
Yeah.

--Then Vickie:

VICKIE
Let's order a pizza.

BACK TO SCENE

Everyone's laughing enthusiastically, including Michael. Lelaina's mouth is agape with horror and disbelief.

ON VIDEOTAPE/TV

The music starts again under the (non-documentary) image of a Domino's pizza box as it's opened and several hands reach in the box (in fast-motion) and grab a slice...

TROY (V.O.)
--"The answers are inside this."

BACK TO SCENE

Lelaina, livid, looks at Michael.

MICHAEL
It's just a tie-in.

Two seconds from exploding, Lelaina walks out. Michael watches her, then looks at the audience, torn. He runs after her.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Lelaina is briskly walking down the street, smoking a cigarette. Michael comes running up behind her. He grabs her arm, she turns to him, jerking her arm away.

MICHAEL

Lelaina--What are you doing!?!--What's wrong?

LELAINA

That wasn't my work, that's not what I did, that's not what I wanted to--Nothing! Goddammit, I trusted you!

MICHAEL

Look, it was long, it was a little long--Don't you understand, this is the way it works--People aren't, they, it's--

(slaps palm repeatedly:)

--Boom, boom, boom, fast--It's fast cutting.

LELAINA

Well you cut out everything I had left that meant anything to me, that I was proud of, I signed your stupid contract for your two-bit tee-vee station--Don't you get it? Somewhere in there? No, you don't even realize what you've done, you just don't get it!

MICHAEL

No, you don't get it--You have this audience, these kids, and you have this great piece of work, and it's like trying to make them eat meatloaf and they don't want to eat it--You've got to give it to them like here comes the plane, it's coming into the hangar. But it's still meatloaf!

LELAINA

It was never meatloaf!

MICHAEL

That's a bad--I'm sorry, I just tried--What do you want from me?

LELAINA

Everything. Everything or nothing at all.

Michael looks at her, exhausted, confused. A long beat.

MICHAEL

What? I mean, my god, no one can be perfect--everybody cannot be Troy riding his melted cheese sandwich--

LELAINA

--Don't fucking start on Troy--

MICHAEL

--I mean I wish I could be like him and live off mottos and, and creeds and all that shit, okay? But I am living in the real world, and I have ideals also. They are that, you know, I care about you, alot, and I want to see you happy. I thought this would make you happy.

LELAINA

What? How could you possibly think this would make me happy? You totally fucked me over.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I fucked you over--Ooo, I had a plan, I had a book: Day twelve, uh, Lelaina is coming into my, uh, trust and now only six more days until I get to fuck her over--I mean, come on! What do you think!?

LELAINA

I don't know what to think.

ASSOCIATE(O.S.)

(calling)

--Michael?

MICHAEL

I'll be there in a minute!

ASSOCIATE(O.S.)

Hey, it's hysterical! It's incredible!

LELAINA

God.

MICHAEL

(sighs, sincere)

Look... I'll take the pizza thing out.

She almost laughs. She tosses her cigarette to the ground.

LELAINA

It's been surreal.

She walks off. He wants to follow her, but he looks at the building and his waiting associate. He looks back at Lelaina.

MICHAEL

(calls to Lelaina's back)

I'll see you tomorrow night! Okay?!

She doesn't stop walking.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lelaina is lying on the couch, singing sadly to herself "I'm Just a Bill" from Schoolhouse Rock. Troy starts to enter from the kitchen-- but stops when he sees Lelaina, hears her singing. He watches her affectionately.

LELAINA

I'm just a bill, yes I'm only a bill, and I'm sitting here on Capitol Hill. Well it's--

--She stops when she sees Troy staring at her. She sits up.

TROY

How'd the big premiere turn out?

LELAINA

Great. It turned out really great.

She knows he knows she's lying. She stands up. He follows her as she walks into

THE KITCHEN

where she gets a Diet Coke from the fridge. He watches her as she takes a sip, then rubs her face, tired.

LELAINA

They're just...videotapes anyway. Who cares?

(a beat, lamenting)

But I worked so hard on them. I mean, god-- Forget it. I sound pathetic.

TROY

No you don't. It's just me here, okay? It's just me.

He rubs her back, friendly.

