

MILLER'S GIRL

Written by

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A cursor blinks on a blank computer screen. Text appears.

Adventures in Adversity.

The text is deleted and replaced.

Afflictions and Obstacles

The text is deleted and replaced.

I have nothing to say.

The words are deleted.

CU on clean, unpolished fingernails resting on the keyboard of a laptop. We follow the fingers to the wrist, on which is a series words written in faded ink, a grocery list of vocabulary words: *gormless, complaisant, obviate* - The words disappear into a sleeve.

CAIRO SWEET, 17 and plain in a dark hooded sweatshirt, sits alone at a table in a huge, beautiful kitchen. It's dark, the only lights coming from her computer screen, a dim bulb above a massive chef's stove, and an expensive television hanging on the wall, playing NOW, VOYAGER on mute.

She shuts the laptop and stares at the TV for a moment, grainy black and white flickers casting shadows on her face. Behind her, the sun is just starting to rise gray-pink in a winter sky.

She unmutes the television just as Paul Henreid asks Bette Davis if they should "*just have a cigarette on it*" in the final scene of the film.

Bette Davis and Paul Henreid are reflected in Cairo's pupils.

TITLE CARD:

MILLER'S GIRL

EXT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - MORNING

A gray Jeep Grand Cherokee sits in the vast parking lot, exhaust smoking in the cold air.

Only three or four other cars are there - the early arriving over-achievers and burn outs coming for last minute tutoring.

Cairo's face is reflected in the side mirror.

The reflection shifts to what she sees: a pair of stringy teenagers walking toward the building.

The girl says something that makes the boy laugh. He pulls her close and kisses her as they walk.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Inspirational posters line the walls. A VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY banner hangs above a dry erase board, on which is written *MR. MILLER - CREATIVE WRITING* in beautiful, cursive handwriting. Beneath that, a list of authors - Nabakov, Twain, Chbosky, Sedaris.

Cairo sits at a desk in an entirely empty classroom, reading her library copy of *FINNEGANS WAKE*. A venti Starbucks cup and a small stack of books sit next to her on the desk.

JONATHAN MILLER, a tall, slim man in his 30s, enters carrying a stack of freshly printed pages. He is surprised to find a student in his classroom so early.

JONATHAN
Good morning.

CAIRO
Morning.

JONATHAN
Class doesn't start for another hour.

CAIRO
Yes, I know.

She absently blows on the lip of her coffee but doesn't drink it.

JONATHAN
What've you got there?

CAIRO
Joyce.

JONATHAN
Awfully big man for such a small cup.

CAIRO
Shocking what you can fit in a venti.

He smiles.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
It's a triple espresso.

JONATHAN

Intense.

CAIRO

I'm not a morning person.

JONATHAN

Based on your arrival time I'd have guessed otherwise. Do you live far?

CAIRO

No, just down the road in Lovell Hills.

JONATHAN

Wow, nice.

CAIRO

My parents are lawyers. Perks of the trade, I guess.

JONATHAN

What kind?

CAIRO

The expensive kind.

JONATHAN

Do you want to be a lawyer?

CAIRO

About as much as I want to be a high school student.

He considers her.

JONATHAN

What's your name?

CAIRO

Cairo Sweet.

JONATHAN

I'm Mr. Miller.

CAIRO

I know.

He hands her a sheet of paper.

JONATHAN

Well, Cairo Sweet, I assume you got this before Christmas, have you had a chance to look it over?

CAIRO
Yeah, I've read them.

JONATHAN
I know it looks intimidating but
we'll move through these quick
enough.

CAIRO
I mean I read the books.

JONATHAN
You read these books?

CAIRO
Yes.

JONATHAN
There are twenty-eight books on
this list.

CAIRO
I party hard.

WINNIE BLACK enters. She is 17 and gorgeous, overtly trendy
and just one inch away from being inappropriately dressed.
She gives Jonathan a once over.

WINNIE
I like this whole sweater without a
shirt under it business. I like it
very much.

JONATHAN
(uncomfortable)
Uh, thanks Winnie. Nice...feathers.

WINNIE
Oh, you like? They're sewn into my
hair.

JONATHAN
Okay.

WINNIE
(to Cairo)
You're overdressed as usual, I see.

CAIRO
Your underwear as usual, I see.

Winnie leans over and takes a sip of Cairo's coffee.

WINNIE
This tastes like diabetes.

CAIRO
I can see your uterus.

WINNIE
You like?

CAIRO
You wish.

Jonathan clears his throat. Winnie smiles and spreads her legs wider for Cairo.

WINNIE
What's on the agenda today, Killer Miller?

JONATHAN
Nothing that will interest you, I'm sure.

WINNIE
Try me.

JONATHAN
We'll be discussing censorship in the American education system and it's effect on young writers.

WINNIE
Boring.

CAIRO
Important.

WINNIE
Please. Censorship is dead. It can't exist with the accessibility of today's technology.

JONATHAN
It's not just the banning of books, Winnie. It's the banning of ideas. And without ideas, what are we?

WINNIE
Pop musicians.

JONATHAN
You're not wrong. Do you know why?

WINNIE

Yeah, do you?

CAIRO

Censorship distracts us from what's important. If we don't have ideas, then we won't have any idea what's going on.

Winnie rolls her eyes.

JONATHAN

(impressed)

Yes. Precisely.

CAIRO

If we're taught something is wrong at an early age, we develop a conditioned aversion without being aware until it's too late, and by then we're likely too apathetic to care. It narrows our perception. Narrow perception is certain death for writers.

JONATHAN

And censorship is certain death for readers. Clever.

WINNIE

Boring.

Winnie sits on Cairo's desk and her stomach growls, loud. She rubs her belly.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

(to her tummy)

What's that you say? You need a chicken biscuit?

(it growls again)

And a coke?

(to Cairo)

You heard the boss. It's chickybisky coke-y time. Let's go.

CAIRO

You know chicken biscuits are made of chicken, right?

WINNIE

So?

CAIRO

So I thought you were vegan.

WINNIE

Ugh, hard no. The only weight I lost was in bone density.

CAIRO

It's not a diet.

WINNIE

Because it doesn't fucking work.

CAIRO

Okay. May we get you anything Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN

No thanks, Cairo. Sweet of you to ask, though.

WINNIE

Ah. I see what you did there.

Cairo and Winnie exit.

Jonathan takes a deep breath and smiles to himself.

JONATHAN

Okay. Good start, Jon. Good start.

He looks at the stack of books on Cairo's desk. *Finnegans Wake*. *The Paris Review*. And UNDER THE ROOFS OF PARIS by Henry Miller. This surprises him. He takes the book and opens it.

BORIS FILLMORE (30s) enters, wearing a MEMPHIS TIGERS hat. He carries a pastry box and two coffees.

BORIS

Pretty advanced for seniors, don't you think?

Jonathan shuts the book immediately.

JONATHAN

It's a student's.

BORIS

What's her name?

JONATHAN

How do you know it's a girl?

BORIS

Boys are too lazy to read porn.

JONATHAN

It's not porn.

BORIS

Every other word in that book is peen, poon, pee in the poon, pussy play peen poon and also anal. Gimme that.

He snatches the book from Jonathan.

BORIS (CONT'D)

(reciting)

"Marcelle wants me to fuck her. She leaps onto the couch and pushes herself between the girl and me...there's something so fascinatingly horrible about her that I can't move--"

JONATHAN

Okay.

BORIS

(still reading)

"-I turn my back to get away from her when I feel her bald cuntlet touching the end of my dick--"

JONATHAN

OKAY.

BORIS

Tell me her name.

JONATHAN

Cairo.

BORIS

No way.

JONATHAN

No way what way?

BORIS

I had her last year. Didn't know she was a dirty nerdy. Heyyyyo.

JONATHAN

She's not and we are not having this conversation.

BORIS
 (resuming his recitation)
*"Marcelle stretches her tiny split
 fig, holds it open and pushes it
 down against-"*

Jonathan snatches the book back from Boris and returns it to Cairo's desk.

JONATHAN
 And that is quite enough of your
 elocution.

BORIS
Split fig is fucking poetry.

JONATHAN
 Henry Miller, regardless of your
 opinion on what he writes, is a
 literary icon. If she's as smart as
 you say she is, then I'm certain
 she's reading his work for more
 erudite reasons than self-pleasure.
 Is that coffee for me?

BORIS
 And a muffin too, if you want.

Jonathan pulls a muffin from the pastry box. Boris goes through Cairo's bag.

JONATHAN
 These look great man-
 (he looks up)
Are you going through her bag?

BORIS
 (digging)
 How many wonders can one cavern
 hold?

Boris pulls out a university press paperback with DDC numbers on the spine.

BORIS (CONT'D)
 Well slap my butt and call me
 Gramma - *Apostrophes and
 Ampersands*, six gruellingly pompous
 short stories by Jon Albert Miller.

JONATHAN
 (surprised)
 My book? She has my book?

BORIS

No one else could come up with a title like that.

(he looks at the library card in the back)

And she's the only one who's ever checked it out. How sweet.

Jonathan takes this book from Boris as well.

JONATHAN

Don't you have a class to teach?

BORIS

I've got an assignment up on the board.

JONATHAN

That doesn't count.

Jonathan stares at the cover a moment and replaces the book in Cairo's bag. Boris finishes his coffee and free throws it into the trash.

BORIS

I guess I can go pop in a movie for them.

JONATHAN

Start the year off with a bang?

BORIS

We can't all be Mr. Chips. Later Professor.

As Boris exits, Cairo bumps into him.

CAIRO

Oh, excuse me Coach Fillmore. Good morning.

BORIS

Good morning Cairo.

As Boris exits, he turns around and mouths "*split fig*" behind Cairo's back.

CAIRO

Forgot my wallet.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - THAT EVENING

Jonathan sits at a table with his wife BEATRICE, (30s, rapier wit, minimal empathy). She is typing furiously on her laptop and cross referencing on her iPad. Chinese food cartons separate them.

JONATHAN

Perhaps we could schedule a more convenient time for conversation.

She looks up and shuts her laptop.

BEATRICE

Sorry, I've been back and forth all day with the Nashville office, who can't seem to articulate what they want to my useless agent and think they can somehow articulate it to me, which is pretty ambitious considering they think *articulate* is a Danish cheese. So I'm gonna start scooping my fucking teeth out with a baby spoon as that seems the most reasonable exercise to deal with this day's lunacy. How are you?

JONATHAN

Jesus, babe. You need a massage.

BEATRICE

I need a lobotomy.
(trying)
So, first day of the semester, yeah? You like the new class?

JONATHAN

One of my first period kids is really bright. She's reading Finnegans Wake on her own, can you believe that?

BEATRICE

Oh yeah?

JONATHAN

And guess what else?

BEATRICE

Infinite Jest.

JONATHAN

Probably. But no.

BEATRICE

What.

JONATHAN

Apostrophes and Ampersands by yours truly. Pretty cool, right?

BEATRICE

And obscure. I wonder where she found it.

JONATHAN

She checked it out of the library.

BEATRICE

They carry your book at the library? That's so sweet.

Her phone rings. She looks at it in dismay.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Hark. A confederacy of dunces.

He kisses her head and stands. The conversation is over.

JONATHAN

Deep breaths. Happy place.

BEATRICE

My happy place has all of their heads impaled on giant Montblanc pens.

She answers the phone.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Hello, Amy. What is it now?

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - EVENING

We follow Jon through the hallway of his little house toward the kitchen. It's an older home with wallpaper so outdated it's almost chic now. A little messy. Books crammed into every available space.

