

ACT ONE

CLOSE ON - A BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF KURT COBAIN.

Hunkered over a battered acoustic guitar. Stringy, blonde hair obscuring his face, those eyes. We are in --

INT. GARRETT HOUSE - NICK'S BEDROOM - DAY

As the photo is removed from the wall. By NICK GARRETT, 18, attractive in a tortured-poet sort of way. Very clearly a case for cornflakes and classics...

Nick slides the photo into a tatty leatherbound journal. And we see that he is *packing*. He holds up a stained Boston Red Sox baseball jersey...

NICK

The conundrum remains: to take or not to take? The rumors run rampant, you know, of a tremendous (and extremely violent) anti-Red Sox bias throughout much of Continental Europe...

REVERSE ANGLE REVEALS: sitting on Nick's bed, looking somewhat doleful, is his girlfriend, HANNAH WILSON, 17. Hannah is the kind of girl you hoped you'd be dating by the time you got to high school, while you were suffering through the inequities of 7th grade. Blonde, open-faced, willful...

HANNAH

I think you gotta let your freak flag fly. Skinhead-Derek-Jeter-fans-in-Berlin be damned...

Nick tosses the jersey onto an overstuffed BACKPACK. As they look at each other over the vast chasm of an uncertain future. But before any of this can be further masticated:

EDDIE

There he is! Woop!

Entering is EDDIE LATEKKA, 18. Eddie is that rare small-town phenomena: the three-sport captain who hangs with the burn-outs. The all-important triple-G's of high school come very easy to Eddie: grades, ground-balls, and girls...

EDDIE (CONT'D)

This is very cool. This may be the coolest thing ever. Nicky Garrett. Heading out to the territories. To garner experience. Which he will put to good use upon his return...

HANNAH

God knows every doors, floors, and windows shop needs an owner/operator with impeccable knowledge of The Parthenon...

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EDDIE

Ours won't be *just* a doors, floors and windows shop. Right, Nicky?

NICK

Right. It'll be a doors, floors and windows shop with a *historical* perspective. For, those who ignore the past are doomed to install incorrect linoleum...

He tries a smile. But Hannah continues her mournful mien...

EDDIE

Don't look so moony, girl. He'll be back in a few months...

HANNAH

That's what my Uncle Nate said. My Aunt Minerva is still sitting by the window in her shawl...

Nick and Eddie exchange a look... And Nick takes a FRAMED PHOTO from a shelf: of 11-YEAR-OLD NICK, with a WOMAN, early 30s, with a pale, limpid beauty. His MOTHER.

Nick surreptitiously slips the framed photo into his backpack. Eddie glances out one of the bedroom windows...

EDDIE

I never knew you could see The Doof from up here. Woulda come in handy the summer we had that sniper rifle...

(to Hannah)

Still can't believe you're actually gonna go there...

HANNAH

I know. Higher education. It'll never catch-on...

Eddie shakes his head. But Nick is looking at Hannah...

NICK

Where did he go? Uncle Nate.

And, as if it were the most ghastly thing imaginable:

HANNAH

He went: *to find himself.*

EXT. GARRETT HOME - DAY

PAS A small, single family ranch in a lower middle-class section of Knight's Ridge, Massachusetts, a college town some 40 miles west of Boston... A pair of PICK-UP TRUCKS are parked out front...

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CONTINUED:

Nick, Hannah and Eddie emerge from the house, Eddie carrying the backpack... Waiting for them are THREE MORE FRIENDS, 18:

- IKEY is short and obnoxious and decidedly dim. He wears greasy coveralls, with *Eichorn And Sons Service Station*, stitched on the back...

- PHYSICAL PHIL is pale and asthenic, and he crackles with a nervous intensity that belies an incredible stillness, a true economy of movement...

- OWEN ROWAN is a big, guileless, gourd-shaped boy with a heart full of jelly beans...

OWEN ROWAN

All hail the conquering hero... !

Eddie brings the backpack over to an old Chevy Caprice Classic, depositing it into the car's open trunk...

PHYSICAL PHIL

Nicky. I'm sure you know the thing. About the search for The Grail being The Grail itself...

IKEY

Why you poppin' daffy, freakshow -- ?

PHYSICAL PHIL

The journey *is* the destination. Never forget your Grateful Dead...

Nick glances over at Hannah...

PHYSICAL PHIL (CONT'D)

*"There is a road / No simple highway /
Between the dawn and the dark of night /
And if you go / No one may follow / That
path is for / Your steps alone..."*

NICK

Thanks, Physical Phil...

When something occurs to Nick:

NICK (CONT'D)

I almost forgot...

He darts into the garage. Reappearing, he holds an old-school wooden TENNIS RACKET. He gives it to Physical Phil...

NICK (CONT'D)

Take care of her for me?

IKEY

You're only gonna be gone for, like, six weeks, bro -- !

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED: (2)

Another glance to Hannah. As Nick's father, 48, whom everyone calls THE COMMANDER, due to his gruff, stoic demeanor - earnest Hemingway that he is - comes out of the house, followed by RONNY, Nick's 10-year-old brother, who possesses the jittery energy of a demented lap dog...

THE COMMANDER

Let's go then. Traffic to Logan's bound to be grim...

The Commander and Ronny get into the car... Nick bangs fists with Owen and Ikey and Physical Phil... Eddie gets a hug...

EDDIE

Hurry home, chief. And we'll make doors, floors and windows history.

Nick goes to Hannah. Gathers her in a tight embrace...

NICK

I'll see you at the end of the summer...

HANNAH

Whatever you say. Uncle Nate.

But before he can react, the OPENING CHORDS OF Boston's "DON'T LOOK BACK" CA-RANK... From Eddie's truck... The stereo turned all the way up...

And here come Owen and Physical Phil... Owen air-guitars on a shovel... Physical Phil uses the tennis racket Nick gave him to safe-guard... Ikey uses two screwdrivers as drum sticks...

Wailing to the song... (*"I don't mind/Where I get takin'/The road is callin'/Today's the day... "* etc.)

Eddie shakes his head. He don't play at this. Nick laughs. Kisses Hannah one last goodbye... And climbs into the car...

THE COMMANDER

What's the matter with those boys?

But Ronny is rocking, too. And Nick looks back at his friends. At Hannah. As The Commander puts the car in gear.

Nick presses the horn. The boys are still jamming (*"I see beyond the road I'm drivin'/Far away and left behind"*)...

Eddie and Hannah wave goodbye... As the car drives off...

Missing him already... As Boston WAILS we --

DISSOLVE TO:

PAS

BURN IN: TEN YEARS LATER

(CONTINUED)

01/26/2006

"October Road" - Network Draft

CONTINUED: (3)

A CD PLAYER. One of those space-aged Bang & Olufsen types. Playing the very same Boston song. Only we are in --

INT. NICK'S LOFT - MANHATTAN - TEN YEARS LATER - NIGHT

Where the PHOTO OF KURT COBAIN hangs above the desk. A PILE OF BOOKS is stacked nearby. All with the same title: "TURTLE ON A SNARE DRUM" by Nicholson Garrett...

WIDER STILL - crowded bookshelves. An iMac. A FRAMED MOVIE POSTER on the wall: "TURTLE ON A SNARE DRUM" starring Richie Peddler and Gwyneth Paltrow... "From The Best-Selling Novel".

And we are reunited with Nick Garrett. Ten years older. He appears a bit haggard. Exhausted. But still with the whimsical twinkle of a shimmer that refuses to fade...

He leans back from his computer. Cursor blinking against a black screen of nothing...

His PHONE RINGS. He answers. It is BERT GOLDMAN, mid-60s, his avuncular editor... He's in his Park Avenue study. CROSS-CUT AS NECESSARY...

BERT GOLDMAN

How you doing, kiddo -- ?

NICK

Ever hear the one about blood and a stone? And the difficulty in extracting the former from the latter?

And now we take a WIDER LOOK. And we see that Nick is in the back of an enormous LOFT-STYLE APARTMENT. It must be 4000 square feet. But there is very little furniture here. Very little to make this place a home. Aside from the cluttered office in which he is now perched...

BERT GOLDMAN

Dufresne College called. They want to know if you'd be interested in teaching a one-day intensive on The Art Of The Novel... ?

NICK

Not so much.

BERT GOLDMAN

Why not? Might be good for you. Get you off the schneid...

NICK

I've been on the schneid so long, I'm thinking about building a summer house there...

- PAS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERT GOLDMAN

What do you think?

NICK

Dufresne College is in my hometown. I haven't been back in 10 years. And there are some people there that may not be happy to see me...

BERT GOLDMAN

You've got to get past your fears. G. Gordon Liddy was afraid of rats. So he cooked one up and ate it. Fear gone...

Nick picks up a copy of his novel...

NICK

If you're suggesting I cook and eat my old friends, I can assure you: in their opinion - I already have.

BERT GOLDMAN

Think about it. It's this weekend. Short notice, I know. But John Irving dropped out.

NICK

Just as well. My friends wouldn't have been nice to him either...

Nick hangs up the phone. And leans back in his chair. He sees his ANSWERING MACHINE light blinking. He presses play.

STRATTON LORB (O.S.)

Doctor. It's me. It's 10:30. I'm downstairs. I'm posting-up until you come out... Because we're having a big old party. And we're calling it "Life"!

Nick looks at the clock on the wall. It's 12:30. He smiles. And we PRE-LAP The Libertines' "UP THE BRACKET" and CUT TO:

EXT. NICK'S LOFT - NIGHT

Where a man, 32, panthers the sidewalk. Take two scoops of The Mad Hatter, six ounces of Keith Moon, crumble-in four Dexedrine and play at fast-forward. This is STRATTON LORB, Nick's lit agent. A peripatetic blur in black-label Italian.

Nick comes out of his building...

STRATTON LORB

Nicholson. Doctor. I'm standing out here. For two hours. Like the family schnauzer. You could have at least cracked a window. Allowed me to loll my tongue...

PAS

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED:

He puts his arm around Nick's shoulder, leading him over to a waiting TOWN CAR... As they go, Stratton dials-it-down, for:

STRATTON LORB (CONT'D)
Anything come out tonight?