LELAINA

(angry)

I know it's stupid, but it really meant something to me, you know? It wasn't like gonna end nuclear war or anything, but it meant something to me.

He puts a caring arm around her. She's trying hard not to cry. He gently caresses her cheek.

LELAINA

Why can't things just go back to normal at the end of the half hour, you know, like "The Brady Bunch" or something.

TROY

Because Mr. Brady died of AIDS, okay? Things aren't really like that.

LELAINA

...I was really gonna be something by the age of twenty-three.

TROY

Honey, the only thing you have to be by the age of twenty-three is yourself.

LELAINA

I don't know who that is anymore.

TROY

I do. And we all love her. I love her. She breaks my heart over and over, but I love her.

He pulls her into a hug. She holds onto him like a life-raft. Troy holds on to her tightly. He kisses her cheek. Then he kisses her on the mouth, very passionately. She responds equally passionate, without thinking. They break. He presses her against him; he smells her hair, breathes deeply. Then he kisses her again, hotly; they really fit like this. They look like they're melting together.

INT. LELAINA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Troy and Lelaina are on her futon, nude; he is passionately kissing her neck as they make love. Her eyes are closed as she abandons herself. She clings to him, moving with him, digging her fingers into his back. He looks at her face.

TROY

I've wanted you like this for all these years.

LELAINA

So have I.

He kisses her mouth fervently.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE BRADY BUNCH HOUSE - MARSHA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

B.g. situational MUSIC from the TV show starts. Marsha is asleep in bed, but that's not Marsha. That's Lelaina as Marsha Brady. And lying next to her is a guy with dark, wavy hair. He turns over--It's Troy as Greg Brady.

The door to the room flies open, and in walks a woman with cropped blonde hair carrying an armful of laundry. It's Vickie as Carol Brady. She stops when she sees Lelaina and Troy in bed together. She drops the laundry.

VICKIE
 Marsha!?!... Greg?
 (yells)
 Mike!

Some CANNED LAUGHTER as Lelaina and Troy wake up.

LELAINA
 No, mom, please don't tell Dad. He won't understand.

A geeky looking guy with dark hair peeks inside. It's Sammy as Bobby Brady.

SAMMY
 Far out!

TROY
 Beat it, squirt.

SAMMY
 I'm not a squirt.

TROY
 I said scram!

Sammy sticks out his tongue and leaves. CANNED LAUGHTER. Vickie approaches the bed.

VICKIE
 Honey, you can't sleep with your brother. We've told you that.

LELAINA
 I'll never do it again--I promise.

Mike Brady walks into the room: he is Michael. He shakes his head, sighs, walks to the bed.

MICHAEL
 I expect a little bit more from you than this.

TROY
 It's been building up for over four years, Dad. She just couldn't help herself.

MICHAEL
 Well, you're grounded. Both of you. You're not to leave this room.

TROY
 Groovy.

VICKIE

Mike, I don't know what to do with her. She's a mess.

LELAINA

Me!? What about him?

TROY

Hey, at least I have my principles.

LELAINA

So do I!

Troy laughs. Michael and Vickie laugh along with the maniacal CANNED LAUGHTER.

CUT TO:

INT. LELAINA'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Lelaina's eyes pop open. It is very early, about nine. Troy is not in bed with her. She looks around the room, surveying the situation. There is a box of condoms next to her bed.

Troy is standing by the door, getting dressed for work.

LELAINA

...Where are you going?

TROY

I have to go to work.

He starts out of the room. She sits up.

LELAINA

Wait a minute.

He stops, stares at her.

LELAINA

I mean... That's it?

TROY

No. I'll see you tonight.

He starts out again, but stops. He goes to her and gives her a mechanical, perfunctory kiss on the cheek.

TROY

I have to go, but we'll talk at the club.

He quickly walks out of the room, closes the door behind him. Lelaina stares after him. She lies back down, confused.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN GROUNDS (COFFEEHOUSE) - NIGHT

Troy's band "HEY THAT'S MY BIKE" is on stage, performing "Eight Is Never Enough", an original song about welfare mothers who have babies only to increase their income.

Lelaina enters the dark smokey club, stressed out, chain-smoking. She walks towards the stage--but is stopped by a hand grabbing her arm: it's Sammy, sitting at a table with Vickie.