He stops at a bookshelf in the hallway and pulls down a well worn copy of *Apostrophes and Ampersands*. He opens it to the inside cover, where a dedication reads:

"Beatrice June Harker -

For you. Every last word.

Yours Ever, Jonathan Albert Miller."

He flips through the pages - some have been highlighted, notes have been written in the margins in a thick, strong handwriting. He reads through as he walks.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Jonathan enters the small kitchen and goes to the fridge for a beer, still reading.

BEATRICE (O.S.)

Can you get me a drink while you're in there?

He sets the book on the counter and rinses out a lowball glass. He pours a couple of fingers of Maker's Mark.

Beatrice stands in the doorway.

He holds the partially filled glass out to her. She types on her phone without looking up.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

You forgot the liquor.

JONATHAN

Liquor? You brought her.

He pours a bigger glass. She smiles.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Have you read Under the Roofs of Paris?

BEATRICE

Henry Miller, yeah? The one where he wipes come off a prostitute with a dollar?

JONATHAN

(reciting from memory)
I take the first bill I find in my pockets, wipe my cock on it, and lay it crumpled on her bare belly weighted with a coin.

BEATRICE
Right, that one. I like that one.

He hands her the filled glass and kisses her neck.

JONATHAN
You want to reenact?

He runs his hands up her arms.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
I can papier-mâché you with come
and money.

BEATRICE
(laughing)
Gross.

JONATHAN
We can crack you open like a pinata
after you dry.

He unbuttons her blouse.

BEATRICE
It's like the fun never ends.

JONATHAN
What if I do it while you work? You
won't even know I'm here.

BEATRICE
What if you do the dishes instead?

JONATHAN
Kitchen chores? What do you take me
for?

BEATRICE
Arts and Crafts specialist?

JONATHAN
The Kandinsky of Come. The Brecht
of the Boom Boom.

BEATRICE
Appalling.

He kisses her chest and face.

JONATHAN
After you make best-seller we can
have fleets of children who will do
all the chores.

BEATRICE
 If I make best-seller, I'll pay the
 chores to do themselves.
 (her phone rings)
 Oh for fuck's sake.

It rings again. Jonathan sighs into her neck.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
 (answering, irritated)
What is it, Amy.

She walks back to the dining room, drink in hand. She leaves her blouse unbuttoned. Jonathan adjusts himself in his trousers.

EXT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - A WEEK LATER - MORNING

The sun is rising. Jonathan sits on the side of a brick building, smoking a cigarette. Boris sits down next to him with two coffees and a pastry box.

BORIS
 Shit, it's cold.

JONATHAN
 Worth it for the sunrise. Best part of my morning.

BORIS
 Winnie Black's the best part of mine. I like to play drinking games with her outfits. Cooter shot? Drink. Nipple slip? Drink. It's a wonder I can make it through my day.

JONATHAN
 Without getting arrested?

BORIS
 Without getting blasted. But I guess that too.

Jonathan is not amused.

JONATHAN
 Why do you always have to hold my coffee hostage?

BORIS
 Because you're a fucking puritan
 and I feel it's my duty to punish
 the goodness out of you.

JONATHAN
 You're a sadist.

BORIS
 I'm a public school teacher.

Jonathan stares at the sunrise.

JONATHAN
 Look at that. How beautiful is
 that?

BORIS
 You gonna sing about it?

JONATHAN
 I'm going to bask in it.

BORIS
 Gay.

JONATHAN
 You're the one who made it a
 picnic.

BORIS
 No homo.

JONATHAN
 Your applications of demotic
 language are endlessly inspiring.

Cairo walks past wearing headphones. Jonathan waves.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
 Hey Cairo.

She doesn't hear him. Boris tosses a balled up pastry wrapper
 at her.

BORIS
 YO, CAIRO.

She picks up the ball and throws it back.

CAIRO
 Is that how a gentleman says good
 morning?

BORIS
When you're older you'll see how
real men say good morning.

Jonathan is mortified.

JONATHAN
What are you listening to? Little
Wayne? No Direction?

CAIRO
(embarrassed)
Oh, uh. Celine Dion?

JONATHAN
No way, for real?

CAIRO
For real.

BORIS
(horrified)
But...why?

CAIRO
Why not?

JONATHAN
Ignore him. He wept openly, *aloud*,
to the Titanic theme song at our
senior prom.

CAIRO
Me too! Not at your prom,
obviously.

BORIS
(to Jon)
Do vows of secrecy mean nothing to
you? To the grave, man!

CAIRO
No judgement. It's devastating.

BORIS
I didn't cry.

JONATHAN
You were disconsolate.

BORIS
(butt-hurt)
Traitor.

JONATHAN
Hypocrite.

BORIS
(to Cairo)
You want a muffin?

CAIRO
A what?

BORIS
Did I stutter?

He holds out a muffin for her. She takes it.

CAIRO
Okay. Thank you.

She takes a bite. It's buttery and sticky - the crumbs stick to her lips and she uses her fingers to wipe them away.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
Whoa, this is crazy good.

BORIS
I know, right?

CAIRO
You made these?

BORIS
Yeah, but don't tell.

CAIRO
Why not?

BORIS
You know.

CAIRO
...I don't.

BORIS
You'll figure it out.

CAIRO
I won't.

JONATHAN
Can't have the baseball team
knowing he bakes muffins and cries
to Celine Dion.

BORIS
 (to Cairo)
 Well. Fuck me, right?
 (to Jon)
 You're an asshole.

JONATHAN
 Love you.

BORIS
 This isn't love, you monster.

JONATHAN
 (singing)
*LOVE WAS WHEN I LOVED YOU...ONE
 TRUE TIME I HOLD TO...IN MY LIFE
 WE'LL ALWAYS GO ON...*

Boris flips him a double bird as he walks away.

CAIRO
 Y'all are sweet.

JONATHAN
 Something like that.
 (beat)
 You're gonna be late for my class.

CAIRO
 So are you.

Jonathan finishes his cigarette.

JONATHAN
 Come by after school today if you
 can.

CAIRO
 Am I in trouble?

JONATHAN
 I'd like to talk about your work.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS
 LATER

Boris walks down an almost empty hall, checking his phone, humming the Titanic theme song to himself. He walks right past Winnie Black, standing at her open locker - it looks like a Lisa Frank installation.

WINNIE
Excuse me, you can't even say
hello? I dressed up just for you.

He turns around, eyeing her.

BORIS
Winnie Black. If only that were
true and legal.

WINNIE
How's it going?

He walks up to her.

BORIS
What do you want?

WINNIE
Who says I want anything?

BORIS
You're the hungry type.

WINNIE
You think you've got me figured
out, huh?

BORIS
Not even close.

WINNIE
You're awfully close now.

Boris backs away from her.

BORIS
Tricky. Very tricky.

WINNIE
I was wondering if I could get back
into your physics class.

BORIS
Oh? What for?

WINNIE
I've got a boner for Bohr.
Heisenberg gets me hard.

BORIS
It would be a lot to catch up on,
Black. You'll be two tests behind
and only four away from midterms.

WINNIE

Do you tutor?

BORIS

You don't need tutoring.

WINNIE

How do you know?

BORIS

Because I know you're smarter than advertised.

WINNIE

Flattery gets you everywhere, Boris.

BORIS

I don't recall giving you permission to use my first name.

WINNIE

And I don't recall giving you permission to check out my tits, but I won't stop you.

EXT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - ANOTHER HALLWAY - MORNING

Cairo tries to enter the building from an outside corridor, but two teenagers are blocking the door, making out. She again tries to open the door, but they won't budge. She knocks on the window. The girl pulls out of the kiss and looks at Cairo through the glass. Cairo gestures to the door, and the girl looks right through her before she goes back to kissing the boy. Cairo is irritated but not surprised. This is Benson Agricultural High School. She goes back the way she came, passing other students carrying backpacks and coffees and iPhones. Nobody notices her or waves to her. She is singular and nondescript.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Cairo enters through a different door and watches Winnie and Boris for a minute before she joins them. They could be any teacher talking to any student. Nothing unusual.

Boris walks away from a smiling Winnie. She turns and sees Cairo and waves.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Cairo and Winnie walk together. More students and teachers are starting to crowd the halls.

CAIRO
What was that?

WINNIE
I'm seducing Coach Fillmore.

CAIRO
Why?

WINNIE
Because I can.

A group of baseball players walks toward them in the opposite direction. One of the guys whistles at Winnie.

JOCK
What's your going rate, baby girl?
Been saving up my lunch money.

WINNIE
(not missing a beat)
Finish growing out your vagina and
then we can talk.

The other jocks laugh at Winnie's retort and continue on their way. Cairo barely notices. This is old hat to her.

CAIRO
Coach Fillmore though? He's a
fucking primate.

Winnie gestures to the student body around them.

WINNIE
These are primates.

CAIRO
You're a lesbian.

WINNIE
I'm an opportunist. You jealous?

CAIRO
If I say yes, will you lay off him?

WINNIE
If I say yes, will you lay on me?

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - END OF THE SCHOOL DAY -
AFTERNOON

Jonathan is attempting to grade papers while simultaneously having a conversation with Boris, who sits on Cairo's desk, eating a power bar.

BORIS

This tastes like chalk, why do people eat this shit?

He tosses the rest of the bar out the open window. From below we hear student yell "*the fuck?*"

BORIS (CONT'D)

How's the book coming?

JONATHAN

Not fast enough.

BORIS

Trouble in paradise?

JONATHAN

No. Yes. No.

BORIS

Is she putting out?

JONATHAN

Wow.

BORIS

Knew it.

JONATHAN

She's busy.

BORIS

Too busy to get busy? Step it up, brah.

JONATHAN

I'm not going to guilt my wife into sleeping with me.

BORIS

Why not?

JONATHAN

Who wants guilt sex?

BORIS

Guilt sex, make up sex, balloon
animal sex...

JONATHAN

This is why you're single. You know
that, right?

BORIS

I'm not single, I'm available. And
late to practice. What time is
dinner?

JONATHAN

Six. Please take a shower first.

BORIS

What, you worried Bea's gonna wanna
get with this?

(he stands and rubs his
body)

With this luscious sweaty man-meat?

JONATHAN

It is actually my worst nightmare.

Boris begins to Roger Rabbit out of the room.

BORIS

You better watch yo'self. I got
moves. I got skills.

JONATHAN

You've got brain damage.

BORIS

(singing as he backs out
of the room)

*Iiiiiiiiiif you want my body AND you
think it's sexy come on darling let
me know-*

Once alone, Jonathan sings along to himself and resumes
grading papers. He dances a little in his seat.

Cairo stands in the doorway watching him. He looks up and
sees her, and immediately stops mid-lyric.

JONATHAN

Hey.

She tries not to laugh. He tries to be cool.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Hi. Hello. Well that's embarrassing, isn't it?

CAIRO

I won't tell.

JONATHAN

That's generous. Thanks for coming by, I hope I'm not keeping you from anything.

CAIRO

Nah, I'm just waiting for Winnie.

JONATHAN

Seems like you're always waiting for Winnie.

CAIRO

Sounds like an album title. Waiting for Winnie by the Gin Blossoms.

JONATHAN

Gin Blossoms. How old are you again?

CAIRO

In my body or in my brain?

JONATHAN

What's she doing?

CAIRO

She's with Mrs. Rodgers getting her portfolio together. She's applying for Vandy, you'll be pleased to know.