NICK
Not even a predicate.

INT. BUNGALOW 8 - LATER - NIGHT

Hipster watering-hole nonpareil. Beneath the towering potted plants, a scrum of INTERNATIONAL BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS mingle with Midtown HEDGE FUND DUDES, on the hunt for Kate Moss; and the bedraggled SCENE-DEMONS who never venture north of 34th.

Nick trails Stratton into the crazed celerity, thick with music and cigarette smoke. Stratton keeps up a machine-gun patter. He knows all. Mayor McCheese to the downtown set. We HEAR him more than we SEE him. Remaining CLOSE ON NICK:

STRATTON LORB
Hey, there! You remember my guy, Nicholson Garrett? Of course, you loved it. Everyone loved it. It's called mainlining the zeitgeist. Philip Roth, in his review for THE NEW YORK TIMES, called it "'CATCHER IN THE RYE' for the post-911 generation... !" So what if it was two years ago! Who died and made you the doyenne of pub dates... ?

And Stratton actually goes after the guy. Again, we don't see this. Just HEAR SIGNS OF A SCUFFLE. Stratton re-appears back in frame. A little tousled. He fixes his tie...

STRATTON LORB (CONT'D)
What a toolio. Now I'm stoked I banged his sister and never called her...

A table is cleared. Bottle service is brought over. A steady stream of PEOPLE offer-up obeisances...

What follows is dizzying. A swirl. Of talk. Laugh. Smoke. Drink. The entire sequence should feel exaggerated. Unhinged. Elliptical. Nick drinks. FACES appear and disappear. A YOUNG GIRL is in his grille:

YOUNG GIRL
Will you sign my book? I ran home and got it when I saw you were here. It really changed my life. Kind of like "FLASHDANCE" did...

PAS She hands him the book. But then she is grabbed from behind, by a skinny GUY in a porkpie hat... They start kissing...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Other FACES appear. Wittering on. A choric cacophony...

Nick sees a GIRL across the room. She's impossibly tall. Thin. Built to prowl a catwalk. Early 20s, with long, profuse hair and the vague melancholy of the born beautiful. This is TAYLOR. And she sees him...

He struggles to his feet... Walks over... She kisses him...

TAYLOR

I thought you were working -- ?

NICK

I was. Until Frenzy Boy came by.

TAYLOR

I should be done by 5 tomorrow...

NICK

Tomorrow?

TAYLOR

We're going to Rhinebeck?

But then Taylor is goosed from behind. By another filigree-thin MODEL. She turns and erupts into a gale of giggles...

Nick slips away, sitting back down. It seems to be getting louder in here. More discordant. The lights are hot. The voices maundering incoherently... Stratton leans into him:

STRATTON LORB

I was thinking: since you're having so much trouble with the follow-up. Maybe you just make it a sequel...

NICK

Stratton, Sebastian Grace, the hero of the book, *dies* at the end. Remember? The peanut allergy?

STRATTON LORB

Oh. Right.

He shrugs. But, ever the quick-thinker:

STRATTON LORB (CONT'D)

It can still be done. Two words: *ghost story*.

Stratton turns back to the GIRLS he was dialoguing. And, as Collective Soul's "*THE WORLD I KNOW*" starts up on track, Nick gets unsteadily to his feet... A look over to Taylor, still yukking it up with Filigree Girl...

PAS

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED: (2)

STRATTON LORB (CONT'D)

Where you going, Doctor? This night is
in diapers -- !

But Nick fights his way through the tangled ravelment of the
after-2:00 crowd... Bumped and jostled and spilled-on...

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. As Nick walks through the streets of the
city. A light rain falls. He passes by a wall, posted with
massive BILLS for the DVD-release of the filmed version of
"TURTLE ON A SNARE DRUM". Nick walks on...

Collective Soul warbles. (*"I drink myself of newfound
pity/Sitting alone in New York City/And I don't know why..."*)

At last, he's arrived. Just past Tompkins Square Park.
ALPHABET CITY. Grungy tenement houses shroud the moon. Nick
goes to ONE BUILDING. The front entrance is unlocked...

As the music FADES OFF (*"So I walk up on high/And I step to
the edge/To see my world below..."*), Nick climbs the stairs.

INT. TENEMENT HOUSE - ALPHABET CITY - SIXTH FLOOR - NIGHT

Nick, breathless, arrives at the sixth floor landing. He
goes to apartment 617. And knocks on the door... He waits.
Knocks again. Looks at his watch. It's very late. Or very
early, as the case may be...

NICK

Hello? Anyone home?

After a bit, the door opens a sliver. And, over the thin
security chain, a frightened PUERTO RICAN MAN, early 30s,
looks out at Nick...

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry. I... Used to live here.
In this very apartment. And I was
wondering if...

And the man hurls a gout of imprecatory Spanish at Nick and
SLAMS the door. Nick knocks again...

NICK (CONT'D)

I know. It's late. This is awful. But
I... Would love to just...

He shakes his head. Not sure what he would love to do...
After a beat, the door opens again. This time to a pretty
PUERTO RICAN WOMAN, late 20s...

WOMAN

Are you a crazy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

No. I just... I had great success in
this apartment...

And he has found the PAPERBACK COPY OF HIS BOOK. That the
girl at Bungalow 8 asked him to sign... He holds it up...

NICK (CONT'D)

This is my book. Here...

And it is the movie printing of the novel. The one with the
one-sheet art on its cover. And the Woman recognizes it...

WOMAN

I see this film. You write book?

Nick nods. She looks dubious. He takes out his wallet.
Shows her his LICENSE. She compares it to the author's name.

NICK

I know it says "Nicholas" on my license.
But the publishers had me change it to
"Nicholson". They felt it was more...
Uh...

WOMAN

Importante.

NICK

Exactly.

The Woman closes the door again. Nick looks bereft. Until
he hears the chain slide. And the Woman opens the door wide.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The Man stands there, baseball bat in hand. It is a small-
studio. Exposed pipes. Water-stained walls. But the couple
have managed to make it homey...

NICK

I wrote the book here. Three years ago.
Over one long winter. Does the radiator
still make that noise? Like four dogs
eating a cat?

WOMAN

We thought it like four cats eating a
dog...

Nick nods. Smiles...

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You write another book?

NICK

Not so much.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN
Writer block -- ?

NICK
Something like that.

WOMAN
You should write it here --

NICK
Why?

WOMAN
This is where you did good. This is
where you do good again. We make a space
for you...

Nick looks at her... The Man is still holding the baseball
bat, still unsure as to this strange fellow's designs...

WOMAN (CONT'D)
My grandmother had an expression: "*Es el
tonto que no puede volver al lugar de su
felicidad pasada...*"

Nick has wandered over, to a spot on one wall. Just above
where his desk had been. There is a HOLE. The former
resting place of the Kurt Cobain photo, no doubt...

WOMAN (CONT'D)
*"It is the fool who fails to return to
the place of his last happiness"...*

Nick touches the hole. He looks up at the Woman...

EXT. TENEMENT APARTMENT - ALPHABET CITY - NIGHT

Where Nick paces, cell-phone ringing in his ear. The sun is
just starting to come up. The phone is answered. By Bert
Goldman. Asleep in his bed, his WIFE grumbling beside him...

NICK
Bert, it's me... !

BERT GOLDMAN
Of course it is. Only you and Jerzy
Kosinski ever call me at this hour. And
Jerzy's dead. Ergo...

NICK
I'll do it. The one-day intensive. At
Dufresne College...

BERT GOLDMAN
Okay. And this couldn't wait until the
morning on account of how come?

PAS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK
I should leave now. I have to rent a
car. I suddenly feel imbued with...
Possibility...

BERT GOLDMAN
I was thinking it was either that or
gin...

INT. RENTAL CAR PLACE - SOHO - DAWN

Nick finishes signing the paper work. He appears to have a
true spring to his step. The RENTAL AGENT, round and
ebullient, digs his groove...

RENTAL AGENT
You sure got your rockets on, sweetie-
pie. Where you off to... ?

And Nick looks at her...

NICK
I'm going...

And, as it hits him, he smiles, buoyant...

NICK (CONT'D)
Home.

As we PRE-LAP Three Dog Night's "SHAMBALA" and CUT TO:

EXT. NICK'S RENTAL CAR - MOVING - DAY

Nick driving. He sings along with the music. Bellowing:

NICK / THREE DOG NIGHT
(singing)
*"Howwww does your light shine?/In the
halls of Shambala" --*

Caught-up in the sheer bravura of this enterprise...

When, at once, it occurs to him. Just what it is, exactly,
that's waiting for him at the end of this line...

And he stops singing. Actually frowns. As a twinge of
tension tweaks the tickle. But he steers the rental car
north, anyhow. Away from the island of Manhattan...

And on to the small town of Knight's Ridge, Massachusetts.

A place he left oh, so long ago...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. KNIGHT'S RIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Nick arrives back in town. And, to the Gin Blossom's "LOST HORIZONS", we get the quickie tour:

This is a place where the Ice Age left traces of its passage; sharply rolling with a series of wooded hills and drumlins.

The center of town is five square blocks of storefront businesses, a fire station, a town hall, a church...

But this is very much a college town. Bisected by OCTOBER ROAD, the two-lane, judiciously-stop-lighted blacktop, separating the college from the town...

As Nick drives through, we take in the modest working-class tableau of faded clapboard houses; sagging two-families; more pick-up trucks than cars...

We should also note several CONSTRUCTION SITES: with "CATALDO BUILDERS" signs on their chain-link fences...

The place looks slightly bizarre to Nick. Slightly surreal. As if he cannot believe he's back. And, as he drives past PINELLA'S PACKAGE STORE, we'll REMAIN HERE...

EXT. PINELLA'S PACKAGE STORE - DAY

Where we are reunited with Nick's old friends, Eddie Latekka and Ikey. As Eddie pulls his GMC 3/4 ton pick-up into the lot. "LATEKKA LANDSCAPE AND DESIGN" stencilled on the doors.