SAMMY
(anxious)
Tell me it's not true.

She just looks down. Sammy is shocked; Vickie grabs her hand.

VICKIE
Oh, Laney, sex is the quickest way to ruin a
friendship.

Lelaina looks at Vickie, knows she's right. The crowd applauds as the band finishes the song.

TROY
(over mic)
Thank you.
(applause)
Now we're gonna go have a new American cheese
snack idea.

LELAINA
I have to talk to him.

He takes off his guitar. Lelaina starts to walk off--when Sammy's new friend LUKE WEINBRENNER, a handsome guy in his twenties, approaches the table.

SAMMY
Oh--Lelaina, Vickie, I want you to meet Luke.
He's getting his doctorate in Medieval History.

Lelaina watches Troy as he steps down from the stage. She starts off--but Vickie pulls her back.

VICKIE
(low)
Lelaina, it really means alot to Sammy that you
like Luke. Do you know what I mean?

Lelaina looks at Sammy and Luke together. Luke lights a Dunhill, French inhales, John Waters style. She gets it.

VICKIE
So don't run off yet.

Lelaina sees Troy across the club, getting coffee.

LELAINA

Okay, okay. Let me just--hold on.

Lelaina again starts off, but doesn't get two steps before she hears from behind her--

MICHAEL (O.S.)

--Lelaina?

She does a mental one-eighty as she remembers the date with Michael. She feels a hard rock in her stomach. She slowly turns to find him, holding a brochure and two plane tickets. He's pretty wound-up. Vickie and Sammy stare at him, shocked at his presence.

MICHAEL

(to Vickie and Sammy)

Hi. Hi.

Lelaina is speechless. He moves in close to her. She watches Troy, who hasn't seen her yet.

MICHAEL

(excited)

Don't say anything--Look, I screwed up. I'm getting your tapes back. It's not definite yet, but listen to me. I want to make this up to you, you mean so much to me, Lelaina. I got us two tickets for the Red Rock Trails in Arizona. We'll go hiking in the desert, just like you wanted.

TROY

is still at the bar. He watches with complete and total disdain, almost disbelief, as Michael takes

LELAINA'S

hands. She quickly looks back at the bar for Troy... but he has left. There is no sign of him.

MICHAEL

This'll be great for us because you were right, we need to get away and get perspective on everything.

LELAINA

Michael, I don't--

MICHAEL

--Listen, you and me after a long hike and we're sweating together and we'll get a saltscrub and just peel off all the layers, scrub them off and get down to you and me. I'm telling you, look, they've got...

(shows her brochure)

...two o'clock canyon explorers, three o'clock meditation--or, or we don't have to do anything. They have wallyball too.

LELAINA

I, I don't know what you're talking about.

She frantically scans the club for Troy.

MICHAEL

I'm talking about giving me another chance here. I screwed up, alright? I know, I'm a jerk, look at me, I'm a jerk, alright?

LELAINA

Listen, there's something I should tell you...

Lelaina looks around, getting panicky...

MICHAEL

Oh. Hi.

...and she bumps right into Troy.

TROY

(mock surprise)

Well hi Lelaina.

LELAINA

Hi.

TROY

Is that a frog in your throat or are you just glad to see me?

(very nice)

Hi Mike. Thanks for coming down. No hard feelings, man.

Troy offers his hand, as a truce. Michael thinks a second, then shakes it. Lelaina is frightened by Troy's congeniality. He knows this, and he loves it.

TROY

Lelaina, you're looking a little pale.

MICHAEL

Yeah, are, are you okay? .

VICKIE

(trying to help out)

She's fine--She just had too many Diet Cokes today.

TROY

Yeah, this girl is koo-koo for Cocoa Puffs--So are you gonna tell him or am I?

He is looking at Lelaina, though he keeps that polite smile on his face. She feigns confusion, but Troy's gaze is relentless. She weighs her options... Troy starts whistling the theme song from "Jeopardy". Lelaina is suddenly incensed, livid.

LELAINA

(low but acidic)

Why do you always have to be so funny!?
--Why is it so goddamn important for you to be funny!?

TROY

Because it's all I've got. Isn't it.

LELAINA

(to Michael)

Excuse me one second.