JONATHAN

Have you considered Vanderbilt?

CAIRO

God no. Tennessee is a fucking tar pit. No offense.

JONATHAN

I think you'll come to appreciate it when you're older.

CAIRO

Maybe. From afar. As it burns. Like Nero.

JONATHAN
And where do you intend to go?

CAIRO
Stanford, naturally.

JONATHAN
Naturally.

Jonathan opens a folder on his desk and pulls out a sheet of paper.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
I want to talk to you about this week's assignment.

CAIRO
Okay.

JONATHAN
I asked for a first person short story from an opposing social perspective. Your peers wrote varying articles about high school social hierarchies - some attempted a comment on classism, Ms. Black delivered a scathing satire on popularity - and you wrote about a reluctant spider.

He begins to read from aloud from the page. The text appears over the images we see.

EXT. CAIRO'S SHORT STORY - FANTASY

CU on a sturdy black garden spider spinning a web in a white window sill.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
*"Survival and desire amalgamated
and turned an aphotic eye inward.*

ECU on her black legs against the silk. A shadow falls over her and she begins to spin upwards on a single strand. A hand perfectly manicured in dark purple nail polish plucks the strand from the web, the spider floating beneath it.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
*I saw my expectations dismantled
and dismembered by those harsh and
starving dogs of reality-*

She begins to spin upwards toward the hand that holds her.

JONATHAN

*- the truths that sit in the
vacuity of space like a
hypergiant-star, burning to ash all
elements too weak to withstand the
awesome heat.*

She makes it to the flesh of the hand. She crawls over the top, over the fingers and around. She cannot find a way off. The hand turns upward and she is cradled in the palm. She stops moving and the fingers close around her.

The hand turns downward and opens and the spider falls.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

We are what we are.

She tumbles down - down into what appears to be a primordial forest.

She falls into the mouth of a venus fly trap.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

And all creatures must eat."

We pull out far enough to see the arm and torso belonging to the hand, which now rests on a white windowsill, on which also is a small terrarium full of carnivorous plants.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

He puts the pages down and looks at her.

CAIRO

She's not reluctant, she's resigned.

JONATHAN

To her death?

CAIRO

To the order of things. She eats and also waits to be eaten.

JONATHAN

Is she you?

CAIRO

I suppose all fiction is just cloaked confession, isn't it?

JONATHAN

And what does your spider confess?

CAIRO

The weak are made to be devoured by
the strong.

JONATHAN

That's dark.

CAIRO

That's nature.

JONATHAN

Could I keep a copy of this?

CAIRO

Why?

JONATHAN

Because it's gorgeous and I want my
wife to read it. I'm hoping she'll
write you a letter of
recommendation.

CAIRO

Why not you?

JONATHAN

An author's endorsement will carry
more weight than your teacher's.

CAIRO

Maybe to the school.

JONATHAN

You'll be a superstar in college.
God, you can post-grad anywhere you
want.

CAIRO

Like Iowa?

JONATHAN

Without doubt.

CAIRO

I was joking.

JONATHAN

I wasn't.
You shine. And you're just gonna
get brighter.

CAIRO

That's what I thought about high school.

JONATHAN

What do you mean? You're gonna be valedictorian.

CAIRO

That's just following a formula. Show up, make good grades. It doesn't have anything to do with being remarkable. You're the first person in four years to notice me.

JONATHAN

You'll see. Once you're away from the troglodytes of track and field, you'll find those more discerning individuals of taste.

CAIRO

Once I get into Stanford where they can appreciate the egregious abuse of my sublime vernacular?

JONATHAN

It's better to have fat to trim than not enough to cook.

CAIRO

You learn that at Vanderbilt?

JONATHAN

Missisissy.

CAIRO

What?

JONATHAN

My Aunt Sissy from Mississippi. When I was a kid I thought my parents were saying "we're going to *Missus Sissy*", but they were saying Mississippi. So I always called her Missisissy. She taught me that.

CAIRO

That's a good story. You should tell that at parties.

JONATHAN

I'm too boring for parties. I'm more library-snooper than cabinet-snooper.

CAIRO

Because you define people by what they read, you big snob.

JONATHAN

People are defined by what they read, little snob.

CAIRO

I read your book.

JONATHAN

Oh.
It wasn't as well received as I'd have hoped.

CAIRO

That surprises me.

JONATHAN

There's no accounting for taste, I guess.

CAIRO

Not in Tennessee.

JONATHAN

Not in New York either.

CAIRO

You went to New York?

JONATHAN

Alas to no avail.

CAIRO

Was it fun?

JONATHAN

It was an education.

CAIRO

What did they say?

JONATHAN

"No."

CAIRO
 Well, brevity is the soul of wit.
 If you find that sort of thing
 funny.

He laughs.

JONATHAN
 They found my work...overreaching.
Ambitious without direction, was
 the official word.

CAIRO
 They were wrong.

JONATHAN
 That's kind of you to say.

CAIRO
 I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean
 it.

Beat.

JONATHAN
 What did you make of it, truly?

CAIRO
 I memorized it.

She looks into his face. CU on the wrinkles of skin around
 his surprised smile. He looks at her beneath his lashes.

JONATHAN
 You didn't.

Cairo laughs, awkward.

INT. CAIRO'S BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK/FANTASY

Cairo sits in a clawfoot bathtub filled with pillows. She
 wears tie-dyed pajama bottoms and an oversized, peeling
 sweatshirt that says something like *WORLD'S BEST GRANDPA*.

She's reading the plastic sheathed library version of
APOSTROPHE'S & AMPERSANDS.

We look up at her from the page of the book. The text appears
 on her face, as if projected there.

CAIRO (V.O.)

"She was an electric white, noon-shadow moon casting cold light like water over the flat earth of my face - don't look into the sun, they say, but the moon - the moon - I stared until I was nothing but a bleached bone monument beneath her, human ruins of a madman's love."

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

CAIRO

I've read it countless times.
Impossible not to.

JONATHAN

Wow.

CAIRO

Is that weird? It's weird, isn't it, I'm so sorry.

JONATHAN

Please don't be. I'm flattered.
It's the first story I ever had published. It's my favorite.

Beat. Jon blushes a little.

CAIRO

There's something magic in the way the words and ideas come to you that very first time, unaccompanied and audacious, beautiful in the anarchy of it, like stars before they come together in a constellation - stop me if this is moronic.

JONATHAN

No, no you're - I agree completely.

CAIRO

Chaos is the score upon which reality is written.

JONATHAN

Henry Miller.

CAIRO

You like Miller?

JONATHAN

I do.

CAIRO

That's what your work feels like to me. There's a slow violence to it, a creeping-upon that is so unexpected and...luxurious.

JONATHAN

Where were you when *I* was in high school?

CAIRO

What were you, like class of '89?

JONATHAN

NINETY-NINE, thank you very much. God, you weren't even born.

CAIRO

Wish I was. The nineties were tops.

JONATHAN

You're not wrong about that.

CAIRO

I'm not wrong about many things.

A moment passes between them - a silent thing that smiles and knows without question or answer.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Is there more I could read? Short stories, poems, anything.

JONATHAN

I wish I had something to offer you. I haven't written in a long time.

CAIRO

Why?

JONATHAN

I don't know. I got married. I started teaching. I didn't have anything else to say.

CAIRO

Maybe you will.

He smiles.

JONATHAN

Maybe.
Hey. How'd you like the scoop on
the midterm?

CAIRO

Sneaky. I'd like it very much.

JONATHAN

I'm going to have you write a short
story in the style of your favorite
author. I think it should be the
highlight of your portfolio
submission for Stanford.

CAIRO

Yes. That's genius.

JONATHAN

Yeah?

Winnie enters the room, dramatically dropping her bags on the
floor. She's got a thick painter's portfolio under her arm,
stuffed with loose canvasses.

WINNIE

She wants me to have *fifteen* new
pieces in OIL. Fifteen. Do I look
like a fucking Time Lord to you?
No. I don't.
My shift starts in like an hour and
a half and mama needs some snickity
snackities, let's roll. Hey JMill.

JONATHAN

JMill? Is that my rap name?

WINNIE

Obvi. You're so fucking gangster.

JONATHAN

I'm skrate hood shawty.

WINNIE

Nope. Don't do that.

She motions for Cairo to join her.

CAIRO

Bye, Mr. Miller. I'll see you
tomorrow.

JONATHAN
Bye Cairo. Bye Winnie!
Holleratchaboy.

The girls grab their stuff and leave. Jonathan tries to continue grading his papers, but is distracted. He smiles to himself.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - AFTERNOON

HEARTBEATS by THE KNIFE

Cairo's car is filled with crumpled paper, used books, and candy wrappers.

Winnie sits cross-legged in the passenger seat, paintbrushes and more food wrappers beneath her.

Almost every available space of the interior - the ceiling, the doors, the console - is covered in art and language - an ever evolving art piece by Cairo and Winnie.

We watch their town pass outside the car. Rural, beautiful, overgrown. Yards with chickens, cotton and soy fields.

EXT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Cairo's car pulls into a small country gas station.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Cairo leaves the car running.

WINNIE
You want anything?

CAIRO
A pack of cigarettes. Marlboros.

WINNIE
Okay, do you want anything for real?

CAIRO
That's what I want.

WINNIE
Cigarettes.

CAIRO
Yeah.

WINNIE
Cigarettes.

CAIRO
...Cigarettes, Winnie.

WINNIE
Okay.

INT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

The Jock is behind the counter - not nearly as cool out of uniform.

Winnie goes to the refrigerator and grabs a vanilla Coke, then to the candy for a Zero bar and a bag of jerky.

She sits everything on the counter. Outside of school, Winnie and the Jock are totally different to one another. Kinder.

WINNIE
Hey.

JOCK
Hey Winnie. You want anything else?

He starts ringing everything up.

WINNIE
Can I get a pack of Marlboros?

JOCK
You smoke?

WINNIE
I might.

JOCK
You're too pretty to smoke. My mom's skin looks like a handbag.

WINNIE
It's for a project. I promise not to inhale.

The jock grabs a pack of menthols and sets them on the counter.

JOCK
Show me your id. Just for the cameras.

She does. He checks it and smiles at her.

JOCK (CONT'D)
 Good picture. It'll be ten eighty.

She sets a ten and a five on the counter.

WINNIE
 Keep the change. Buy yourself
 something pretty.

JOCK
 See you at school tomorrow?

WINNIE
 Game on. See you then.

She leaves.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Cairo is doodling on her steering wheel with a silver sharpie.

Winnie gets in and tosses the cigarettes in Cairo's lap and opens her candy bar. CU as she sinks her teeth into the white chocolate.

INT. CHAIN RESTAURANT - EVENING

Beatrice, Jonathan and Boris sit at a table in the back of a family restaurant. An empty lowball glass sits in front of Beatrice, and various beers in front of Boris and Jonathan, who pick at chips in a basket.

Winnie, wearing a her own very tight version of what the other waitresses are wearing, talks to the table.

BEATRICE
 (annoyed)
 This isn't a five star restaurant,
 honey. What is the hold up?

Her attitude doesn't faze Winnie. She's a pro.

WINNIE
 Some stupid fuck up in the kitchen
 that was entirely preventable. Can
 I get y'all anything else while you
 wait?

BEATRICE
 Another Makers.

WINNIE
You got it. Coach?

BORIS
Corona, no lime. Working late on a school night, aren't you?

WINNIE
Drinking late on a school night, aren't you?

BORIS
You think sassing me will get you a better tip?

WINNIE
It gets me a better grade.