Eddie slots the truck beside a late-model BMW. He has managed to retain his rangy good looks, although there is something obdurate about him now. Hardened. Time and disappointment have conspired to form a crust...

Ikey remains unchanged. Half-hyena, half-knucklehead. Although not without a certain doltish charm...

Eddie eyeballs the BMW, as they enter Pinella's.

INT. PINELLA'S PACKAGE STORE - DAY

The local liquor emporium. It does a brisk business. Especially on Fridays after 5:00. Which it is right now. MR. PINELLA, 60, balding and beetle-browed, runs the joint.

MR. PINELLA

Fellas...

PAS They grunt hellos and head for the walk-in fridge. Passing a pair of STUDENTS from the COLLEGE, filling up a cart with premium vodka and tequila. Eddie glowers at them...

Eddie and Ikey each grab three cold cases of beer...

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CONTINUED:

A PRETTY GIRL has entered, early 20s, wearing a "Harvey's Hardware Store" apron. She buys two packs of Marlboro Lights from Mr. Pinella. Let's call her DARCY.

Eddie and Ikey lug their cases to the register. When Darcy sees Eddie, she blinks. Looks stung...

EDDIE

Hey...

She glances at the six cases...

EDDIE (CONT'D)

We're stockpiling. Ikey heard there might be a nuclear war this weekend...

And Ikey goes into full-mack mode. It's clear he digs her...

IKEY

True dat. Darcy. What goes on?

But Darcy's chilly blue eyes are fixed on Eddie...

DARCY

You weren't gonna ever call, were you?

And Ikey's face falls...

IKEY

Aw, no... Not Darcy -- ?

EDDIE

What?

IKEY

Dude... I liked Darcy -- !

Darcy looks at Ikey. Mr. Pinella shakes his head...

IKEY (CONT'D)

Man, do you get around. You're like the flu. Only with a zipper.

The college students are cackling about something, down one aisle. Eddie glances at them. Ikey turns to Darcy:

IKEY (CONT'D)

He don't call. What are you, new? This is Eddie Latekka. Repeat business makes him nervous. No offense. His bad, not yours...

But Darcy just shakes her head. And storms on out. Ikey stares at Eddie, who pays the smirking Mr. Pinella...

EDDIE

What's funny to you?

(CONTINUED)

MR. PINELLA

You're pushing 30. Are you ever going to get married... ?

EDDIE

When did that clearly-defined line between selling booze and being pals become blurred... ?

MR. PINELLA

I'm just saying, is all...

IKEY

Eddie's got a philosophy, yo. As it relates to the girlies. If you remain in your hometown, after high school, you spend 18-22 chasing the ones from your class that also remained. Then you spend 23-26 chasing the ones from the college. Then you spend 27-29 chasing the ones that are now divorced and have returned to The Ridge to lick their wounds. It's a simple system and it has served him well...

(frowns at Eddie)

Although, where Darcy, from the hardware store, fits into this system, I, for one, do not know...

MR. PINELLA

And what about now? What's next?

Eddie sees the college students heading their way, pushing a cart laden with liquor for a party in the offing...

EDDIE

No idea.

And he carries his cases out of the place...

EXT. NICK'S RENTAL CAR - MOVING - OCTOBER ROAD - DAY

Nick drives across October Road, and into the friendly confines of DUFRESNE COLLEGE, a small, private liberal arts school, established in the early part of the 20th Century...

Brick and bramble. Ivy and a great lawn. STUDENTS walk to and from class. It's downright bucolic...

INT. DUFRESNE COLLEGE - ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - DAY

Where Nick walks with LESLIE ETWOOD, a black man, in his mid-60s, who runs the English Department...

LESLIE ETWOOD

All we'll require of you is a five-hour session. Tomorrow afternoon.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LESLIE ETWOOD (CONT'D)
Beginning at noon. Who knows? Maybe you'll like it. Want to come on permanent... ?

NICK
I never taught anything before...

LESLIE ETWOOD
Keep it loose and informal and you'll be fine. The wattage of your celebrity will carry you swiftly through any thicket you may encounter. Speaking of thickets...

For a MAN, approaches them. He's 38, tall and puffy, with the smug, officious air of a maitre 'd at *Le Cirque*. This is GEOFFREY TREADWILL, creative writing teacher...

LESLIE ETWOOD (CONT'D)
Geoffrey, this is Nick Garrett. Nick, Geoffrey Treadwill, one of our esteemed writing teachers...

GEOFFREY TREADWILL
Haven't managed to read your book. Hoping to this summer...

NICK
No need. See the movie. Takes less time. And has nudity...

LESLIE ETWOOD
Geoffrey is writing a novel himself. I read his last one. Quite good. Shows promise. He nearly got it published...

Geoffrey's chubby cheeks go a high, rosy red with ire...

LESLIE ETWOOD (CONT'D)
We've arranged housing for you, Nick. At Manning's. It's a B & B down the hill...

GEOFFREY TREADWILL
It's a boarding house, actually.

LESLIE ETWOOD
Well, yes. But Dot Manning keeps it nice...

NICK
I know Manning's. And she *does* keep it nice. But it won't be necessary. I'm going to stay with my father...

LESLIE ETWOOD
Oh, I keep forgetting. You're from Knight's Ridge. Wonderful. I'm sure they'll be happy to have you!

PAS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NICK

Not so much.

Leslie laughs at what he thinks is a joke. As the three men walk off, two STUDENTS watch them go, both early 20s:

The girl's name is AUBREY. She's very pretty, despite having chopped-off most of her hair. Hers is a Bohemian downtown swerve: funky hat, nose ring, thrift shop spoils. The boy's name is IAN, and he is thin and diminutive, with the furtive movements of a field mouse...

IAN

That's him. Nicholson Garrett. How cool is that? And check-out Treadwill: he so fully has his Salieri on...

AUBREY

I couldn't get past the second chapter. Pretentious hipster goo.

IAN

But you *did* sign-up for the course?

AUBREY

What else is there to do around here on a Saturday afternoon? Go down to fraternity row and watch the hung-over pledges puke... ?

EXT. THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE - DAY

The house Nick grew-up in. We remember it from our opening. Nick parks across the street. He gets out. He leans against the car. Staring at the house for a bit. Reluctant to enter. When A KID, 9-years-old, rides up on a BMX BIKE. He's small for his age. And skinny. But there's something almost preternaturally world-weary about him... This is SAM.

SAM

That house is haunted. You ever see "*TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*"? You know the Boo Radley guy? In that house, lives Boo Radley, Senior. And Boo Radley, Junior.

NICK

I know. I grew-up there.

SAM

What do you mean -- ?

NICK

I mean: Boo Radley, Senior is my father. Boo Radley, Junior is my brother.

SAM

Oh. Uh. Sorry...

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED:

NICK

Are you apologizing for insulting my family? Or for my being to their weird manor borne... ?

SAM

Bit of both.

NICK

You live on this street?

SAM

My friend, Doodie, does. He moved here not long ago. It was hard for him to make friends. On account of it'd be easier to count the bricks left than the bricks *missing*. If you get my drift...

And he points to his head, as if indicating Doodie's limited intelligence... Nick smiles... Just then DOODIE, also 10, comes out of his house. He's a thick boy, with the slate-dull eyes of a clod...

SAM (CONT'D)

Doodie, this guy grew-up there. With Freddy K and Leatherface...

DOODIE

You're the writer dude?

NICK

That's right.

And this comes as news to Sam... Doodie shrugs...

DOODIE

My mother read your book. Said it was mostly crap...

Sam shakes his head... To Nick:

SAM

Told you: he's Lenny to my George.

DOODIE

It wasn't "George", you dope. It was Squiggy.

Nick and Sam share a smile...

NICK

See you guys later...

As Nick crosses the street, we CUT TO:

PAS

INT. THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE - DAY

The Commander opens the front door. To Nick. His face says it all. Nick gets it at once:

NICK

Ronny didn't tell you I was coming home...

THE COMMANDER

Nope. The long term effects of video games and marijuana have affected him in the short term...

And his father embraces him. It's stiff, but it's an embrace... And one The Commander seems to instantly regret...

THE COMMANDER (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

NICK

Teaching a thing. Tomorrow. At The Doof...

Beat... The Commander eyeballs Nick's suitcase, as if it were a dog that may or may not be rabid...

NICK (CONT'D)

I was thinking I could crash here for the weekend -- ?

The Commander frowns. At once, uncomfortable...

NICK (CONT'D)

What is it -- ?

THE COMMANDER

Your room. It's not the same. It changed...

He says it like the room did this of its own accord...

INT. THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE - NICK'S OLD ROOM - DAY

The Commander leads him in. It has been turned into the TV room. Two La-Z-Boys and a wide-screen...

THE COMMANDER

We got a routine here, your brother and me. A pattern. We get up. He makes the coffee. I fry the eggs. We go to work. We come home. He makes the coffee. I fry the pork chops. We sit in here. A few beers. Watch a game. Maybe a picture. I go to bed. He smokes the dope and fights a fake war on his player. We get up. Do it again. It ain't much.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE COMMANDER (CONT'D)
But it works. It's an apple-cart. And
the one thing you don't want to go doing,
after 10 years, is...

NICK
Upset the apple-cart. I know. No
worries. I can stay at Manning's. The
Doof got me a room...

THE COMMANDER
Nice lady, Dot Manning. Always very
clean up there...

Beat... The Commander stares at Nick... It's been a long time
since he's seen his boy... Who was a child when he left...

NICK
What is it?

THE COMMANDER
You look tired...

NICK
I drove in from the city.

The Commander nods. But before this can go further, the
front door opens, and RONNY GARRETT, now 20, enters, in
greasy coveralls, swinging his lunch cooler... When he sees
his brother, he howls...

RONNY
NICKY -- !

... and goes running in for the hug...

THE COMMANDER
Pretty happy to see him for a guy who
forgot he was coming home!

EXT. THE COMMANDER'S HOUSE - LATER - DAY

Nick and Ronny share a beer on the dilapidated swing-set in
the backyard... Ronny is shaggy-haired and smiles a lot...

RONNY
Hannah's still here, you know...

NICK
I figured.