She takes his arm and leads him off to the

PHONE HALL

by the bathrooms.

TROY

You want to tell me what the hell he's doing here!!--I wanted to talk to you.

LELAINA

What the hell do you care? You totally bailed on me this morning!

TROY

I panicked. It happens. But I thought we could work it out, you know? Okay, look, I don't know if this is the right time for us. I mean, I meant everything I said last night, but...

Lelaina glares at him coldly.

TROY

--Would you--Don't look at me like that. Jesus, I'm not saying, you know, okay?--I mean, I know you're the only woman I could ever commit myself to.

LELAINA

So what--do I get a medal? I won the Great Commitment Cook-Off and you just run away?

(beat)

I knew this would happen.

TROY

I don't want to lose you. I don't know, I've never had an experience like this before. I've never--

--She sneers, turns away from him. He grabs her wrist and turns her to him.

TROY

I've never had sex with someone I loved before.

She wrests her hands free.

LELAINA

Well, congratulations Troy Dyer. Welcome to the world of the emotionally mature. It's a nice place to visit--you might bump into Michael, he lives there.

TROY

Yeah right, Michael's so mature because he lets you navigate that entire relationship. Well I'm sorry, but you can't navigate me, Lelaina. I might do mean things, I might hurt you, I might even run away without your permission and you might hate me forever. And I know that scares the shit out of you, because I'm the only real thing you have.

Lelaina is struck by this, but incensed. A long beat; she glares hard at him.

LELAINA

Fuck you to tears.

She walks away, livid. This isn't what Troy wanted.

TROY

Lelaina--wait a minute--wait! Lelaina!

BAND MEMBER(O.S.)

Troy, we're on.

Troy watches Lelaina as she reaches the table and sits next to Michael. She scoots her chair closer to him.

A beat. Troy turns and delivers a solid punch to the wall.

BACK AT THE TABLE

LELAINA

Michael, listen, I'm sorry--

MICHAEL

--No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Don't you get it?
That's what all this is.

Lelaina opens her mouth to say something--

MICHAEL

(charming, almost laughing)
--Huh-uh. Listen, you and me, we'll saltscrub
it all away.

Troy and the band take their places on stage and warm up. He looks at Lelaina who's sitting close to Michael.

TROY

(smiles viciously)
This one's for you, Laney.

Lelaina holds her breath... The guitar begins the intro to "The Fuck Song," a raucous song by Olivia Cornell.

TROY

(singing)
Well, you ever hear the word fuck, baby?
You ever hear the word screw?
How 'bout me? How 'bout you? How 'bout now?

People begin clapping along. Lelaina looks deeply stung. She closes her eyes. Vickie looks down, embarrassed for her. Michael is starting to wonder about all of this.

TROY

Well, I see that look in your eye,
and you know that it's been in mine
How 'bout grabbin' for the gold?
Just put your mind to it
You better damn well do it
before we both get old.

Pretty soon, the audience is going wild, some standing on their chairs, singing along. Lelaina can no longer stand it. She quickly walks off, towards the front doors as the song relentlessly continues. Vickie jumps up, runs to Lelaina, but she waves her off. Michael looks from Lelaina to Troy and back to Lelaina as she disappears out of the club.

He gets what's going on. He stands up, angry.

MICHAEL
 (to himself)
 Goddammit.

He walks out of the club as the song finishes. Luke looks at Sammy, confused. Sammy leans over to him and whispers in his ear. Luke gasps. Then he shakes his head.

LUKE
 The worst thing the Middle Ages gave us is the
 concept of romantic love.

EXT. CLUB/INT. BMW - SAME

Lelaina is in her car; she takes several deep breaths, calming herself down. She puts a cassette tape in. Lolly, Lolly, Lolly from "Schoolhouse Rock" begins.

LELAINA
 (sings along)
 Lolly, Lolly, Lolly, get your adverbs here.
 Lolly, Lolly, Lolly, got some adverbs here.

She backs out.

AT THE CLUB ENTRANCE

Michael watches Lelaina's car drives out of the lot. Troy bursts out of the club, looking around for Lelaina but he only finds Michael, whom he purposely ignores as he walks toward the street.

MICHAEL
 (to Troy's back)
 Nice job. Very well done.