BORIS
Touché.

WINNIE
Another for you Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN
I'm good, Winnie. Designated driver.

WINNIE
See? Why can't you be a nice, boring teacher like Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN
Boring?

BORIS
And let my students make their grades on scholastic merit? Never.

JONATHAN
You think I'm boring?

WINNIE
You're so square I can count your pixels. Don't ever change.

She goes back to the kitchen.

BEATRICE
I like her.

BORIS
Everybody does. Hipster Helen of Troy.

BEATRICE
She's in high school?

BORIS
Devastating.

JONATHAN
She's in my morning class.

BEATRICE
I'm impressed she's ever had to
make use of a brain with a body
like that. Goddamn.

BORIS
She's a 4.0 student.

BEATRICE
No shit, really? How wonderfully
unexpected. She writes, she reads
Joyce? Hell, I want to date her.

BORIS
No, you're talking about Cairo.

JONATHAN
The one who was reading
Miller...and Miller.

He laughs at his own joke.

BORIS
Winnie and Cairo are best friends.
Beauty and the Brain, I call them.

BEATRICE
You feel good about that one?

BORIS
Yeah, I thought it was pretty good.
It's funnier if you've met them.
I'm not a writer.

JONATHAN
They're nothing alike. Winnie is
trendy. Cairo is transformative.

BEATRICE
She's a teenager.

BORIS
He's prepping her to be his
transcendence into the annals of
academic glory.

BEATRICE

What a lovely departure she must be from the technology rotted jello brains of modern youth.

JONATHAN

You have no idea. She reminds me why I do this. Teaching someone as bright as she is almost makes the rest worth it.

BORIS

Makes *what* worth it?

JONATHAN

Teaching. Striving to make a difference.

BORIS

Nah, that's a pipe dream, bro. Our freedom as educators is restricted to what seven or eight nine-hundred-year-old-asscravats on a *school board* decide fits their political spank bank agenda.

BEATRICE

It's tough gettin' crushed under the wheel of oppression, huh?

BORIS

Uh, yeah. It is.

JONATHAN

You are not *oppressed*.

BORIS

Name me one teacher other than Michelle Pheiffer over here who doesn't feel completely impotent.

JONATHAN

A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn is hammering on cold iron.

BEATRICE

Horace Mann?

JONATHAN

Ten points for Slytherin.

BORIS

We can't discipline them and we can't enlighten them. So we sit around with our dicks in our hands regurgitating under-funded, outdated programs that do fuck-all for nothing and no one. Icarus gets the rock up the hill only to have it crush his ass on the way back down.

BEATRICE

Sisyphus.

BORIS

Bless you.

JONATHAN

You're only as helpless as you allow yourself to be.

BORIS

Your idealism is so sweet, really it is, Jon. But this is the public school system. We don't grow presidents and peacemakers. We grow celebrities and domestic abusers. You wanna make a difference? Grow a fucking tree.

JONATHAN

I had no idea you had so many...feelings.

BORIS

Just look at your paycheck, Professor. That's the American story right there.

BEATRICE

Bukowski couldn't have said that better. I salute you.

BORIS

Who dat?

BEATRICE

A misanthrope.

BORIS

A whaddapope?

Beatrice rolls her eyes.

JONATHAN

You wouldn't feel that way if you had a Cairo. I know you wouldn't.

BORIS

You know?

JONATHAN

You have nothing to rise to, nothing to earn.

BORIS

That's rich from the man who stopped rising to earn *nothing* as a high school teacher.

JONATHAN

Hey.

BORIS

Your dreams defeated you, man. Don't talk to me about nothing to earn, just get your ass down here in the mud where it's warm. You let those waxy wings get too hot and they'll fall right off.

BEATRICE

That's Icarus.

BORIS

Do you have a cold?

BEATRICE

And not inaccurate.

JONATHAN

What is that supposed to mean?

BEATRICE

Well it's not like something bad happened to you, you don't have brain damage, we don't have kids. You stopped writing because, I imagine, it wasn't for you. Otherwise you'd still be doing it.

JONATHAN

I'm...a writer.

BEATRICE

You haven't put pen to page since we were in grad school. You're not a writer.

JONATHAN

Okay.

Beat.

BEATRICE

Have I hurt your feelings?

JONATHAN

No, I just - I didn't realize you saw me that way, is all.

BEATRICE

What way?

JONATHAN

As one over the other.

BEATRICE

It's not that you can't write, it's that you *don't* write - you chose to be a teacher. Why would I see you as anything else?

JONATHAN

Because you fell in love with a writer.

She smiles at him.

BEATRICE

I did, didn't I?

She gets up goes off to find the restroom. Boris and Jon share a look.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Cairo is typing away on her laptop, smoking a cigarette and ashing into a coke can. Winnie lays on the bed watching herself in the mirror suggestively finish a popsicle. Her tongue is purple. Her work uniform is crumpled on the floor.

WINNIE

(re: the cigarette)
You like it?

CAIRO

It feels like something I never knew I was missing.

WINNIE

So you're a smoker now?

CAIRO

I'm smoking now. No plans for it to define me yet.

WINNIE

What do you want to do this weekend? I traded all my shifts.

CAIRO

What we always do Pinky - try to take over the world.

WINNIE

Can't take over the world in a sweatshirt. A bunch of new shit just opened in Overton Square. Let's go shopping.

CAIRO

Stealing the clothes off a Taiwanese prostitot does not constitute as shopping.

WINNIE

You're a pretty girl somewhere under that mop of hair and those ill-fitting sweat sacks.

(she goes to the mirror
and checks herself out)

Think how much farther you can get if you're hot. I make all the monies with these bad bad bunnies.

She plays her boobs like bongos.

CAIRO

I don't give a fuck about being hot, Winnie. I give a fuck about being smart.

She watches Cairo in the mirror.

WINNIE

You can be both. What are you doing?

CAIRO

Short story.

WINNIE

I can fucking see that. What's it for?

CAIRO

It's the midterm for creative writing. He hasn't assigned it yet.

WINNIE

Shouldn't you be writing the essay for your Stanford app instead of prematurely writing a short story for your hottie the body teacher?

CAIRO

I would if I had any idea what to write.

WINNIE

What's the subject?

CAIRO

What has been your greatest adversity to date, and how have you overcome? What the fuck am I supposed to say – dealing with the toothless boonie-bumfuck waitresses at CK's? I have had zero legitimate adversity.

WINNIE

It must be hard, what with your awesome parents and being an only child.

CAIRO

I imagine it's about as hard as it is for you to wake up every morning looking like Fuck-Me Barbie.

WINNIE

Aren't we just so fucking tragic.

CAIRO

Let's be real for a second. I don't have enough money to get legacied into Ivy, and I'm sure as fuck not going to a state school and for double fuck not in this state. Is a 4.2 GPA enough? Of course not. Because we are so super fortunate to grow up in a post 90's politically correct clusterfuck, where my hard work is not enough. Oh no.

(MORE)

CAIRO (CONT'D)

I have to be a deaf, legless orphan from Cuba who canoed my dead mother's carcass to America using her bloated arms for oars, only to become a prodigy violinist who speaks three languages and started a Fortune 500 company at the tender age of 14. And still maintained at least a 4.0. I have to be that.

WINNIE

You ain't that. You better invent something.

CAIRO

No shit, but what? I'm not poor enough, not rich enough, not fat enough, not ethnic enough – and no one gives a shit if you're smart enough. I'm a girl, so maybe at least one part of me is minority enough to exploit.

WINNIE

We all invent our own reality. You're smart enough to create something.

CAIRO

About what? On paper I am the most boring of all borings. I bore me.

WINNIE

You could write about the time your friend fucked a teacher.

CAIRO

Only if I made it first person. Are you really going to try to sleep with him?

WINNIE

Haven't decided. What's it to you?

CAIRO

You really want someone like Coach Fillmore to swipe your V card? He's like twenty years older than you.

WINNIE

He's only fourteen years older than me and so what? Older men are easy-peasy eggs and cheesy.

CAIRO
So it doesn't mean anything to you?

WINNIE
What?

CAIRO
Your virginity.

WINNIE
God no. I mean I'm not holding onto it for any special reason.

CAIRO
Then why haven't you fucked any of the guys at school who said they've fucked you?

WINNIE
Why settle for lunch meat when you can have Kobe beef?

CAIRO
What?

WINNIE
We're like, the fucking American wet dream. Young girls with ambivalent sexuality, pheromones steaming off our bodies - I don't want some little jock-twat whose sexual standards are mandated by the shit porn he downloads. That's deli meat. I want a dry-aged, perfectly marbled slab of hot man meat to take me to pleasure town. Oof. I'm hungry.

CAIRO
And you think that's Boris Fillmore?

WINNIE
Comparatively, yes.
(Cairo makes a face)
Miller's no different. I've seen the way he looks at you. When you don't look like a homeless Eskimo.

CAIRO
No. No way.

WINNIE

He's not nearly as overt as Boris.
But like, he's still a guy, you
know?

CAIRO

Mr. Miller is *nothing* like the guys
at Benson.

WINNIE

I see. His separation from the
peasants makes you wet, is that it?
You're in love with him for his
exoticism.

CAIRO

I appreciate his contrast. He's
different. He's smart.

WINNIE

I'm just saying, he's human. And he
has, what I'm sure is a giant man
cock that secretly wants to find
its way into a hot student.

CAIRO

Stop.

WINNIE

You must trust in my infinite
wisdom. I'm vastly more qualified
than you. Get up.

Winnie takes Cairo's cigarette, pulls a drag and dumps it in
the coke can. She takes Cairo to the mirror, where she lets
down her hair and pulls her sweatshirt tight to show off her
form.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

See? Just a little work and you're
totally fuckable. I'd fuck you.

CAIRO

I know.

Winnie and Cairo both appreciate her form in the mirror. It's
intimate.

WINNIE

Go forth my child, and conquer yon
JMill.

CAIRO

What, with my luxurious maiden's hair?

WINNIE

Make him love you.

CAIRO

For what?

WINNIE

For sport. For love, I don't care. I'll get BFill and you get JMill. Oh my God, rhyme schemes are the best schemes.

CAIRO

I'm not into him like that.

WINNIE

Says Ye of the Preemptive Assignment. Everyone loves someone pretty and talented, Sweet.

CAIRO

No offense, but no one at school is walking around talking about how big your brain is.

WINNIE

And yet I'm still top ten in the class. You are such a fucking square with your pretty-can't-be-smart bullshit. In fact, it makes you a conformist.

They do. Winnie puts her face on Cairo's shoulder and her hands on Cairo's waist.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Join the revolution. Be smart and pretty. It's totes the American way.

CAIRO

You make such a strong argument.

Winnie releases Cairo and sits back on the bed. Cairo stays in the mirror, watching herself.

WINNIE

Listen, they're all the same - bifocals or biceps - they're men, and we got what they want.

(MORE)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

No reason you can't get yours too,
however you like it. You want nerdy
professor love? Go get you some,
girl.

CAIRO

Don't make me look like a Thai boy
hooker.

WINNIE

What is with you and South Asian
sex trafficking?

INT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - NEXT MORNING

Jonathan and Boris sit in their usual location. Jonathan
smokes a cigarette. The sun is rising.

JONATHAN

It's not that cold. Don't be such a
baby.

BORIS

I can see my breath.

JONATHAN

Then go inside.

BORIS

And miss Godot?

JONATHAN

Soon't yourself.

BORIS

Did you just say 'soon't'?