RONNY
Works over at the veterinarian's. And
she probably won't be too happy to see
you. So you should just avoid it
altogether. If your cat gets sick, let
it die...

Nick smiles...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RONNY (CONT'D)

And if Latekka sees you? He's sure to beat you soft... He lives with Physical Phil now. In the old Serendello house...

Nick nods... Ronny drains his beer...

RONNY (CONT'D)

A lot of people are pissed at you. I never got why. I mean, you'd think they'd be flattered to be in literature, you know? In a book. That's the way I felt. I mean, the brother character? Johnny? You describe him as "*dizzier than a mongoloid on a merry-go-round*".

NICK

(wincing)

It was fiction, Ronny...

RONNY

Hey, it didn't bother me. I've told you this before. I thought it was funny. I'm a character in a book! Tom Sawyer. Oliver Twist. And Johnny The Moronic Kid Brother. What's there to get creased about?

EXT. MIGHTY SUB - DOWNTOWN, KNIGHT'S RIDGE - LATER - DAY

The local submarine shop. Nick waits. When Owen Rowan, whom we remember from our opening, walks up, with his wife, LIZ, 26, and their two kids, CONNOR, 6, and ALLY, 3...

NICK

Owen Rowan -- !

OWEN ROWAN

Hey, there! I know we're a little late. But it takes a village to get this group to the village. Nicky, this is my wife, Liz. Liz, the great Nicky Garrett... !

Liz offers her hand. She is small, fit, pretty, although there is something slightly weary about her...

NICK

Good to meet you. Sorry I couldn't make it to the wedding...

OWEN ROWAN

We know how busy you are... Hey, kids! Say hello to your Uncle Nicky! This is Connor. And this one is Ally...

NICK

Hi, kids...

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED:

But the kids run off, into the parking lot...

LIZ
I'll get 'em. You guys grab a coffee.
I'll see you at home, Owen...
(to Nick)
Nice to meet you...

And she walks off after the kids...

NICK
Wow. Owen Rowan. She's hot...

OWEN ROWAN
Crazy, right? But it's been an adjustment. She was working at my company and living in Boston when we met. Now she's a stay-at-home-mom in The Ridge. So it's not easy. The Ridge, doesn't welcome outsiders gladly, you know --

NICK
So they tell me.

INT. MIGHTY SUB - DAY

As they enter:

OWEN ROWAN
Hey, I just wanted to say: thanks for leaving me out of it. At first, I was insulted. But then I read how you made Eddie and Hannah look. And I was, like, "phew". Phew point-five, right?

NICK
They were fictionalized renditions, Owen.

OWEN ROWAN
Sure, buddy. Whatever you say.

They pass a man, mid-30s. Tall and strong and tan. This is RAY "BIG CAT" CATALDO. Back in the day, Ray Cataldo made Nick and his friends' lives miserable. Cataldo is with his two SONS, 7 and 9...

NICK
Ray Cataldo. How you doing?

RAY CATALDO
Well, I ain't famous like you. But I *am* rich...

OWEN ROWAN
Big Cat's the man. Owns a huge construction company now, Nicky.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

The concrete castle king... Putting up coffee shops and juice bars and pizza barns all over The Ridge...

Cataldo's grin is smug... Nick's eyes tick to the two boys...

NICK

These your kids?

RAY CATALDO

Yep. Two sons. No daughters. Which means I only gotta worry about two penises, rather than a thousand...

Owen frowns. Cataldo smirks. Winks at Nick...

RAY CATALDO (CONT'D)

Have fun, Garrett. C'mon, kids...

And he ushers the kids out. Nick and Owen share a look...

OWEN ROWAN

10 years after high school, he still makes me nervous...

Nick nods. They go to the counter. Where MURPH, 52, the pudgy proprietor of Mighty Subs, makes the sandwiches...

NICK

Hey, Murph...

MURPH

Nick. I ain't gonna ask why you felt the need to drop turds all over your hometown. That's your business. But I would like to know: what's with the "Nicholson" of it all?

NICK

Some people thought it sounded... *Importante.*

Murph frowns. He's not too happy with Nick. But:

MURPH

You want the usual?

NICK

You *remember* the usual?

MURPH

Egg and salad. *Not* egg salad. Sliced egg, lettuce, tomato, swiss. On a pretzel roll.

NICK

That's amazing...

(CONTINUED)

MURPH

I ain't isolating the human genome back here. If I can't remember a sandwich order...

NICK

But it's been 10 years...

MURPH

You're my only famous customer. You and Frankie Lemlin, who shot a cop in Cambridge...

NICK

What was *his* usual?

MURPH

Cream cheese and pimento. Shoulda known then he was a cop-killer...

The front door jangles open. And Sam, the little kid from in front of The Commander's house, enters...

SAM

Hey --

NICK

Hey...

Owen looks uneasy...

OWEN ROWAN

You two know each other?

NICK

We just met. What are you doing?

SAM

I'm here with my Moms...

OWEN ROWAN

Oh, boy.

NICK

What's wrong -- ?

OWEN ROWAN

Stay tuned.

Nick frowns, puzzled. Until the front door opens. And she enters. *And she sees Nick. And he sees her...*

NICK

Hello, Hannah.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. MIGHTY SUB - DAY

We resume Nick and Hannah. Eyes locked. Sam surveying from below. And darn it if the years have only served to make her even more lovely...

HANNAH

I didn't know you were back.

NICK

It was kind of last minute...

She nods, staring at Nick for a moment. She's the gal who was left behind. And he's the jim that did the leaving...

Sam senses the tension and suggests:

SAM

Whatever you two have going on, why don't I delicately extract myself and order us some Dagwoods?

OWEN ROWAN

I'll go with you -- !

And they are off, leaving Nick and Hannah alone.

NICK

He's pretty amazing, your son --

HANNAH

At first, they said he might be autistic. Then there was some discussion of a bipolar disorder. Eventually, the doctors diagnosed his condition as clinically wise-assed. Said they'd never seen a case so advanced...

NICK

You're a mom. I didn't know...

HANNAH

There's a lot of things you miss when you vanish into the ether. You've been gone how long now?

NICK

Ten years...

HANNAH

Right. I think it was two weeks before my 18th birthday you left. Yes, I'm quite sure of it. Cos I remember getting those roses and thinking they were for my birthday. But they weren't.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

01/26/2006

"October Road" - Network Draft

CONTINUED:

HANNAH (CONT'D)

They were a goodbye present. As in:
goodbye, I am no longer in your *present*.

NICK

I can explain...

HANNAH

Not necessary...

NICK

Hannah...

HANNAH

Nick. Truly. Don't sweat it. It's not
necessary...

Sam calls from the counter:

SAM

Mom! I can't drag this out any longer.
The Murph must be paid...

Hannah turns to Nick...

HANNAH

I should go. Are you staying long?

NICK

I leave Sunday...

They look at each other... Meaningful and strained... The
road from lover to stranger is shorter than a sigh...

NICK (CONT'D)

How old is Sam?

HANNAH

He turns ten in two months.

NICK

Ten.

HANNAH

Ten. Goodbye, Nick. And good luck.

Hannah heads off, but Nick is still focused on Sam. And
then, as if answering the question rattling in his mind:

HANNAH (CONT'D)

And don't worry: *he's not yours*.

And she's gone. And Nick frowns. Because there's something
about the math that doesn't add-up...

PAS

INT. MANNING'S BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

Nick, carrying his suitcase, is led down a hallway by MRS. MANNING, 58, the rotund proprietor of this seven bedroom home turned lodging facility.

MRS. MANNING

Quiet hours begin at ten PM. And there's a seven AM breakfast seating downstairs.

NICK

Thank-you...

They arrive at ROOM FOUR. As Mrs. Manning finds the key and unlocks the door. She hands him the key. Stands there, for:

MRS. MANNING

I play gin-rummy with Beatrice Latekka, Eddie's mother. And it would suit you well not to run into any of the Latekkas during your time here. You know what I'm saying? Also keep away from Grizzly Felps at the dump. And Jerry Conway at the garden store. Heck, I'd avoid nearly everyone, I were you, Nicky...

NICK

Yeah... I...

MRS. MANNING

Have a good stay.

And she waddles off... Nick looks after her... Enters...

INT. MANNING'S BOARDING HOUSE - NICK'S ROOM - DUSK

Nick takes a look around the small, quaint room... He sits on the bed and pulls out the SANDWICH Murph made for him. When his cell-phone RINGS. He checks the CALLER I.D. It reads: TAYLOR. Nick cringes as it occurs to him:

NICK

Rhinebeck.

He forgot about his plans with Taylor. He braces himself and picks up the phone...

NICK (CONT'D)

Hey, baby...

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - STREET - DUSK

CROSS-CUT. With the CREW from a PHOTO SHOOT behind her, and the bustling sounds of the city, Taylor says:

TAYLOR

We just wrapped.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

You're gonna kill me, Taylor...

TAYLOR

Stratton's taking you to a cocktail party... ?

NICK

No, it's... I had to go back home.

TAYLOR

That's fine. I'll swing by your place and we'll--

NICK

I mean *home home*. Massachusetts...

But an ASSISTANT approaches Taylor...

ASSISTANT

He's ready for you...

TAYLOR

I gotta run, Nick... Is everything okay?

NICK

Yeah. It's just...

TAYLOR

I thought you couldn't go back there...

NICK

I know. I'll be in the city on Sunday and I'll explain the whole thing. And I promise-promise-promise we'll do Rhinebeck before the holidays...

TAYLOR

Where are you staying? It's so quiet...

Nick takes a beat, perhaps embarrassed by the truth...

NICK

At my Dad's, of course.

ASSISTANT

Taylor --

TAYLOR

Coming! I'll call later. Miss you...

And she's gone. And Nick hangs up the phone, bothered by the lies. He looks down at Murph's sandwich and asks:

NICK

You still like me, right?

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED: (2)

Wary of the answer, he takes a BITE of his sandwich and the flavors wash over him. Murph's egg and salad sandwich is just as he remembered...

NICK (CONT'D)

Thank God. Love you, too.

A much-needed reminder that some things never change...