TROY
 I don't want to hear it. Not from you.

MICHAEL
 Yeah well, I forgot I'm not qualified to talk to you--Sorry I can't be Mister Hey-look-at-me-I'm-Buddah-on-the-mountaintop. But you know what you are? You know what you remind me of? That guy in the hat with the things, with the bells, the uh, uh--

TROY
 --Court jester.

MICHAEL

Yeah, where everything's so easy to laugh at from a safe distance in CleverCleverland. But you know what happens to him? They find his skull in a grave and they say, "I knew him, and he was funny." And the guy, the court jester dies all by himself.

TROY

Where'd you hear that? The Renaissance Festival?

Michael shakes his head in disbelief: that's his whole point. Troy turns and faces Michael.

TROY

Besides, everyone dies all by himself.

MICHAEL

If you really believe that, then why are you standing out here in this parking lot with me?

Troy turns away, walks off. Michael remains, unmoving. He hears Troy's engine starting. He looks at the

plane tickets in his hand as "Walk on the Wild Side" starts.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE

INT. AIRLINE TICKET LOBBY - DAWN

From the airline's logo on the wall, we tilt down to find... Troy at the counter with his opened shoebox. He hands about half the money to the agent; the man counts it out, gives Troy a ticket.

INT. AIRPORT - GATE - LATER

Troy sits with his bag beside him, reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

Lelaina enters, still dressed in last night's clothes, tired. She walks into the living room... and her heart sinks. It is spotless: Troy is gone. Worried, she walks out...

INT. GAP - LATER

Lelaina enters the Gap, disconcerted, looking around for Troy. Vickie's at the counter, bagging a sale. Lelaina approaches her. Vickie knows why she's here.

VICKIE
He's gone, Laney.

Dejected, Lelaina leans on the counter.

INT. DOWNTOWN GROUNDS - NIGHT

Another band, "SECTS AND VIOLETS", is on stage. Lelaina is by herself, watching the door. A guy who's a version of a poor-man's Troy walks in. For an instant, she is hopeful, she starts to get up, but he turns around, and she realizes it's not him. She goes back to watching the door.

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN THE ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

Nothing but the occasional cactus for miles and miles. Several healthy, toned, tan people sit Yoga-style, their eyes closed, their hands on their knees, palms up. Michael is in the middle of the group, in the same position, a bottle of water beside him. He opens his eyes, peeking, and looks around, uncomfortable. He is very out of place. A large Native American man leads the group meditation.

INT. LELAINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lelaina is lying on her futon, holding the tape Michael gave to her. She rolls over and puts it in her boombox, presses play--

INT. HOSPITAL - SAME

Troy sits alone in the empty, sterile waiting room, under a "No Smoking" sign. He's chain-smoking. He hasn't slept for three days. He rubs his face, exhausted.

He goes to the pay-phone and dials. He waits...

LELAINA(V.O.)
Hello?

He hangs up. He leans against the wall.

INT. LELAINA'S BEDROOM - SAME

Lelaina holds the receiver, thinking. She sighs sadly and hangs up. She knows it was him. She turns off the tape.

END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. PARKSIDE - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

There are five chairs arranged in a circle: Pat and Cynthia are sitting on either side of the COUNSELOR. Patty, wearing boxers, a t-shirt and house-slippers, sits next to Lelaina. Everyone's watching Patty, who is resting her face in her hands.

COUNSELOR

Patty would like to share something with you in this week's session. Are you ready to share?

PATTY

Forget it--I was just hanging out, okay?--I was bored. My roommate had this bottle of Final Net, and I was just curious to see what it tasted like.

Lelaina closes her eyes, disappointed. She puts a comforting hand on Patty's back.

COUNSELOR

So you did not drink that hairspray for its alcohol content?

PATTY

No!

The counselor holds up a brown paper bag.

COUNSELOR

Patty. Put your bullshit in this bag and level with us.

Patty dramatically puts her hands to her head.

PATTY

Oh. My. God. I'm spinning--I'm spinning.

COUNSELOR

Find your center. Find your center.

Patty closes her eyes and finds her center.

PATTY

I drank the hairspray because... I'm dying.

Lelaina exchanges worried looks with her parents.