JONATHAN

So?

BORIS

Soon't.

JONATHAN

How do you say it?

BORIS

Suit. I say suit. Because one would
suit oneself, not soon't, whatever
the hell that is.

JONATHAN

That's what I said. Shut up.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - MORNING

Cairo sits in the passenger seat of her own car, while Winnie puts blush on her cheeks. She holds three coffees in a tray in her lap. Winnie sits back to look at her handiwork.

WINNIE
(admiring)
You're really very pretty.

CAIRO
Shut up.

WINNIE
Like actually pretty, not just smart girl pretty. Like full on She's All That transformative. Goddamn, I'm a genius.

Cairo takes a deep breath.

CAIRO
This is nuts.

WINNIE
This is *fun*.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
You're ready. Onward.

Cairo gets out of the car. Winnie watches her walk away and rolls down her window to cat call her.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
(singing)
Tryna get to yooooou and dat booty-

EXT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - MORNING

Cairo rounds the corner of the building, carrying the coffees. Her hair is down and she's wearing a fitted coat, tights, and boots. She looks like an adult.

CAIRO
Morning.

She hands them each a coffee.

BORIS
What's this?

CAIRO
It's coffee.

BORIS
No, no. What is this I see before
me? You look like a girl.

CAIRO
Thank you?

BORIS
Yes indeedy Cairo sweetie, you
clean up good. Got a big date?

CAIRO
Nope.

BORIS
Presentation in class?

CAIRO
Nope.

BORIS
Get laid?

JONATHAN
OKAY.

BORIS
I like it.

JONATHAN
Thank you for the coffee. You
didn't have to do that.

CAIRO
Oh, totally my pleasure.

BORIS
Muffins, muffin?

Boris hands her a white pastry box. She opens it.

CAIRO
Oh my God these smell amazing. What
flavor?

BORIS
Split fig.

Jonathan chokes on his coffee.

CAIRO
Have you thought about getting some
art on these? Like a logo.
(MORE)

CAIRO (CONT'D)

You could sell them to raise money for the team.

(Boris laughs)

Don't you laugh! There's nothing cuter than a boy selling a muffin. You'd buy some, wouldn't you Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN

I can't resist a cute boy with a muffin.

CAIRO

I know you can't. You could get Winnie to design it for you! She's great at stuff like that. Oh my god, you could call yourself the Muffin Man.

JONATHAN

That is pretty cute.

CAIRO

Winnie and I could help you with whatever you needed and you could be an experience on our college apps.

Cairo lights a cigarette.

JONATHAN

You smoke?

CAIRO

Will you tell on me?

BORIS

No one would believe us if we did.

(to Jon)

Would you really buy some of my muffins?

JONATHAN

Why pay for what I already get for free?

BORIS

Damn. That's cold.

CAIRO

I would. All the girls would.

BORIS

Okay yeah. I'm the Muffin Man. I'm the motherfuckin Muffin Man.

(he jumps up and down)

My balls are slowly creeping inward. You coming in?

JONATHAN

Nah, I'm gonna have one more. You go ahead.

BORIS

Soon't yourself, Brohan. Bye Sweet.

CAIRO

Bye!

Boris leaves. Jonathan opens his pack to Cairo.

JONATHAN

You want one of these?

She pulls out her own pack.

CAIRO

Set higher standards, Mr. Miller.
Have a menthol.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - MORNING

Winnie sits on her knees in black ripped jeans and a tight tee shirt with a screen print of a Lichtenstein weeping woman. She's coloring in sharpie on the ceiling of Cairo's illustrated car. She's listening to a cover of NO DIGGITY by CHET FAKER.

Blurry students move around the car, oblivious to her and she to them.

She's drawing a sugar skull around Cairo's handwriting - the central piece of the ceiling - a mix of quotes from Tropic of Cancer by Henry Miller.

Genius is de2d. The world is rotting 2w2y.

It needs to be blown to smithereens.

GIVE UP THE GHOST AND PUT ON THE FLESH.

The bell rings. Winnie looks over her shoulder.

WINNIE

GD.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - THAT
AFTERNOON

Jonathan is exiting the teacher's lounge as a tall, elegant woman is entering. This is JOYCE MANNER, VICE PRINCIPAL (50s).

JONATHAN

Oh *hey Vice Principal* Manner.
How're you settling into the new
gig? Better than 10th grade
English?

JOYCE

I only get to talk to people who
are in trouble. And typically
trouble makers aren't the brightest
so you can imagine how painfully
bored I am. I think this job may
have been a lateral move.

JONATHAN

Bummer. Well you look great.

JOYCE

Thanks. How's the magical world of
an elective class? Must be charming
what with your kids choosing to
take your course and all.

JONATHAN

Yeah, it's good this year.

JOYCE

Your student reviews were
outstanding. You giving them weed
or something?

JONATHAN

Say nope to dope, Joyce.

JOYCE

I say a friend with weed is a
friend indeed.

JONATHAN

Do you?

JOYCE

No. But I like that it rhymes.
Who's manning your class right now?

JONATHAN

Ah, the hope of the future.

JOYCE

You're streaming a movie, aren't
you?

JONATHAN

Dead Poet's Society.

JOYCE

O Captain, my Captain, your class
is probably sleeping.

JONATHAN

Yeah, I should get back. Catch you
around, boss.

JOYCE

Only if you fuck up.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - THAT
AFTERNOON

School has let out and kids are shouting in the hallways,
ready for the weekend. Cairo is putting books away in her
locker. Winnie stands next to her, playing on her phone.

WINNIE

What did he say? Did he eye-fuck
you so hard?

CAIRO

He didn't say anything.

WINNIE

Fool. You look super hot.

The baseball player entourage walks past the girls. The JOCK
smiles at Winnie.

JOCK

Coming to the game, ladies? I'll
let you hold my bat.

WINNIE

If I wanted to hold a tampon, I'd
just pull it out of your pussy.

JOCK
Fuck you, Black.

WINNIE
Omigod, your whole vocabulary in
one sentence! Come fuck me with
that big nasty rhetoric.

Winnie humps the air. The JOCK flips her off and continues on
his way.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Jock-twat.

CAIRO
Don't feed the animals, Winnie.
They can't be domesticated.

WINNIE
You ready?

CAIRO
I've got to run by Mr. Miller's
room first.

Cairo shuts her locker.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Winnie is on her phone by the door, keeping a watchful eye on
the scene. Jonathan is packing up his bag and shutting down
his computer. He's happy to see her.

JONATHAN
Hey, kid. How are you?

Cairo sets her things down at her desk.

CAIRO
I wanted to say hello before the
weekend. You in a hurry?

JONATHAN
I am. We're heading to Nashville to
meet with my wife's editor.

CAIRO
That's exciting.

JONATHAN

If you're into self-righteous literary types patting themselves on the back and forgetting your name, then sure. It's thrilling.

CAIRO

Have you met me? I'm always into that.

Jonathan stuffs a packet of papers in his bag and checks to make sure his computer is actually off.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Can we talk about the midterm for a second?

JONATHAN

Of course. What's up?

He has all of his things. He comes around and sets his stuff on Cairo's desk.

CAIRO

I'm having second thoughts about my author and I want to get your okay before I go in deep.

JONATHAN

Who is it?

CAIRO

Henry Miller.

JONATHAN

Whoa, provocative. He's not on the approved reading list.

CAIRO

I think I can justify him.

JONATHAN

His structural merit is challenging to emulate.

CAIRO

(excited)

It's not just structural though, it's everything - his decadence, his total disregard for literary etiquette, his destruction of convention. You know. The good stuff.

JONATHAN

Okay.

CAIRO

Okay?

JONATHAN

If there's anyone I trust to handle that kind of source material, it's you. Write what you know. Best advice I've ever received. You must write from life, from the depths of your soul!

CAIRO

That's...that's from Little Women. The movie. The remake movie.

JONATHAN

Yes...well...it's true. I don't ever want you to censor yourself, okay?. That's not what this is about.

Beat. A moment of suspension passes between them - Cairo smiles and he returns it a moment before remembering himself.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

I have to go.

CAIRO

I know. Have a nice trip.

JONATHAN

Thanks sweetheart.

He walks to the door, then stops. Winnie is still on the phone.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Cairo.

(she turns)

Try and do something fun this weekend, okay? Take a recess.

CAIRO

I'll rest if you'll write.

He smiles at her.

JONATHAN

I'll see you Monday, kid. Bye Winnie.

He exits. Winnie drops her phone, that she wasn't even on, and runs over to Cairo.

WINNIE
You like him.

CAIRO
Don't be gross.

Winnie hikes up her skirt and bends over Jonathan's desk suggestively.

WINNIE
*Oh Mr. Miller...I just love the
decadence and the words and
breaking all the rules.*

She throws herself on the desk like a naughty school girl. Boris comes to the door but they don't see him.

CAIRO
I didn't say it like that.

WINNIE
You thought it like that.
(Cairo rolls her eyes)
We make a good double-team-team. Oh
my God, you're totally trying to
seduce him.

CAIRO
I am not trying to seduce Mr.
Miller. I'm trying to get into
college.

BORIS
Am I interrupting girl talk?

Winnie slowly gets up off the desk and pulls down her skirt. The action is not lost on Boris.

CAIRO
No, we were just leaving, weren't
we Winnie?

BORIS
Uh, listen, I think your idea is
great. And I'd love your help too,
Winnie.

WINNIE
With what?

BORIS
Can you keep a secret?

WINNIE
I'm keeping Victoria's in my pants.
Does that count?

Boris shifts uncomfortably.

BORIS
I uh...bake. Muffins.

CAIRO
And he's going to have the baseball
team sell them to raise money. How
hot is that?

WINNIE
My clothes are literally melting
away.

CAIRO
They're going to call themselves
the Muffin Men. And he wants you to
design the logo.

BORIS
Yeah so, I was thinking I could
call you girls out on your lunch
break or something to go over the
specs.

WINNIE
Why don't you give us your number?
We could all maybe go look at some
packaging options at the Hobby
Lobby. Right, Sweet?

CAIRO
Yeah. Totes.

Cairo looks at Winnie like she's crazy.

WINNIE
Here. Give me your phone and I'll
program myself.

He hands Winnie his phone. Cairo digs through her bag looking
for her own.

BORIS
Cool. So we'll...get together soon.

CAIRO
Hey can you call me?

Winnie punches on his phone.

WINNIE
And now you'll have Cairo's number
as well.
(she listens a moment)
It's just going to voicemail.

CAIRO
Shit.

She hangs up and stuffs the phone in her bra.

WINNIE
Whatever, I'm sure it's in the
bottom of your bag.

CAIRO
No, I just had it a minute ago.

WINNIE
It's Friday and we're still here.
Let's a-fucking go.

She begins to haul Cairo out of the room.

BORIS
Uh, Winnie?

WINNIE
Uh, Boris.

BORIS
My phone?

WINNIE
My phone?

BORIS
Your phone?

WINNIE
Your phone? Your phone.

She pulls his phone from her bra.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Right. Sorry.

She hands it to him.

BORIS
Thanks. See you later girls.

Winnie and Cairo leave, arm in arm.

WINNIE
BYEEEEEE!

CAIRO
You're unbelievable.

WINNIE
I'm practically a professional.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Jonathan sits at a table in the now clean kitchen. Suitcases are packed and ready to go by the back door. He is reading a paperback copy of Stephen King's *ON WRITING*.

Beatrice is on her phone.

BEATRICE
(On the phone)
I'm aware.
(she puts her hand over
the phone)
I'm sorry, just a few more minutes.