EXT. BUICK CITY BAR - NIGHT

A former car dealership turned watering hole. It's one of the only decent bars in town, thus forcing a tentative nightly detente between the locals and the college kids...

INT. BUICK CITY BAR - NIGHT

Last Call. The place is emptying out, as we find JANET DOYLE, the 34-year-old bartender/manager. Janet is a heavy-set woman - her big frame and chubby cheeks have earned her the nickname "JANET THE PLANET". But her eyes are luminous. And she's got a smile that's pure sweetness and light...

Eddie sits at the bar with a Jack and Coke. Ikey approaches him. He gestures over to a table, where two GIRLS in their early 20s, are putting on their coats...

IKEY

What do you think? They're from Longwell. Came all the way here to meet college boys...

EDDIE

So how do we fit in?

IKEY

From the looks of them, and the amount of vodka-grapefruits I been pouring down their gullets, I'd say we'll fit in *verrry easily*...

Eddie regards them. The girls wave...

IKEY (CONT'D)

I mad hyped you up.

EDDIE

Why are you always doing that?

IKEY

Not all of us can represent greatness, Edward. But at least we can be associated with it. What do you say? Back to your nest with them? For grilled cheese sandwiches and fellatio?

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED:

EDDIE

I'll pass. You go ahead.

Ikey looks suddenly panicked...

IKEY

I don't think I have enough conversation in me for both of them...

EDDIE

Tell 'em about the time you broke your collarbone trying to roof-ski...

IKEY

Yeah. That *is* a gem. Sometimes, I can make it funny, too. Hasta la Pasta...

As Ikey heads off with the girls, Janet The Planet approaches Eddie, pouring him another Jack and Coke...

JANET THE PLANET

You okay, Eddie? Never seen you pass up an opportunity... Hope you're not getting old on us.

EDDIE

It's not that. I'm not too tired to do the, well, you know. But the legwork necessary to get to that place? The endless chit-chat about meaningless bock? You really got to be in the right frame of mind for that...

JANET THE PLANET

Maybe you should try out a different type of girl. Maybe somebody from The Doof...

EDDIE

Been there, done that. Presents its own brand of problems...

JANET THE PLANET

I'm just saying: maybe you should try something more *nutritious*...

EDDIE

"Nutritious"? Like full of vitamins?

JANET THE PLANET

No. "Nutritious", like, good for your health. Helping you to feel the best you can, and live a long, happy life...

PAS Janet The Planet shrugs... They are now the only two people in the bar...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANET THE PLANET (CONT'D)
Wish I could offer you better advice,
Eddie. But what I can offer you...

She comes around the bar and heads towards the JUKEBOX... We
HOLD ON Eddie... As he considers her words...

JANET THE PLANET (CONT'D)
Is a little Glen Campbell!

She plugs a quarter into the jukebox. And "RHINESTONE
COWBOY" starts up. Janet The Planet begins to sing along:

JANET THE PLANET (CONT'D)
*"I've been walking these streets so
long / Singin' the same old song /
I know every crack in these dirty
sidewalks of Broadway... "*

And she really gets into it. Dancing and singing. Eddie
laughs, as Janet The Planet climbs onto the bar, using a Bud
long-neck as a microphone... Eddie claps.

JANET THE PLANET (CONT'D)
We call this "COYOTE VERY UGLY"!

EXT. KNIGHT'S RIDGE - ESTABLISHING - DAWN

The sun rises over the treeline, as the town slowly starts to
come awake. At this hour, there's only one place to get a
good cup of coffee to start your day... Indeed, the parking
lot is crowded with trucks... This is --

INT. BESS EATON DONUT SHOP - DAWN

The Commander sips quietly on his coffee, the *BOSTON HERALD*
sports page in front of him. At the counter, Eddie and Ikey
try to burn off their hangovers... Ray Cataldo is at another
table. He looks to The Commander:

RAY CATALDO
Nick's back in town, huh?

THE COMMANDER
That's right...

IKEY
He is?

RAY CATALDO
Oh, I forgot: you guys were close. I
never read the book, Latekka. What with
me hating books and all. But Joey
Guarino read me the parts about you.
Damn, son, Nicky Garrett didn't much like
you so much, did he -- ?
(turning to Ikey)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAY CATALDO (CONT'D)

And he didn't mention you once. 243 pages of book and he couldn't give you a sentence? That's gotta leave a mark...

Ray Cataldo smirks. The Commander shakes his head. Eddie and Ikey just eat their crullers in silence...

INT. DUFRESNE UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - DAY

Nick is being led down the empty hallway by Leslie Etwood...

LESLIE

We are at capacity. And they are looking forward to whatever you have prepared. And, as mentioned, if you find the interest, there's always a spot for you here. Good luck...

Leslie heads off... Nick frowns... Suddenly nervous... But then his cell-phone RINGS. He picks up... It is Stratton. In Bubbie's Diner, in Tribeca. CROSS-CUT AS NECESSARY...

STRATTON LORB

Doctor. Taylor told me where you are. What's wrong with you? You can't go home again. Everyone knows that. Norman Rockwell is dead. Spread the word...

NICK

I gotta run, Strat...

STRATTON LORB

What for? This conversation is in diapers...

But Nick hangs up. He steels himself and enters...

INT. DUFRESNE UNIVERSITY - CLASSROOM - DAY

Twenty or so STUDENTS are seated in a semi-circle. Amongst them is Aubrey and Ian, whom we met earlier. Nick stands at the front of the class. He smiles. Looks at a sheaf of pages he's prepared. Coughs. Looks at the pages again...

NICK

Well... These aren't really...

Coughs again. All those faces, shining like mackerels. Looking up at him. Eagerly waiting for him to indoctrinate them into the secret tribal rites of the successful novelist.

The room becomes blurry. As a HAND IS RAISED. By Ian. Nick blinks. His eyes tick to Aubrey. To the others...

And Nick bolts for the door, racing from the classroom. Leaving them to look after him in wonder...

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. DUFRESNE UNIVERSITY - DAY

Nick, hands on bent knees, hyperventilates behind the BUSHES. His chest heaves as he desperately fights for a good breath. When --

AN ENORMOUS SHADOW looms over him. And he hears A VOICE:

VOICE (O.S.)
You all right?

Nick turns, to find the most gentle and giant of all Gentle Giants - MUNCH KEEGAN, early 30s, the college's grounds-keeper and all around handyman...

NICK
I'm just... Having a moment...

Munch leans around to get a good look at Nick...

MUNCH
You're Nicholson Garrett!

NICK
Not so much.

MUNCH
Sure you are! The big-timer from the other side of October Road everyone's been buzzing about. Aren't they holding a special class for you today?

NICK
If by "special", you mean ill-conceived, then yes...

MUNCH
Let me guess: despite your success, you've always got one eye on the door, waiting for the Fraud Police to bust-in. And, by no means, just cos you wrote a book, are you in any way qualified to tell someone else how to do it...

Nick blinks. This guy is eerily accurate...

NICK
Are you... God -- ?

MUNCH
No. I just understand... I once ate 30 hot dogs in 11 minutes, at a 4th of July fair. Doesn't mean I can teach someone else how to eat 30 hotdogs in 11 minutes...

PAS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

As analogies go, it's clunky. But helpful. Thanks.

MUNCH

My pleasure, Nicholson.

NICK

Make it Nick.

MUNCH

Munch Keegan. Now, *vamoosh*.

And Nick heads back inside. Munch grins, and goes back to raking the leaves...

INT. DUFRESNE UNIVERSITY - CLASSROOM - DAY

Nick enters, prepared to redeem himself. But his return is too late. *All of the students have left, save for Aubrey, who is writing on a legal pad. She looks up at Nick.*

AUBREY

The others left.

NICK

How come?

AUBREY

I dunno. I guess they still cling to the antiquated notion that it's difficult to learn from a teacher who has fled the room in panic...

NICK

Why are you still here?

AUBREY

This is a good, quiet place to write. My roommate. She's pretending she's a lesbian this term. Constantly on the phone, weaving unlikely tales of Sapphos to her friends back home. But it beats the Jehovah's Witness thing from last semester, though. Every time I opened my dorm room door, she was just standing there. Holding pamphlets...

Nick smiles...

AUBREY (CONT'D)

I never read your book.

NICK

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUBREY

I don't really go for that "encapsulation of a generation" muckety-muck. It bores me...

NICK

Fair enough. What's your name?

AUBREY

Aubrey.

NICK

I'm Nick.

AUBREY

I know.

NICK

I would have written it on the blackboard, at the start of the class, but my throat tightened-up to the size of a pinhole and I was covered in flop-sweat. I thought, maybe, someone had slipped me a peanut...

Off her quizzical look:

NICK (CONT'D)

All of the Garrett men suffer from nut allergies. Dating back to my great, great, great grandfather, James Joseph Garrett, who was tragically felled in the Civil War by a cashew...

He smiles...

AUBREY

Ah-ha. So the peanut-allergy-related death of Sebastian Grace was more than just a convenient plot contrivance... ?

Nick grins...

NICK

Thought you didn't read it?

And Aubrey looks oh-so-busted...

AUBREY

Uh. I didn't. The guy who lives above me had the audio-book. As read by Johnny Depp. Played it all night long... Crazy-annoying...

NICK

Nice try. That's what we call a "swing and a miss"...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUBREY

Putting it in line with the theme of the morning. Which begs the question: if the idea of talking about your work is so unbearable, why did you come here?

NICK

I can talk about it. But I can't impart any wisdom. I can't inspire...

AUBREY

Then what are you doing here?

Excellent question. And, for the first time, Nick may have the answer...

INT. NICK'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Nick drives along. When his cell phone RINGS. It is his brother, Ronny. CROSS-CUT...

RONNY

If you don't have plans for dinner, you should come over at six...

NICK

Is this Commander-endorsed?

RONNY

Better than that: it was his idea. He watched "CAT BALLOU" last night. And you know how Lee Marvin softens him up and makes him get all oogley.

NICK

Whatever it takes. I'll see you at six.

Nick hangs up the phone, suddenly buoyed by this unexpected invitation. He pulls his car into the driveway of...