COUNSELOR

Patty, tell us why you're dying.

Patty suddenly starts to cry.

PATTY

Because I don't want to get out of this place because I don't have a family to come home to!

Lelaina bows her head empathetically. Pat stands up. He walks over towards Patty--when Cynthia stands up.

CYNTHIA

It was your daddy who remarried six months after the divorce while I was waiting because I thought--

Pat takes the bait; he turns and looks at Cynthia, infuriated.

PAT

Dammit, Cynthia!--You filled their heads with that kind of crap then sent them off to me for a weekend, no wonder they're confused.

LELAINA

Stop it!

CYNTHIA

They're confused because their daddy doesn't care about anything but golf clubs, cars and that goddamn Carol Ann.

PAT

I'm about to walk right out of here.

CYNTHIA

Well, darlin', what the hell is new?

PAT

That's it--

--Pat starts to walk out--Lelaina stands up--

LELAINA

(screams)

Stop it!

Everything stops... Everyone looks at her, taken aback. She stands up. She looks at all of them as if for the first time. She almost laughs.

LELAINA

I am so sick of you people, I could throw up. I have tried so hard--so hard--to make everything okay, but I quit.

She picks up her purse.

CYNTHIA

Honey, nobody ever asked you to make anything okay.

PAT

My god, Lelaina, what are you talking about? You've gotten almost everything you've ever wanted, we never hit you--

LELAINA

--What a big accomplishment. Oh, gee, thank you so much for never hitting me, you just scored extra bonus points, Pat.

She's never talked to him like this before.

CYNTHIA

Your problem is you never had to suffer.

LELAINA

Right, okay, I never had to suffer. God, look at us. I can't believe that we ever even lived in the same house. Or went to Disneyworld or watched "Little House on the Prairie" together. It's like it never happened. Family portraits hidden away. Polaroids cut up. New furniture, new dishes, new moms and dads, kids split in half. You two can't even look at each other, she's drowning herself in Final Net, and I...

She starts to tear up, despite herself. But this time she doesn't run into the bathroom; she stands her ground and makes them watch.

LELAINA

...God, I'm still taking out the trash. Who am I if I'm not the one taking out the fucking trash? I don't even know.

There is a reverent pause. A deep-seated chord has been struck in all of them. They know it's true. Lelaina takes a deep breath, like a brick has finally been lifted off her chest.

LELAINA

But I'm gonna find out. I know it's not your fault, and I know you did your best, but I've gotta get out of here, at least for a while, I'm checking out of this thermonuclear family.

She walks out. They can do nothing but watch her go. Pat sits down next to Cynthia. Patty reverently stares after Lelaina. She smiles, proud.

EXT. PARKSIDE - LATER

Lelaina walks through the parking lot. Patty bursts out of the building, runs to catch up to her, calls her name. Lelaina turns around. Patty approaches, smiling. They hug tightly. Lelaina walks on; Patty watches her go, happy. She waves a small goodbye to Lelaina's back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAP - DAY

Vickie walks over to an employee whose back is to us as she concentrates on folding jeans.

VICKIE

Hey, I still need your social.

She turns around: it's Lelaina, wearing Gap clothes.

LELAINA

533-84-0987.

Vickie begins writing this then stops. They look at each other:

VICKIE/LELAINA

The only thing I really learned in college!

They high-five, but Lelaina freezes, shocked when she sees

Michael, standing at the entrance, wearing a sweatsuit and a very deep tan; his hair is lighter. He waves to her and mouths "Hi."

Vickie and Lelaina exchange surprised looks.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRANSCO TOWER - WALL OF WATER - HOURS LATER

Michael and Lelaina walk in the park area in front of the huge, modern-art fountain across from the mall. Lelaina is a little nervous, glancing at her watch as Michael is intense, excited.

MICHAEL

--Then on the sixth day, I went on the overnighiter, just me and a bottle of water in the desert. Lelaina, I looked at the stars again, I made the time, like you said, and I really got perspective--I smelled everything--I smelled sand--I never knew sand had a smell.

LELAINA

(pleads)

Michael, can we talk about this after I get off work? I mean, I've been gone almost three hours--Vickie's gonna kill me.