JONATHAN
We were supposed to leave forty
minutes ago.

Beatrice walks away. Jonathan goes back to his book.

Some serious gangster rap emanates from his bag. He stares at it. It stops. It starts again. Jonathan digs through his bag and retrieves a cell phone.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
(answering)
Hello?

INTERCUT between CAIRO'S BEDROOM and JONATHAN'S KITCHEN.
Cairo sits at a desk smoking a cigarette.

CAIRO
Hi. I think you have my phone.

JONATHAN
And whose phone do I have?

CAIRO
Cairo Sweet's.

JONATHAN
Cairo. It's Jonath- uh, Mr. Miller.

CAIRO
Sticky Fingers Miller. How's the
thieving business?

JONATHAN
Alive and well, apparently. How are
you?

CAIRO
Out of touch with all the world and
tethered to a landline since you
know, you stole my phone.

JONATHAN
I assure you it wasn't deliberate.

CAIRO
Are you already in Nashville?

JONATHAN
I should be.

Cairo and Jonathan hesitate. Beatrice pops her head in the
room.

BEATRICE
Forty-five minutes.

JONATHAN
Are you serious? We won't get there
till after nine as it is.
(she shrugs and exits)
Sorry. You still there?

CAIRO
Still here.

JONATHAN
You live over in Lovell Hills,
right?

CAIRO
How did you remember that?

JONATHAN
I'm eidetic. And Mensa.

CAIRO
...that's incredible.

JONATHAN
My mom is really proud.

CAIRO
What are you doing teaching high schoolers?

JONATHAN
Withering on the vine.

Cairo smiles and tucks a piece of hair behind her ear.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
What should we do about your phone?
We'll pass you heading East - We could just drop it in your mailbox or something.

CAIRO
Yeah, that would be great.

JONATHAN
Okay, what's your address?

CAIRO
400 Huxley. You just take a right into Lovell Hills from Brunswick and keep going straight. You'll see us on the left - big old antebellum.

Beatrice enters, still on the phone.

CAIRO takes a drag of her cigarette.

BEATRICE
I don't give a flying backwards fuck, Amy. Give them the first draft, they'll think it's new.

Jon waves at Bea to get her attention.

JONATHAN
I must have accidentally picked up one of my kid's phones on my way out of class. We need to drop it off on our way.

BEATRICE
Why don't you go do that now, while I'm on the phone?

JONATHAN

Will you be ready when I get back?

BEATRICE

Promise. Get me some tampons while you're out.

(to Amy)

Not you, Amy, obviously.

JONATHAN

Jesus. You owe me.

BEATRICE

Big time.

JONATHAN

Like road head big time.

BEATRICE

I have to work.

JONATHAN

Multitask.

(Beatrice dismisses him
and leaves)

Sorry about that. I'm fixing to head out, is now okay?

CAIRO

Yep, just call me on this number, okay?

JONATHAN

Got it. See you soon.

They hang up.

Jonathan dog ears his page and shuts the book. He grabs his keys, puts his wallet in his back pocket and waves at Beatrice, who takes no notice. He runs his hand through his hair in the mirror in the hallway.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cairo sets the phone down and drops her cigarette in the coke can. She goes to her floor length mirror and pulls off her sweatshirt.

She grabs a cotton dress crumpled on the floor and pulls it over her head, smoothing down the wrinkles as best she can.

EXT. DRUG STORE PARKING LOT - EARLY EVENING

Heavy clouds stain the horizon. It's going to rain.

Jonathan starts his car. *LOVER, YOU SHOULD HAVE COME OVER* by JEFF BUCKLEY plays on the radio. He sings along. A bag of tampons sit next to Cairo's cell phone in the passenger seat.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING

Cairo stands at her open window, her hand on the sill. A fat raindrop smacks against the white casement. A small spider crawls inside.

Jonathan pulls up in the driveway. Through his windshield, he sees her in her window and waves to her.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - PORCH - EARLY EVENING

Cairo opens the front door. Jonathan stands with a bag in his hand, hair wet from the rain.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NASHVILLE - THAT NIGHT

Beatrice wears earbuds and types on her laptop. She is surrounded by paper. A bourbon rocks sweats in a glass next to her.

The television plays Bette Davis in *Jezebel* on low volume.

Jonathan is on his laptop.

CU on the screen - a blank word document with a blinking cursor. He stares at it.

His beautiful hands hover above the keyboard.

Beatrice pulls out an earbud.

BEATRICE
Whatcha doin'?

He reduces the document. His email is behind it - amid various promotions is a new message from *CAIRO.SWEET@GMAIL.COM*.

JONATHAN
Nothing important.

BEATRICE
I'll give you a kiss if you go get
me some more ice.

He leans over to her. She kisses him on the cheek.

JONATHAN
Want anything else?

BEATRICE
Just ice. Thank you, sweet man.

Beatrice pops her earbud back in.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - EARLIER THAT AFTERNOON

Back to us, Cairo sits at her computer desk wearing a black strappy yoga bra. She smokes a cigarette and we watch the muscles in her back move as she slow motion ashes into a coke can.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - EVENING

Jonathan walks down the hallway with an empty ice bucket in hand.

He walks past a door marked BUSINESS CENTER.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - EARLIER THAT AFTERNOON

We face her now, the glow of the computer screen washing her out in blue light. We can tell she's typing by her focus and the subtle movement of her shoulders.

She smiles and goes still. She brings the cigarette to her lips and takes a drag. We hear a single click of her mouse and the swoosh of a sent email.

INT. BUSINESS CENTER - EVENING

CU on a booted up computer screen.

Jonathan sits alone in the empty business center, a full bucket of ice next to him.

He opens Cairo's email.

Subject: Preemptive Midterm

He clicks the email.

"Here's a shot. -C"

He smiles.

CU on printed pages filling a paper tray.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Jonathan enters with the ice bucket and a stack of papers. Beatrice still sits with her headphones in, typing away. She never even looks up at him.

He sits the bucket down next to Bea and goes to the bathroom with the papers and a red pen.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jonathan runs the bath but doesn't plug it. He sits on the floor and leans against the bathroom door.

CU on the pages in his hand.

"For Jonathan From Cairo". He smiles and takes the cap off his red pen, ready to grade.

INT. JONATHAN'S CAR - NEXT DAY

Beatrice is in the passenger seat, napping. Jonathan watches the road ahead of him, face blank and unreadable.

INT. CAIRO'S CAR - DAY

Cairo drives through the rural streets of Tennessee, hand out the window. She wears make up and her hair is in a ponytail.

She drinks a neon red Slurpee. Her lips and tongue and teeth are stained with it.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY - MORNING

It's very early in the morning.

Jonathan sits stiffly behind his desk, and Cairo sits on the desktop of hers. Her hair is done and she wears make up.

The clock ticks loudly.

JONATHAN

I think you need to pick another author.

CAIRO

Why?

He starts to say something. Stops. Reconsiders.

JONATHAN

This is inappropriate.

CAIRO

Inappropriate.

JONATHAN

Yes.

CAIRO

Why?

JONATHAN

When you said you were going to write like Henry Miller, this is not what I thought you meant.

CAIRO

What did you think I meant?

JONATHAN

I thought you were going to be explicit in your descriptions. I thought you were going to mix high language with modern colloquialisms. I didn't think you were going to write...what you wrote.

CAIRO

I did all of those things.

JONATHAN

You're better than this.

CAIRO

Better than what?

JONATHAN

Why did you write this?

Beat.

CAIRO

You asked me to.

JONATHAN

No - why did you choose this content?

CAIRO

You said to write what you know.

JONATHAN

This is what you know?

CAIRO

This is. Us.

Beat.

JONATHAN

Cairo.

CAIRO

It's allegorical.

JONATHAN

Explain it to me.

She stares at him a moment before listing on her fingers, as though she were speaking to a child.

CAIRO

It's about two like people abnegating social convention. It's a comment on the sexual anesthetization of a culture supersaturated with pornography. It's about the inefficacy of said culture's romantic dogmas on young people's expectations. It's layered.

JONATHAN

I think you may have misunderstood the assignment.

CAIRO

I don't think I have.

JONATHAN

This is not what we discussed.

CAIRO

I was clear about how I intended to write the piece.

JONATHAN

Cairo, I can't - I'm not sure how you expected me to respond to this.

CAIRO

I expected you'd be able to appreciate the literature, to recognize the various metaphors, most of which we've already discussed casually; I thought you'd be able to show some objectivity.

JONATHAN

That's what I'm trying to do.

CAIRO

You're afraid of the content.

JONATHAN

I'm not.

CAIRO

You're afraid of what it makes you feel.

JONATHAN

Cairo, listen to me. I think you're...you're so smart. Which is why I'm not really sure what you thought you'd accomplish with this.

CAIRO

Why are you talking to me like I'm a stranger? Say what you mean.

JONATHAN

I'm having a hard time understanding why you would choose this subject matter.

CAIRO

And I'm having a hard time understanding why you're antagonizing me. I wrote in the style of Henry Miller. Like you asked.

JONATHAN

This is pornography.

CAIRO

It's an illustration of social hypocrisies in a psychosexual culture obsessed with youth.

JONATHAN

You can dance with the language all day long, it doesn't change that this is *obscene*-

CAIRO

Obscene? Heavy word for a man who so strongly postures against unmitigated literary censure.

JONATHAN

Stop.
Do you know what this looks like?

CAIRO

Do you?

Beat.

JONATHAN

I won't indulge this conversation.

CAIRO

You won't indulge me, like I'm a fucking child?

JONATHAN

Yes, like you're a *child*. Because, make no mistake, that's what you are.

Cairo is stunned.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Write a new story with a new author in mind.

CAIRO

You're unbelievable. I did the assignment.

JONATHAN

I won't accept this.

CAIRO

I won't rewrite it.

JONATHAN

Then I'll have to fail you for the midterm.

CAIRO
You're gonna fail the top student
in the class? How are you gonna
explain it? What's the reason?

JONATHAN
I DON'T NEED A REASON.

CAIRO
GOOD. You'll really set the bar
high for antithetical teachers
everywhere, right?

JONATHAN
I think you need to calm down.

CAIRO
And I think you need to stop being
such a fucking coward.

Beat.

JONATHAN
This conversation is over, Cairo.

CAIRO
You know what, you're right. This
is fucking over.

JONATHAN
Watch your language.

CAIRO
Oh please. Now you have some sort
of moral compass? Like it's okay
for you to treat me like we're
friends, like we're peers and
then when it suits you or becomes
too fucking real or whatever you
just shut down?

JONATHAN
Too real?

CAIRO
You can't blur the lines and expect
me to see a boundary when I
suddenly cross it.

Beat.

JONATHAN

I apologize if you feel I've been anything but equitable – but let me be very clear with you; you're my student. We are not friends. We are not peers. Any misconceptions you have about that are regrettably something you shoulder alone.

Cairo's face shifts backwards on her skull. A tightening of pain and realization move over her.

CAIRO

Write what you know, is what you said.

JONATHAN

I know what I said.

CAIRO

No you don't. You don't know anything you say.

He's coming unraveled. Her posture tight and coiled. A cobra.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

(slowly)

This is good. You know it is. So let's examine the real issues, which are you and your failures as a writer.

JONATHAN

Excuse me?