EXT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

A modest side-by-side two-family. Nick goes to the front door on the right and starts banging. He calls inside:

NICK

Eddie? Hey, Eddie...?

INT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

And here's Physical Phil, whom we also met in the opening. But he certainly has changed. He is alone, watching TV and fused to the couch, pale and unshaven, dressed in pajama bottoms and a ratty t-shirt and robe...

Physical Phil hops off the couch and heads towards Nick...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHYSICAL PHIL

It's good to see you, man...

Nick smiles, relieved at the warm reception...

NICK

You too, Physical Phil. Eddie around?

PHYSICAL PHIL

Not home. And I gotta warn: he's not overflowing with *the fond*, as things relate to you...

NICK

So I hear... But isn't there a statute of limitations on this kind of thing?

PHYSICAL PHIL

Not after you betrayed him three times.

NICK

Three times -- ?

PHYSICAL PHIL

Yep. Once when you left, and took his dream of doors, floors, and windows with you. Twice, when you crapped-on him in your book. And three times, by crossing over to The Dark Side and teaching at The Doof. You know how he feels about The Doof. Ever since The Incident...

NICK

I know how he feels about The Doof. But where in the rules does it state that you can't leave home and see the world... ?

PHYSICAL PHIL

I don't have your back on that one. Cos in my book, such a rule *does* exist. Not only have I stayed within the confines of Knight's Ridge my entire... I haven't left this house in five years...Nick looks around. The evidence *does* suggest dormancy.

NICK

Five years? What for?

PHYSICAL PHIL

Remember how after the Twin Towers were hit, everyone went into lock-down and glued themselves to the TV? Just us and Peter Jennings, taking the nation through it all, rock steady like he was... By September 15th, most everyone got up and went back to their normal routines.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED: (2)

PHYSICAL PHIL (CONT'D)

But not me. *Homeboy stayed on the couch...* Just me and P-Jennings. And then they went and took him, too. Now it's only me...

NICK

But... *Why?*

PHYSICAL PHIL

Way I see it, everything I need is right here. I order-out for food; got the phone for chit-chat; entertainment and info from the tube. And then came the iPod! And TiVo! As if to further assure I maintain my position on the couch...

NICK

But what do you do for money?

PHYSICAL PHIL

The workman's comp from my "accident" when I was with Jimmy Centola's masonry outfit? The patio brick falling on my foot? It was after you left, I think. But it's roughly 412 dollars a month forever...

NICK

Forever?

PHYSICAL PHIL

Or until I grow a new left big toe. Which doesn't seem all that likely...

He offers up his left, slippered foot...

PHYSICAL PHIL (CONT'D)

Best part: it's guaranteed reliability for all my friends and loved ones. And there's honor in that. Honor in locking yourself at home base. Honor in staying put...

NICK

But...

Physical Phil looks at him. Face grave:

PHYSICAL PHIL

It's *dangerous* out there, man...

Before Nick can react, the FRONT DOOR OPENS. To Owen and Ikey...

IKEY

Nicky!

(CONTINUED)

NICK

There he is -- !

IKEY

Wait. I got a bone to pick. I read the book three times. I still can't figure out which character is supposed to be me.

NICK

It is now official. If I had a time machine, I wouldn't use it to go back and kill Hitler; I wouldn't stop Lee Harvey Oswald from climbing up the Texas School Book Depository. I would go back just 3 years. To the exact moment I started writing the book. And I would stop myself...

IKEY

I'd go back to the day little Halle Berry learned that boys didn't really have cooties...

But the attention is elsewhere, as Owen slides a CD into the STEREO. Physical Phil begins rifling through the closet...

NICK

What are you doing?

OWEN

It's three-0-clock on Saturday. What do you think we're doing?

As Ikey pulls a pair of DRUMSTICKS from his back pocket.

IKEY

Jammin', soldier!

Nick cannot believe this...

NICK

You guys still do it -- ?

Physical Phil emerges from the closet with a TENNIS RACKET.

PHYSICAL PHIL

This is yours.

It's the one Nick handed over the day he left town.

NICK

You held onto this... ?

PHYSICAL PHIL

I knew you couldn't stay away forever...

PAS

CONTINUED: (4)

Nick regards the scratched handle and warped strings with something akin to reverence...

OWEN

Looks like we finally got the band back together...

EXT. EDDIE'S TRUCK - MOVING - DAY

Eddie drives... He fiddles with the radio... When "RHINESTONE COWBOY" comes on... Eddie smiles... Drives on...

INT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

A HAND THRUSTS DOWN, past the strings of a tennis racket. And, oddly, we hear a GUITAR CHORD ring through the air. PULL BACK TO FIND...

Nick, in a full state of blissful *regression*, playing his tennis racket. Owen plays bass on another racket. While Physical Phil lip-synchs the lead vocals on a hairbrush.

Ikey is perched on a chair, drumsticks in hand, offering a backbeat, as the guys rock along to "CORDUROY" by Pearl Jam. Blasting from the stereo. (*"The waiting drove me mad! / You're finally here and I'm a mess!"*)

EXT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

Eddie pulls up in his pick-up. He gets out. Hears the music cranking from inside. He smiles to himself, shakes his head.

EDDIE

Dorks.

As he heads toward the house, he passes Nick's rental car. Clocks the New York plates. His smile fades...

And then, peering through the window, he sees them. Sees Nick. Eddie's face darkens... And he simply heads back into his truck. And tears away...

INT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

As the Pearl Jam wails, Nick, Owen, Ikey and Physical Phil play their hearts out...

We STAY WITH NICK, unaware how close he just came to reuniting with Eddie. And, for the moment, as the MUSIC CRESCENDOS, there's no other place he'd rather be...

THE GUYS / PEARL JAM

"Everything has changed/Absolutely nothing's changed...!"

PAS

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

OVER BLACK - we HEAR the VOICE of MIKE GORMAN, as he calls a Celtics/Knicks game: "*Pierce drives the bucket... Bounces it out to Davis who drains the three...*" And as the SOUND of CHEERING FANS rumbles, we FADE IN on the BIG SCREEN TV.

INT. GARRETT HOUSE - NICK'S OLD ROOM/DEN - DAY

The Garrett family dinner is underway, but it's definitely not the reunion Nick had in mind, after ten years of absence.

Silence looms. Nestled in their side-by-side La-Z-Boys, TV TRAYS before them, The Commander and Ronny chomp away at steak dinners, eyes glued to the game...

Seated off to the side, in a considerably less comfortable chair, Nick picks at his meal, as he attempts to engage them:

NICK

Seems like Ray Cataldo's taking over The Ridge. I must have passed five construction sites with his name plastered all over them...

RONNY

He's got, like, a master plan. To make the kids from The Doof fall in love with The Ridge, while they're here. So after they graduate, and start making coin, they'll come back here to live. And buy the huge houses Big Cat is building. And force the rest of us out. On the Evil Land Baron tip. It's kind of genius...

Ronny shrugs. And his eyes go back to the TV. Beat... Nick turns to his father...

NICK

How's work -- ?

The Commander responds, eyes never leaving the TV screen:

THE COMMANDER

Same. It's a delivery truck.

Again, *more silence*. And though it may feel like The Commander is giving Nick the cold shoulder, he's not. It's just the way he has led this family. Unmolested by the clutter of conversation... Nick's eyes drift back to the TV.

NICK

What is a Knickerbocker, anyway? I never knew...

PAS No answer. As they continue to watch the game... Then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK (CONT'D)

Ronny, do you know Hannah's son?

RONNY

Sure. He's buds with that moon-calf
moved into the Farina house...

NICK

I met him yesterday. And I can't help
but do the math: the kid's ten. I left
ten years ago. The way it adds up...

RONNY

No sale. Some guy from Boston is the
dad. Older guy. Grad student from B.C.,
I think. She hooked up with him a couple
of weeks after you left for Europe...

Nick is simultaneously relieved that he's not a father and a
bit hurt by Hannah's infidelity. It may be an old
indiscretion, but it's a new wound...

NICK

Why didn't anyone ever tell me?

RONNY

I dunno. Didn't want to hurt your
feelings, I guess. I mean, you bailed on
her. But she... Kinda cheated on you
before she knew you were gonna bail.
It's not the kind of news you drop over
the phone...

But Ronny's voice is drowned-out. By the *increased volume of
the TV*. Nick and Ronny turn to The Commander, who has the
remote in hand, CRANKING UP THE SOUND. The game is on. And
so is the talk-free dinner....

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DUSK

Nick walks down the dimly-lit road. He comes to a single-
family HOUSE, a BMX bike parked outside. The door to the
MINI-VAN in the driveway is open. A bag of groceries inside.

Nick stands there. Unsure. And then the front door opens.
And Hannah comes out. She looks startled to see him...

HANNAH

Dude! You scared me -- !

NICK

Sorry. I was in the neighborhood. Your
parents still live here... ?

HANNAH

They moved to the Cape five years ago.
It's just me and Sam now...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

Do you know it's still 547 steps from my house to your house?

HANNAH

You thought maybe it would be different?

NICK

I was trying to take into account an increase in stride-length. But my stride, like everything else in my life, appears to have stagnated.

HANNAH

Poor little super-successful writer boy.

NICK

I just mean... This place...

HANNAH

You had it in your head, I'm sure, that it remained. Frozen in amber. Just the way you left it. And that was probably wicked reassuring. That you could go and do and see... And things would stay the same here. But now...

(beat)

Things change, Nick. Even in The Ridge. Why, we had a big rally the other night. Where we burned all of our REO Speedwagon records...

Nick smiles...

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Would have made a good scene for your book...

NICK

About that...

HANNAH

No. I loved it. Truly. But tell me: when you came up with the character of the pathetic hometown girl left behind, did you have to name her "Anna"? Wouldn't Lily or Allison have done the trick? At least a feeble attempt at camouflage? I mean, you didn't even try.

NICK

Anna's not you. I promise.