MICHAEL

I just want to get to this one point, which is when they made me do this regression thing?--I mean, I know it's ridiculous, but even if you don't believe in that crap, I don't even believe in it, but it told me that when we were like in ancient Egypt or something, you were like a slave, and I was like this unhappy slave-master guy, I think--I don't remember everything 'cause I was kind of in this trance, but the upshot of it is that I was crowding you. So what I need to do now is give you space. And that's good, because I need to be by myself too, and I'm so okay on my own right now. We just need space.

LELAINA

Okay. Alright.

This was not the answer he wanted.

MICHAEL

Really? Okay... I mean, it's space. And I think we can still see each other with the space. Like, within the space.

She sighs; this isn't going to be easy.

LELAINA

Listen, I still want to be friends--

He stops walking; so does she.

MICHAEL

--Look, I know I'm screwed up, okay? I know what I am, and I'm not perfect. No one is--well, except, to me, you're very close.

She didn't want to hear that; she looks down, painfully.

LELAINA

No, I'm not.

He takes out a bracelet made of stones on a leather strap.

MICHAEL

I made this for you. The guy who regressed me, Hector, he said the stones are supposed to mean that you care about somebody.

She takes the bracelet, genuinely touched.

LELAINA

Well Hector was right. I do. I care about you. I really do.

He nods. He knows it's over.

MICHAEL

I should go. I have to fly to New York.
(mumbles)
I got promoted or something.

She's happy for him, but before she can congratulate him--

MICHAEL

--No, you know what? I don't even care. I mean, I care, but--Look, you want to come with me?--Why don't you come to New York with me? No forget it.

LELAINA

You know, I bet ten years from now, we'll be laughing at this. We'll be cracking up.

MICHAEL

Yeah, I'm sure at some distant point in the future this will all seem really hysterical. It kind of already does seem funny to me.

LELAINA

Really?

MICHAEL

No--not. No.

She tries not to, but she laughs infectiously. He shakes his head, then starts laughing with her. She hugs him.

CUT TO:

EXT. GALLERIA PARKING LOT/INT. BMW - ANOTHER DAY

Lelaina parks the BMW: it's alot cleaner than before: the ashtray is empty, the Coke cans are gone. She gets out and walks towards the mall.

INT. GALLERIA - THE GAP - MOMENTS LATER

Lelaina is on the up escalator--when a frazzled Sammy appears at the top and spots her. He walks down the up escalator. She walks towards him.

SAMMY

Thank God!--Come on, we gotta hurry--

--He takes her arm and hurriedly leads her into The Gap.

Troy is sitting on the floor in the middle of the store, playing his guitar, singing Sugar Mountain by Neil Young. His guitar case is open in front of him; there is some money in it. Some customers watch him; Vickie is desperately trying to lead them away from him.

SAMMY

He won't leave. He's been sitting there for hours, going through the whole Neil Young songbook. He's almost through with the S's. I don't know what's gonna happen when he gets to the end.

Vickie comes up to Troy.

VICKIE

That's it, Troy. You have five minutes to vacate this mall. Then I'm calling security and having you physically removed from the premises!

Troy finishes the song. A passing customer tosses a quarter in his guitar case. A beat. Vickie holds her breath. Then Troy starts playing again: This Old House.

VICKIE

You will be arrested.

Lelaina steps in, shocked.

LELAINA

Vickie!

Vickie takes Lelaina by the arm and leads her off to the side.

VICKIE

Panhandling is illegal inside this mall. If Troy isn't out of here, I have to call in security or close the store. If I close the store, I'll lose my job.

(desperate)

Lelaina, I cannot lose my job.

Lelaina turns to the scattered customers: Troy's audience.

LELAINA

Okay, folks, show's over.

Customers toss money into Troy's case as they back off; Troy still keeps playing.

Lelaina approaches him; he does not look at her as he finishes the song. He doesn't say anything for awhile. He looks at her, then turns the page of his Neil Young songbook. Lelaina turns and walks towards Vickie, who cringes.

TROY

Lelaina.