CAIRO

You thought you were gonna be hot shit, didn't you? You thought you were gonna be somebody, *didn't you?* "Overreaching without ambition." You know what that means? It means you weren't brave enough to be better. It means *you are mediocre*. You wanna fail me? I fucking dare you. Screw your courage to the sticking place and *make it mean something to you* because this banality, this falsity you wallow in will devour you until you are as small as you pretend to be. And then you will disappear and no one will give any more thought to you than they do an unread cookie fortune.

(MORE)

CAIRO (CONT'D)

(she moves toward him)

I thought you were a good writer.
But you just regurgitate the work
of better authors. You're a bad
impression of a good writer.

He is stunned.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

How disappointing your inadequacies
must be to those who believed in
you. No wonder you're a public
school teacher.

Cairo takes her essay from his desk and leaves.

EXT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - MORNING

TOXIC by YAEL NAIM.

Cairo walks through an outside corridor. Sleepy students are
starting to arrive.

She goes to the parking lot, gets in her car, and lights a
cigarette.

A text from Winnie appears on the screen: "*Where you et
bish?*"

CAIRO puts the jeep in reverse. Her eyes in the rearview
mirror are dead.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - LATER THAT EVENING

Beatrice sits at the dining room table, laptop, iPad and cell
phone all lit up. Papers and books are everywhere. A half-
eaten plate of spaghetti sits forgotten next to a sweating
soda cup.

Jonathan enters and immediately walks over to her, grabs her
face, and kisses her.

BEATRICE

Hey. You okay?

(he sits down and puts his
head in his hands)

Jon?

JONATHAN

Bad day.

BEATRICE

What happened?

JONATHAN

Well, I gave Cairo the midterm assignment and she drafted a version and - let me preface this - she's gifted, okay? Actually brilliant. So my expectations were high. But what she gave me was staggeringly vulgar. She made Henry Miller look like Dr. Seuss.

BEATRICE

She chose Miller as her author and you're surprised the paper was vulgar?

JONATHAN

She was supposed to use his literary technique not his subject matter.

BEATRICE

What's it about?

JONATHAN

An English teacher and a student who have an illicit affair, complete with pre-come and cherry popping.

She stops typing and looks at him.

BEATRICE

No shit? Can I read it?

Jonathan regards Beatrice, who is staring at him expectantly.

JONATHAN

I returned it to her. I'd have thrown it away if I hadn't.

BEATRICE

What? Why would you do that?

JONATHAN

Don't be dense, Bea. It's about me.

BEATRICE

Was it well written?

JONATHAN

What do you mean was it well written? It was pornography. I told her to rewrite it.

BEATRICE
What did it say? Tell me.

JONATHAN
No.

BEATRICE
Come on, Mr. Eidetic Memory. Dazzle me with a recitation.

JONATHAN
Oh God, don't make me recite it.
(she looks at him like a
child awaiting a bedtime
story)
Well, after the teacher and the
student have sex for the first
time, she describes the - the *blood*
as an oil slick.

BEATRICE
What?

The quoted text appears on the screen as he recites.

JONATHAN
*"Alice sat back against the soft
down of her pillows, her sex split
and sore, and imagined herself as a
pitted peach, with bruised and open
flesh. The sanguine testament of
her virginity lay heavy like an oil
slick in the cream lace of her
Tuesday's."*

Beatrice blinks at him once, twice.

BEATRICE
Her Tuesdays. Like her Tuesday
panties.

JONATHAN
Yes.

BEATRICE
Clever. What else?

JONATHAN
Four pages of teacher-student rape.
Yay!

BEATRICE

Clearly allegorical.

(Jonathan stares blankly
at her)

The English teacher forcibly takes the narrator, whom I will infer is a young writer, through a traumatizing and equally liberating physical transition. It's literary rebirth. I mean that's practically fucking Greek in its layered psychology.

JONATHAN

Well great.

BEATRICE

How is the teacher described?

JONATHAN

"Mr. Murphy, tall and carelessly attractive, kept his thoughts to himself and his blue eyes at half-mast. One might assume his drowsy appearance to be symptom of a vague institutional ennui, but Alice saw it mostly to hide the shock of indecency he felt when he lay his eyes on the young unripened bodies of his female students. He licked his chapped lips, imagining his tongue instead sliding into the cleft between each of their legs. Imagining himself as the first. As the standard. None were exempt from his salacious reveries. Not the pockmarked wall flower picking her fingernails in the corner, nor the silver haired princess silently deprecating her ephemeral reflection. All cunts were created equal and magnificent in his mind."

BEATRICE

Shit. She's good.

JONATHAN

The quality of her writing isn't in question here. It's the content.

BEATRICE

Her language is...advanced.

JONATHAN

She's a kid, Bea. It's not like I can sit down with her and be like, *Hey Cairo, great use of language. 'Pussy' and 'cuntlet' really give it that something extra. A+ +.*

BEATRICE

Well look - she's a seventeen year old girl. You're dealing with a creature whose whole identity is offset by a culturally predicated conformity she's been trained from birth to create. Teenage girls are hostile. Unpredictable. Attempting or expecting any kind of balanced relationship with one is the height of idiocy. They're incapable of separating themselves from the world around them - any examination not prefaced with accolade becomes instead an act of vituperation. She assumes you were disparaging the work itself, and therefore, because it is an extension of her...her.

JONATHAN

What?

BEATRICE

She took it personally.

JONATHAN

What am I supposed to do with that?

BEATRICE

It's an opportunity for a fascinating sociologic observation.

JONATHAN

That's your advice?

BEATRICE

My advice is not to worry. She's besotted. It's kinda sweet, in a twisted way. Twisted in her Tuesdays.

Jonathan pulls out a cigarette and lights it. It is a Marlboro Menthol Light 100.

JONATHAN

I want to get drunk. Can we get drunk tonight?

BEATRICE

I have to work.

JONATHAN

You can't take one evening to get drunk with your husband when you drink all the live long day as it is? I'm not going to try to sleep with you, if that's what you're worried about.

BEATRICE

What is that supposed to mean?

The front door bangs open.

BORIS (O.S.)

Y'all shouldn't leave the damn door unlocked.

Boris enters the room carrying a large case of beer.

BORIS (CONT'D)

What up?

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - THAT EVENING

Cairo and Winnie sit on Cairo's bed, passing back and forth a bottle of vodka.

CAIRO

God, how could I have been so stupid? I mean it *offended* him, Winnie. Like for real *offended* him. Scared him. He's no different than the other single-celled fuckwits infesting this godforsaken shit hole.

WINNIE

Maybe he wasn't offended. Maybe he was affected.

CAIRO

Maybe he's just appallingly simple.

WINNIE

But you still like him, right?

CAIRO

NO. Are you kidding? He's a pretender. At least with Boris what you see is what you get.

(MORE)

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Jonathan Miller is like fucking imitation crab meat in gas station sushi. Fuck that. Fuck *him*. What a waste of time I mean Jesus, he came to my fucking house - I need to disinfect. You fuck Fillmore yet?

WINNIE

You know I'd tell you.

CAIRO

I don't know that.

WINNIE

Whatever. You know when I wax my vagina. I tell you everything.

CAIRO

Let's play a game.

WINNIE

Okay.

CAIRO

Text him. Tell him you're drunk dialing him, that way he'll imagine you drunk and what you might be doing drunkenly.

WINNIE

Are you serious?

She is. Winnie pulls out her phone and starts to draft a text to "B.FILL."

WINNIE (CONT'D)

What do I say?

CAIRO

Ask him what he's up to.

She types the text and sends it.

WINNIE

Oh my God I sent it. What do you think he's doing?

CAIRO

Probably masturbating.

Winnie's phone chimes. The text appears on the screen. She shows it to Cairo.

I was just thinking of you.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Ask him what he's thinking about you.

She types Cairo's response.

WINNIE

Would you ever make out with him?

CAIRO

I don't know. Maybe. He's your jurisdiction.

WINNIE

I thought you found him primitive.

CAIRO

Well beggars can't be fucking choosers, can they?

Winnie's phone chimes again. She shows it to Cairo.

What are you doing awake at this hour, young lady?

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Tell him you're with me and we're doing what all girls do at this hour.

She types the response.

WINNIE

Too bad you're over J.Mill now. I was looking forward to a double banger.

CAIRO

You'd fuck him too?

WINNIE

For sure. He's kind of hot in a schlubby, sexually repressed collegiate way. I bet he's kinky as fuck.

Winnie's phone chimes, she shows Cairo.

And what might that be?

CAIRO

Tell him girls like us are measuring the depths of our sexuality within the safe confines of BFF-dom.

Winnie types.

WINNIE
Sick. You should just seduce
admissions. You got mad skill, son.

Winnie's phone chimes.

What does that entail?

CAIRO
Let's show him. Take off your
shirt.

Cairo runs into the bathroom. Winnie pulls off her shirt. She wears a neon push up bra.

WINNIE
What are we gonna do?

CAIRO (O.S.)
We're gonna make out.

Cairo comes out of the bathroom in a simple lace bra. Her hair is down.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
How's this?

Winnie is wide eyed.

WINNIE
Yeah. Good.

CAIRO
Give me your phone.
Sit on your knees and face me.
Closer. What are you, a dutch
clock? Come get like right up on
me.

Winnie comes closer. Their stomachs touch. Cairo sets the phone to face them. She frames them in the shot.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
Ready?

They kiss. Cairo snaps the picture and a flash bleaches them in white light. She pulls away.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
Send it.

WINNIE
What do I say?

CAIRO
Nothing. Just send it.

She does.

WINNIE
You should text Jonathan.

CAIRO
No need.

WINNIE
How come?

CAIRO
Boris will show him that picture. I don't ever need to say anything to Jonathan Miller ever again.

WINNIE
Cairo-san, I am most impressed with your magnificent mojo. And utter indifference to consequence.

CAIRO
I'm not indifferent, I'm evasive.

WINNIE
You're lawyer progeny, that's for fuckin' sure.

CAIRO
Haven't you ever read *The Art of War*?

WINNIE
No but I'm guessing you have.

FLASH TO:

Cairo walks through students like a ghost, making her way to her locker.

CAIRO (V.O.)
All warfare is based on deception. Appear weak when you're strong, and strong when you're weak - move your enemy but don't be moved by him.

FLASH TO:

She grabs her things, among them an UNLABELED MANILA FOLDER, into which she stuffs the copy of her essay.

CAIRO

Get them close enough to check your pulse then slip the knife under the ribs. It's chess.

WINNIE

Jesus. You're kind of scary.

CAIRO

Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right.

FLASH TO:

Cairo drops the essay into an INBOX outside the door of JOYCE MANNER, ASST. PRINCIPAL'S office.

WINNIE

How do you just come up with this shit?

CAIRO

Ani DiFranco?...come on, really? Do you listen to anything I give you?

WINNIE

Only the compliments.

Cairo's mom calls up the stairs.

CAIRO'S MOM (O.S.)

Honey? We're going to bed. You girls need anything?

Cairo walks to her bedroom door, cracks it and shouts down to her mom.

CAIRO

No thanks Mom, we're good.

CAIRO'S MOM (O.S.)

Okay, goodnight. I love you.

CAIRO

Love you too, tell Daddy goodnight.

WINNIE

LOVE YOU MOM!!

CAIRO'S MOM (O.S.)
Love you too, Winnie. Don't y'all
stay up too late, okay?

CAIRO
Night.

She shuts the door and grabs her cigarettes from her
backpack.

CAIRO (CONT'D)
Have a cig with me.

WINNIE
Okay. No. Okay. No. I'm just going
to lay right down here and die.

Cairo digs through Winnie's bag and pulls out the Muffin Men
logo.