HANNAH

Page 44... Third paragraph... I committed it to memory: *"Anna possessed the faded blue sadness of a Roy Orbison song.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

The kind of gal who was quite sure, someday, Richard Gere would come on by, in his dress-whites, pick her up and carry her out of this factory girl existence, as the dulcet strains of Joe Cocker - 'LOVE LIFTS US UP WHERE WE BELONG' - warbled dissonantly within the soundtrack of her mind... "

(beat)

Sounds like you nailed me to a click...

NICK

It's a book. When I wrote it, I never thought anyone would actually publish it. When they did, I tried to change the names. But they wouldn't have it. And for that, I'm truly sorry. But, by the way: who doesn't love "AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN"?

He offers her a smile... But she's having none of it... So:

NICK (CONT'D)

Where's Sam?

HANNAH

Doing his homework. Which takes him all of 11 minutes. After seeing you at the sub shop, Sam's new fascination is "my past". I don't think it ever occurred to him, until that very moment, that I actually had one...

NICK

Yeah, I wanted to talk to you about that... About...

But A TRUCK pulls into the driveway. And Ray Cataldo emerges from it... He saunters up the walk... And, to Nick's surprise, Ray slips an arm around Hannah and plants a kiss on her lips. He looks at Nick, big face dripping with gloat...

RAY CATALDO

Surprised, Garrett?

NICK

"Shocked into a stupefying silence I may never recover from" is a better way to describe it...

He looks at Hannah... She shrugs...

HANNAH

It's kind of a limited menu here in The Ridge...

PAS

(CONTINUED)

RAY CATALDO

That's right, baby. And I'm the Pizza Supreme -- !

NICK

See, now anyone else, in your shoes, Ray, would say: "*and I'm the filet mignon*"; or "*I'm the Chateaubriand for two*"; or "*I'm the Lobster Thermidor gratineed in its shell.*" But not you... To you, the culinary zenith, is Pizza Supreme...

RAY CATALDO

Shut up! Jeez, you talk too much!

HANNAH

I gotta go with Big Cat on that one.

RAY CATALDO

I'm gonna wash-up for supper. Later, Garrett...

And Ray kisses her head. And goes into the house...

HANNAH

"Lobster Thermidor gratineed in its shell... " ?

NICK

Hey, I'm not apologizing. You're the one kissing Big Cat Cataldo...

HANNAH

Like I said: things change...
(Nick nods)
I'll see you, Nick. Take care.

And she goes into the house. Leaving him alone. As we play a little "*TAKE IT ON THE RUN*" by REO Speedwagon...

INT. OWEN ROWAN'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

The front door opens. Liz lets Nick in the house...

LIZ

He's upstairs. Follow the splashing...

And Liz disappears into the kitchen. Nick frowns. A bit stung by Liz's frost. He walks up the stairs...

INT. OWEN ROWAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Connor is in the bath. Owen sits on the floor, beside the tub. They are playing with TOY BATTLESHIPS...

NICK

What's happening, fellas?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OWEN ROWAN

Connor just sank my last destroyer.

Owen rises and holds his arm straight out over Connor's head. Connor grips it like an orangutan on a tree branch...

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

Ready and steady, Monkey-Man?

Owen hoists the giggling Connor, up and out of the tub, depositing him gently on the bath mat. Owen looks at Nick...

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

This is why you do it...

Nick nods. Owen shrugs, embarrassed by his own honesty.

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

You want kids, Nicky -- ?

NICK

Sure. But I think I have to stop *dating* kids to be able to have them...

OWEN ROWAN

Yeah, we saw a picture of that model in *The Herald*. Smoking hot.

NICK

Taylor. Maybe we could set-up a play-date for her and Ally... ?

Owen laughs. Towels off his son...

NICK (CONT'D)

Did you know about Hannah and Big Cat?

OWEN ROWAN

I did. It's disturbing. Let's go get some PJs on, Con... !

And the little boy goes racing out of the bathroom...

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

How was steak and potatoes with The Commander?

NICK

Same as I remember. The meat had more to say than my father. Is everything all right with Liz?

OWEN ROWAN

Sure. She gets a bit uptight when I go out with the guys. Thinks I drink too much. And she hasn't made a lot of friends.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PAS

CONTINUED: (2)

OWEN ROWAN (CONT'D)

Six years in The Ridge and she hasn't made a friend. She just gets lonely...

NICK

I don't think she likes me...

OWEN ROWAN

She likes you fine. She just don't want to end up a character in a book...

INT. BUICK CITY BAR - NIGHT

Nick and Owen enter. Waiting at a table, with two pitchers of beer, Ikey nibbles at a bowl of nuts...

NICK

I'll be there in a second..

For he sees Aubrey and Ian, from the seminar, at the bar.

AUBREY

Hey. I don't think you and Ian have been formally introduced. Ian's as close to the next-big-thing at D.C. as there is. His stuff is straight stoops...

Ian blushes. He's a bit star-struck...

IAN

Not really. But "TURTLE" really made me see... What could be done.

NICK

Cool.

AUBREY

(to Ian)

Do you want me to leave your lips and Mr. Garrett's sphincter some alone time?

Ian frowns. But then Leslie Etwood and Geoffrey Treadwill, from Dufresne, pass by, on their way out...

LESLIE ETWOOD

Nicholson. May I have a word... ?

And Nick follows them over to one side of the bar...

LESLIE ETWOOD (CONT'D)

I just wanted to reiterate how greatly honored we would if you would even consider coming on in a more permanent position... ?

NICK

Perhaps you weren't apprised, sir, of my performance this afternoon... ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEOFFREY TREADWILL

Yes, we heard. And I asked Leslie how he thinks one can effectively inculcate young minds when gripped with the dry-heaves...

A smug smirk in Nick's direction... But:

LESLIE ETWOOD

A momentary lapse. Why, the first time I was in front of a classroom? The nastiest rash you ever did see. Hives. Big ones. But, soon after that, the concept of *not* standing in front of a classroom would cause me to break-out...

He smiles. Nick looks at Treadwill, who is shaking his head, doughy features cleaved with threat. To Etwood:

NICK

Well, it's very flattering, sir...

LESLIE ETWOOD

Just something to noodle on. So long now...

Etwood shakes Nick's hand. And they are gone, Treadwill glaring ominously at Nick as they leave...

Nick returns to where Aubrey and Ian stand at the bar...

AUBREY

What was that about? Professor Treadwill looked like he wanted to tear out your throat with his teeth...

NICK

I think the implication: "this town ain't big enough for the both us"...

And then, as if on cue, Eddie enters the bar.

And Nick sees him. And Eddie sees Nick. And they LOCK EYES. Eddie doesn't look happy. *Not at all...*

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. BUICK CITY BAR - NIGHT

Eddie and Nick. Still looking at each other across the bar. Nick nods, tries a smile... Ian is still at Nick's side:

IAN

Can I ask you - did you intend a deeper allegorical nihilism when you set the last chapter at the Empire State Building? Cos I saw it as: The Towers have crumbled, sure, but there is still a higher ground that can be ascended to?

Eddie's eyes tick to Ian, making him for a college kid... And Eddie goes to Ikey's table. Nick, turns back to Ian...

NICK

A lot of people read it that way. I just thought it was a manifestation of his larger issue. Which was: how do you reconcile the past with the present, when you don't feel comfortable in either? I don't normally go for big fancy themes. But it's important to have just enough of one, to sink your teeth into, you know?

Ian nods, as if this never occurred to him. Aubrey grins:

AUBREY

See now, that look on his face? I'd say you'd call that: *inspired*. Maybe you do have a knack for this thing, Mr. Garrett?

Nick nods... Smiles... Then:

NICK

Excuse me, guys...

Nick heads towards his friends, taking a chair at the table.

NICK (CONT'D)

Long time, Eddie...

It's an awkward moment... Nobody's sure how Eddie's going to respond. But Eddie merely ignores Nick entirely... Beat... Ikey tries to break the tension with:

IKEY

Check it: Janet The Planet. I mean, at what point does she just give up the fight? And go, like, bacon-burger 1, Janet The Planet, 0... ?

PAS A round of laughs from everyone, save for Eddie...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDDIE

You shouldn't go and disparage the people of The Ridge like that. It's not good...

And he says this, eye-fucking Nick like you read about...

IKEY

And you shouldn't go using words like "disparage", Edward. Makes us think maybe super-smart aliens swapped bodies with you...

EDDIE

What do you even know about Janet? She may be the coolest person in here. But you'll never find out. Cos you're too busy judging from the outside. Instead of finding out what's on the inside...

A quiet, sobering beat as they all process this wisdom...

IKEY

Maybe you're right. Maybe we should find out what's on the inside...

(beat)

My guess is *cake*. Lots of *cake*.

And everybody laughs - including Eddie, though it's clear he's covering. He rises from the table...

EDDIE

I'm gonna grab some shots.

OWEN

I gotta hang a rodent...

After they're gone, Ikey turns to Nick...

IKEY

That's wasn't too bad. Maybe he ain't still so creased...

Nick shrugs... Beat... Then, Ikey looks at him, his mood suddenly grave...

IKEY (CONT'D)

There's something I gotta drop on you, Nicky. I hate doing this, but... I gotta tell someone. I'm busting out...

NICK

What is it... ?

IKEY

You meet Liz yet... ?

PAS

(CONTINUED)

NICK
Owen's wife?

Ikey nods... Long beat...

NICK (CONT'D)
What about her... ?

IKEY
I had sex with her.

NICK
What -- ?

IKEY
Ducky Lowe had a thing. A party. Owen
got boomered and passed-out. She got
mad. I gave her a ride. And it just...

NICK
Ikey...

IKEY
It was a one-shot thing. It'll never
happen again. But...

NICK
But what... ?

IKEY
It was the most intense experience I've
ever had. I know I can't go back. And
that's the gong. I might've shared the
most intense moment of my life. With
someone I can never be with again. I
don't know where to go from here. My
head's just full of her...

NICK
Why am I hearing this -- ?

IKEY
I dunno. Cos you're leaving town
tomorrow? And we probably won't see you
again for another ten years? And I had
to tell someone. Cos it's gnawing at my
guts. And won't let go...

NICK
Well, let it go, Ikey. Let it go now.
They got a family. A life...

IKEY
And what do I got?