She turns back, goes to sit next to him. They are quiet, then:

TROY

...When I was about eleven, I was already playing guitar. I learned from my older brother, 'cause he was always playing old Beatles songs on his. And one day in December, I heard on tee-vee that John Lennon died. That he was assassinated. I don't know why, but I felt like, suddenly, there was this... evil force in the universe that I never knew before. So I went and sat alone with my guitar in my room. I wasn't playing, I just held it. Then my father knocks on my door and walks in. And he comes over and sits beside me on my bed. I thought, "This man knows what I'm feeling right now. Without a word spoken between us, this man knows exactly what I'm going through." So we sat there for a minute. Then he turned to me and said, "Son?" And I said, "Yeah, Dad?" And he looked at the floor and said, "Jack Lemmon was killed."

She starts to laugh. He kind of laughs with her... their laughter dies, and he looks at her.

TROY

My dad died.

Her mouth drops open. She embraces him. He lets himself be held. He bites into her sleeve; his face contorts, but he won't let himself cry.

TROY

My mom didn't even bother to show up at his funeral.

She hugs him tighter, flooded with empathy and love. He can't hold back anymore and cries. She just holds him, stroking his hair, rocking him back and forth. She starts crying too.

LELAINA

Oh, Troy, I would plan your funeral.

TROY

I'm sorry, Laney.

LELAINA

It's okay, it's okay.

They break the hug and wipe at their eyes.

TROY
I acted like a little piece of... Spam.

LELAINA
No, I was Spam.

TROY
No, I was Spam.
(looks around)
I hope you don't have that fucking camcorder on
me somewhere.

LELAINA
No, the whole thing's done. It's on the air
now.

TROY
In Your Face?

LELAINA
Public access. Cost me thirty dollars, but I
got a good lead in. I'm right after the animal
balloon guy...
(smiles, nods)
But, hey, who knows when PBS will come knocking?
You gotta start somewhere. And until then, I'm
right here. In the stop-Gap.

TROY
That's really cool.
(sighs)
You know what I think our whole problem is?
(beat)
We need to get our own place.

LELAINA
(laughs, giddy)
With what money?

TROY
Well...

He looks in his guitar case.

TROY
I have about five bucks.

She leans in and kisses him on the mouth. He responds passionately,
hungry for her.

LELAINA
Then fuck the world.

TROY
 Fuck the world.

He stands up, offers her his hand. She takes it and stands up, and they hug. Vickie runs to them. Sammy runs and hugs all of them. And the four of them stand there, hugging in the middle of The Gap.

DISSOLVE TO:

A TELEVISION SET

as various channels are being surfed. We see bits and pieces of various programming: "Small Wonder," Robert Tilton, QVC... The surfing stops at In Your Face TB, where their new young adult soap opera is on. An ACTOR is playing "Roy," a cynical, cool guy who is packing a duffel bag, as an ACTRESS playing "Elaina," a chain-smoking, teary-eyed girl dressed in black.

ACTRESS
 Roy, why are you doing this to me? I know we can be happy together.

ACTOR
 Elaina, you have made it clear to me that your job is first priority. I'm just a sprig of parsley on your plate.
 (hands her a box)
 Here, I think these are your condoms.

ACTRESS
 I don't want my stupid condoms back! God. You're really bumming me out.

ACTOR
 You'll chill in time. Right now, I need someone who understands what my music and the band mean to me.

ACTRESS
 But it's just music, Roy! I'm a human being with deep feelings who feels things deeply!

ACTOR
 Music is feeling, babe. The band may be a small dream, but it's the only one I've got.
 (picks up bag)
 I'm Audi 5000.

He leaves her there crying. She stares after him.

ACTRESS
 (to herself, pleading)
 Please don't let him get drunk and drive.

On the suspenseful MUSIC, we fade in on a title card: "EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, MICHAEL GRATES"

INT. NEW APARTMENT - NIGHT

Troy and Lelaina are making out on the couch in their new apartment; she is wearing her Gap clothes, he has a new "grown-up," neater look. The TV is on In Your Face TV. The phone RINGS. They don't even break to say let the machine get it.

TROY(V.O.)

At the beep please leave your name, number, and a brief justification of the ontological necessity of modern man's existential dilemma and we'll get back to you.

The machine BEEPS.

PAT(V.O.)

Uh, yeah, Lelaina, this is your dad. Call me when you get this--I need you to explain something: I just got a two thousand dollar bill from Mobil.

FADE OUT.

THE END