NICK
He's your best friend, man...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

They see Owen heading back. On his way, Owen scoops up a BOWL OF NUTS from an empty table, presenting them to Ikey...

OWEN
Score for you, buddy.
(to Nick)
Eichorn likes nuts more than most
squirrels do, Nicky...

Nick and Ikey exchange a look. Ikey offers Nick the bowl:

IKEY
Want some -- ?

Nick shakes his head...

OWEN ROWAN
Don't you remember, Ikey?
(in self-important voice)
"All of the Garrett men suffer from nut
allergies... "

IKEY
Oh, yeah... How could I forget... ?

But the moment is interrupted. By the loud CRASH of a bar stool knocked to the floor...

At the bar, Eddie slams down a double shot. He plunks down the glass next to three others. And gets right up in Ian's face. Ian, petrified, takes two steps backwards...

IAN
I'm sorry... What did I do -- ?

And Nick steps between Eddie and Ian...

NICK
Eddie, come on. Forget it. Let's go
back to the table...

But this only seems to fuel Eddie's ire...

EDDIE
Is that right? Is this who you are now?
Defender Of The Doofs?

Eddie's outburst has captured the attention of everyone in the place, including Aubrey and Janet the Planet...

NICK
I know I got a lot to set right with you,
Eddie...

EDDIE
Don't know what you're talking about...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Eddie downs the last shot off the bar. The booze clearly pushing him into a full-fledged frenzy...

EDDIE (CONT'D)

... *Nicholson*. But what I do know is: in your big triumphant return, you seem to have forgotten which side of The Road you belong on. Well, I'm gonna remind you how we roll here in The Ridge... It ain't much. But it's tight...

He grabs a fistful of Ian's collar and SLAMS him against the bar. Nick tries to intervene, but Eddie shoves him away. He won't be stopped. He tosses Ian back and forth... Aubrey gets in between them. And Eddie pushes her aside.

NICK

Eddie! Stop!

Eddie looks at him, blood in his eyes.

EDDIE

No. No, Nicky. *I won't*.

And Eddie cocks his arm back. Ready to pulverize. Ian's cherubic face in the cross-hairs of that big, gnarled fist.

And then, improbably, Ian winds up. And *swings a wild right hook into Eddie nose*... And, before any of them/us can process how unlikely this is:

Eddie goes down hard. And we HIT THE BLACK...

EXT. BUICK CITY BAR - NIGHT

Two SQUAD CARS bounce BLUE and RED lights over the scene. Seated on the curb, Eddie, fully tanked, holds an ice pack to his chin... Janet The Planet brings him out a fresh one... Nearby, Nick talks with a YOUNG COP, 26...

NICK

It was a friendly misunderstanding that got out of hand...

YOUNG COP

Just get him home, okay? I don't have any need to take Eddie Latekka in. He was real cool when I made varsity. He was QB my sophomore year. Threw me the ball a lot...

Nick sees Aubrey and Ian. She waves. He waves back...

INT. EDDIE'S TRUCK - MOVING - NIGHT

Nick is behind the wheel. Eddie is close to passed-out in the passenger seat. Nick looks at him, considering... Then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NICK

I really am sorry, Eddie. I never thought anybody would get torn up in the process, especially you. But I made a promise. A promise I never told you - or anyone else - about.

And, as the remnants of this promise flood through Nick, he tries to put it into words...

NICK (CONT'D)

Right before Ma died. She called me into her room... And I remember walking in. She looked so helpless. And she was not a helpless lady. She was tough. Remember that time she beat your ass for selling Ronny those firecrackers?

Nothing from Eddie...

NICK (CONT'D)

But now she was scared. As if she could see The Reaper, scythe in hand, slowly backing her into a corner. She actually told me she could see him. And that he looked like Wilford Brimley... Which is both creepy and reassuring at the same time, you know -- ?

Nick smiles at the memory...

NICK (CONT'D)

That's when she made me promise. That I wouldn't spend the rest of my life in The Ridge. I wouldn't give up on dreams of becoming more. She did. She sacrificed. For me and Ronny. And The Commander. She wanted to be a sculptor. She wasn't very good. She knew that. But still...
(beat)

So I went. From city to city. Bumming around Europe for years. Working every crap job I could find. And then one day, I woke-up in New York City. And six years have passed. And I didn't have a nickel. So I just started writing. Cos I didn't have anything else to do. Or anyplace else to go... Not sure why I never told you about it - the promise I made. But I guess, at the time, we were just too... Young.

He shakes his head...

- PAS

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NICK (CONT'D)

You got every right to stay creased. Doors, floors and windows would have been something. But I couldn't break the promise, Eddie. I just couldn't. And once I started running, it was easier to just keep going... Easier to just not deal with what was left behind: this place. My father and Ronny. Even you guys and Hannah. None of it seemed real anymore. With Ma gone... What was left behind was just a grim reminder... Of all that was lost...

(beat)

Any of this make sense?

Nick looks over to Eddie. But Eddie's been out cold for most of this. But in his own weird way, Nick's okay with that.

And then Eddie comes to... For:

EDDIE

Did that midget lay me out?

NICK

Sure did.

Eddie just shakes his head... And, as quickly as he came to, he's back out. Nick continues the drive in silence...

INT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - EDDIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nick hauls the semi-conscious Eddie to his bed and plops him down. Eddie looks up at Nick... Then:

EDDIE

I really missed you, man...

Nick nods, touched. Eddie falls back into his slumber, as Nick lets those words wash over him, penetrating him deeply.

Sensing something, Nick turns to find Physical Phil, leaning in the doorway, like a wraith, in the dim light. Physical Phil grins. He heard Eddie. He winks. And then, he is gone, as quickly as he appeared...

Nick smiles. Nods. And throws a comforter over Eddie.

NICK

G'night, buddy...

Nick throws the comforter over Eddie and starts out. But he stops, as Eddie stirs to finish his thought:

EDDIE

... But I can never, *never-ever*, be your friend again...

(CONTINUED)

- PAS

CONTINUED:

Nick stares at him. But Eddie is back asleep. Off the deeper implications, we PRE-LAP The Vines's "HOMESICK"...

EXT. EDDIE AND PHYSICAL PHIL'S HOUSE - DAWN

Nick makes his way toward the rental car he left parked here.

INT. NICK'S RENTAL CAR - MOVING - DAWN

The Vines play through. As Nick drives around Knight's Ridge, taking in the sights. The birth of a new day:

- The Donut Shop. Where The Commander and Ikey are starting their day, seated at separate tables with their newspapers...

- Hannah's house. Where Ray Cataldo comes out, mossy with sleep, heading for his truck... He glares at Nick, as he drives on by...

- Buick City Bar. Closed-up tight...

- CONSTRUCTION SITES. And their "CATALDO BUILDERS" signs...

- Owen's house. The lawn littered with the kids' toys...

- The HIGH SCHOOL, where the VARSITY FOOTBALL SQUAD is taking the field for morning practice...

And then he sees Sam, pedaling his BMX, tossing PAPERS from house to house... Nick toots his horn... Sam rides up to him... MUSIC DOWN FOR:

NICK

A paper route?

SAM

Ma feels it's good for me. Crack of dawn, fresh air, current events. Character-building stuff. What are you doing up this early?

NICK

Same thing. Trying to build some character. What do you think of your Mom's boyfriend... ?

SAM

Big Cat? He's okay, I guess. Although sometimes I think he's trying to murder me...

Off Nick's look --

SAM (CONT'D)

He makes my lunches. Which is nice, I suppose. But he forgets...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And Sam takes a brown paper bag from his newsboy satchel. He removes a small foil-wrapped sandwich...

SAM (CONT'D)
Yep. He did it again...

NICK
Did what?

SAM
Made me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Only... I've got a peanut allergy. One bite of this puppy... And I'm toast...

And the color drains from Nick's face... He looks visibly shaken... Sam clocks it:

SAM (CONT'D)
You okay -- ?

NICK
Yeah. Sure. Fine.

Sam offers him the sandwich...

SAM
You want this?

NICK
No... I... Uh.... Don't like jelly...

Sam frowns at Nick's obvious discomfit...

SAM
Okay. Well. See ya around --

And he pedals off... Leaving Nick, completely freaked...

NICK
Yeah. See ya around...

As The Vines FADE BACK UP... Nick puts the car in gear... He turns onto October Road... There, facing Dufresne College, he pulls to the shoulder and climbs out of the car.

EXT. OCTOBER ROAD - DAWN

Nick flips open his cell phone and dials...

INT. BUNGALOW 8 - MANHATTAN - DAWN

The Vampire Shift. Stratton chats-up TWO ENTHUSIASTIC PARTY-GIRLS. Next to him, on the plush booth bench, his cell phone VIBRATES... But Stratton doesn't take notice...

EXT. OCTOBER ROAD - DAWN

We hear Stratton's voice mail message pick up: "You got Stratton. Leave your peep at the beep."

NICK

Frenzy Boy, it's me. I, uh... I think I'm gonna hang in The Ridge for a while... They offered me a permanent position to teach out the rest of the semester... I think I'm gonna take it. Please don't say anything to Taylor. I'd like to tell her myself...

(beat)

It's just that there's a lot here I'm not ready to walk away from a second time...

And, from up here, he can make out the vague figure of Sam, down below, on his bike, tossing papers... Nick smiles...

NICK (CONT'D)

Way I see it: this thing is in diapers...

Nick snaps the phone shut. As Crowded House's "WEATHER WITH YOU" starts up on track. And Nick considers his choice.

But then Munch Keegan, the enormous handyman, comes walking down the road, swinging his lunch cooler, on his way to work. As he approaches, MUSIC DOWN FOR:

MUNCH

Morning, Nick...

EDDIE

Morning, Munch.

MUNCH

I guess this is goodbye... ?

Nick just looks at him.

NICK

Not so much.

The MUSIC SWELLS ("Everywhere you go / Always take the weather..."). And, as we CRANE UP, soaring high above October Road - Dufresne College and Knight's Ridge facing-off on either side of it, like punch-drunk pugilists determined to go down swinging - we know we are at...

THE END

PAS

Or rather... THE BEGINNING.