CAIRO
I'm going to draw this on you.

WINNIE
What?

CAIRO
The logo. On your tits.

WINNIE
Why?

CAIRO
Because chaos is the score upon
which reality is written.

WINNIE
So sexy when you talk books to me.
Do it.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Beatrice and Boris sit in the kitchen. Chinese food cartons
and several beer bottles are spread over the table.

BEATRICE
Well, I wanted to tell her to eat a
bag of dicks but I smiled and shook
her hand and bit my tongue in half.

BORIS
I don't believe it. You wouldn't know how to hold your tongue if it was handed to you.

BEATRICE
No, I really did it! I mean, she deserved an extreme vagina punch and I held my shit together. Cheers to me.

The phone rings. Beatrice gets up to answer it. Boris is texting on his phone.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
(on the phone)
Hello? This is his wife, who's this? Uh huh, just a second.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jonathan is staring at himself in the mirror. His pulse is slow and his mouth is sticky. He looks sick.

FLASH TO:

Jon's POV. Cairo sits on the desk across from him, smiling. Beatrice pops her head in.

BEATRICE
Jon?

He looks up at her. He watches her mouth moving.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
(covering the receiver)
It's the assistant principal ah, Joyce? Want me to tell her you'll call her back at a reasonable hour?

He focuses on Beatrice's tongue behind her teeth.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Jon?

He snaps to.

JONATHAN
Uh, no I'll take it.

He takes the phone and Beatrice leaves.

Jon takes a breath before he says anything.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
(on the phone)
Hey Joyce, what's up?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beatrice sits back on the couch with Boris, who finishes his text and puts his phone back in his pocket.

BEATRICE
Who is she?

BORIS
Not telling you that.

BEATRICE
Okay, I'll guess. Becky? Tara?
Tiffany. A stripper, naturally.

BORIS
This is why I will never tell you
her name, Bumble Bea.

BEATRICE
Can I help it if every girl you've
ever dated owns a pair of five inch
lucite heels and is named after a
character from the Babysitter's
Club? No I can't. Your life, your
choices.

BORIS
You're a snob. Kristy was great.

BEATRICE
She had one leg.

BORIS
Shoulda seen the way that nub could
work a pole.

BEATRICE
You're a pig.

BORIS
Pigs have thirty minute orgasms.
(he downs his beer)
Alright baby girl, I gotta run.

BEATRICE
So soon? You've only eaten three
pounds of food.

Boris gets up and tosses the food cartons in the trash.

BORIS
I've got forty-five pop-quizzes on
thermodynamics to grade. Or fail.
Jesus, we haven't even reached
fractals - fucking hopeless youth
of America. Tell Jon I had to run?

BEATRICE
You got it.

BORIS
Thanks kiddo. I'll see ya.

He kisses Beatrice on the head and leaves through the back door. She finishes her beer.

Jonathan enters, visibly shaken.

BEATRICE
Jon?

JONATHAN
I don't...someone found the story.
Cairo's story.

BEATRICE
What?

JONATHAN
Well, it had "*To Jonathan from
Cairo*" written at the top, so you
know, no mistaking - and uh, I
guess someone read it and unable to
appreciate the motifs, turned it in
to the assistant principal. Joyce
would like to speak with me
formally to go through the
necessary paperwork.

BEATRICE
Paperwork for what?

JONATHAN
An incident report. I think she did
it.

BEATRICE
Think who did what?

JONATHAN

Cairo. Cairo turned it in. I should have shredded it.

BEATRICE

It's a short story, Jon. Not a communist manifesto.

JONATHAN

It's the implication - if she convinces them that something happened between us, I could lose my job.

BEATRICE

Why would she offer that information?

JONATHAN

She offered it to me.
(he stares at her)
Can we get drunk now?

INT. BENSON CITY REC CLUB - OUTSIDE - FOLLOWING MORNING

Various people in work out gear run around a track surrounded by metal bleachers. Jonathan, also in running gear, sits alone watching the runners and smoking. He looks hungover. One of the joggers, a young man in a BENSON BASEBALL sweat suit, waves to Jonathan.

Boris enters the track and jogs over to him with a bounce in his step.

BORIS

Good morning, Brochill. Sorry for bailing last night. You know how I feel about shitting in other people's homes.

JONATHAN

What's with all the sunshine?
You're effervescent.

Boris pulls out his cellphone.

BORIS

You won't believe me if I tell you, so I'm just gonna show you. Don't be judge-y.

JONATHAN

Oh God. Okay. Show me.

He shows Jonathan a picture on his phone.

BORIS
Take a look at that, my brother.

JONATHAN
Woah. *Woah*. Who's that?

BORIS
You don't recognize them?

JONATHAN
Should I? Damn.
(Boris flips the picture)
Is that...is that the Muffin Men
logo? On some very pert tatas?

BORIS
Perfectly pert perky tatas, painted
to look like muffins. It's genius.

JONATHAN
Where do you find these girls?

BORIS
That's the beauty and the brain,
brother. Being beautiful and not so
smart.

JONATHAN
(horrified)
Boris - You have to delete that.

BORIS
Like hell I do.

JONATHAN
Neither of those girls are
eighteen. That's child pornography.

BORIS
Two girls making out in what could
easily be bathing suits is not
child pornography, it's a beautiful
statement about equal rights.

JONATHAN
How did they get your number?

BORIS
Don't pretend like you don't think
that's hot.

JONATHAN

That's exactly what I'm going to do.

BORIS

You don't have to.

JONATHAN

Some really weird like *weird* things have been happening with Cairo and that - that just perpetuates - I can't get involved in that.

BORIS

The fuck are you talking about?

JONATHAN

I don't know. I think she's into me.

BORIS

Doesn't look like she's into boys.

JONATHAN

You don't think this is deliberate?

BORIS

Maybe on Winnie's part.

JONATHAN

They're fucking with you man, can't you see that?

BORIS

Alright, paranoid android, calm your tits. I can like it enough for both of us.

JONATHAN

Does this idiocy come naturally to you or is it an active effort?

BORIS

Mostly natural. What's your deal, man?

JONATHAN

My deal is that my student has recreated her own *Justine* as a gesture of, of...I mean, I've read some prurient stuff before but this was some shameless, Marquis De Sade shit and in a classic character foible reserved for schmucks like me, I didn't destroy it and the goddamn thing was admitted to administration for its graphic content and I know how this is gonna sound, but I think she did it to punish me because I didn't...because - I don't know. And now I have to meet with Joyce because it was fucking dedicated to me and I have to explain why and what it means.

BORIS

You couldn't have known what she was going to write.

JONATHAN

I approved Henry Miller as her author. I gave her the assignment early. She said it was inspired by me and her.
Fuck, this is so bad.

BORIS

Was it?

JONATHAN

Was it what?

BORIS

Inspired by the two of you.

JONATHAN

How can you ask me that?

BORIS

Look, I know you haven't dipped your wick in a while and along comes this attractive, intelligent girl who thinks you invented the fucking Oxford comma - you spend lots of time together, she's obviously your favorite - I mean, you *like* her. I wouldn't blame you if you had a little thing.

JONATHAN

A little *thing*? That's completely insane, you know that right? You really think I would have an affair with a student? Jesus, she's only seventeen.

BORIS

And it's not that different from eighteen.

JONATHAN

Yes the hell it is. One is legal and one is not.

BORIS

Don't tell me you haven't thought about it.

FLASH TO:

Cairo's lips wrap around a cigarette. She laughs with it between her teeth.

JONATHAN

I haven't.

BORIS

You're a fucking liar.

JONATHAN

What do you want me to say? That I think she's beautiful - that I fantasize about being with her?

BORIS

Do you?

JONATHAN

What difference does it make?

BORIS

Because it's completely possible that you misled her.

FLASH TO:

Cairo and Jonathan laughing with Boris in the morning.

JONATHAN

No. No way.

BORIS

You're good to her, man. You treat her like she's our equal. You treat her like an adult.

FLASH TO:

Cairo and Jonathan in his classroom, talking after class.

JONATHAN

That was never my intention.

BORIS

Are you sure?

JONATHAN

Yes I'm fucking sure.

BORIS

I just think you have to examine your own actions before you go accusing a kid of going after you. And c'mon, this is Cairo, we're talking about here - she's as threatening as buttered toast.

FLASH TO:

Cairo smiles. What once was sweet is now sinister.

JONATHAN

You'd have to have read the story. It was fetishistic. The fact that she has that kind of stuff rolling around in her brain is unsettling at best. The idea that she wrote it about us, that she *told* me she did, is beyond perception.

BORIS

I think it turns you on.

JONATHAN

No.

FLASH TO:

Cairo brings a cigarette to her lips.

BORIS

You're rolling out all these diatribes about how bad it is, but if I'm being real, it sounds a little like you've got a case of the Gertudes.

JONATHAN

The what?

BORIS

Methinks thou doth protest too much.

JONATHAN

Quit telling me what the fuck you think I think.

BORIS

You want me to lie to you?

JONATHAN

I can't have this conversation with you.

BORIS

Because you know I'm right. You don't want me to be because it fucks up your idealistic little interpretation of yourself, but I'm right.

JONATHAN

This isn't about how I feel it's about what she implies - you realize people get crucified for shit like this? You realize I could be a sex-offender.

BORIS

Velcro-shoed unmarked van drivers, maybe. Not guys like you, Jon.

JONATHAN

Guys like me - guys like me go down while guys like you are looking at naked pictures of your students.

BORIS

Oh you're so fucking lofty, aren't you. So righteous. You think you're any *different*?

FLASH TO:

Jonathan leans over Cairo's desk to look over something she's written. Their faces are close.

JONATHAN

I am.

BORIS

Your defensiveness speaks for itself, you fucking hypocrite. You're worried she's into you and now it's gone too far? Well so sorry for you, man. You did this. You instigated it.

JONATHAN

Enough. Fucking enough.

Jonathan leaves Boris sitting on the bleachers.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON - SAME DAY

Daylight pours into Cairo's bedroom from an open window. Her bare feet stand in front of her mirror, her hand hangs by her thigh, lit cigarette between her fingers. She brings the cigarette to her lips and stares at herself, her face devoid of emotion.

In the reflection we see her open laptop in the background. An online application for STANFORD UNIVERSITY is open, cursor blinking.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - LAST PERIOD OF THE DAY

Jonathan is sitting at his desk, head in his hand as he grades with the other. The classroom is full, save for one desk in the middle back. Cairo's.

The rest of the class is watching GOOD MORNING, MISS DOVE.

The bell rings and everyone leaves but Winnie.

He looks up at her briefly, then back down at his papers.

JONATHAN

What can I do for you Miss Black?

WINNIE
Have you seen Cairo?

JONATHAN
I haven't.

WINNIE
I'm surprised she hasn't come by.

Jonathan's pen hesitates, only a moment.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
I haven't seen her in a few days. I thought maybe...maybe you had.

JONATHAN
I haven't seen her to talk to her.

WINNIE
Oh you don't text or anything?

JONATHAN
Did she tell you we do?

WINNIE
Um, no. I mean not really.

JONATHAN
Did she tell you that we - what has she said that we do?

WINNIE
Well, you know. Cairo's good at saying everything and nothing.

He considers this.

JONATHAN
Winnie...

He's at a loss. So is she.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
What is happening?

WINNIE
I don't know anymore.

They both look at one another. Desperation separates and unifies them.

INT. JOYCE MANNER'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Joyce sits behind her desk. Her educational diplomas and a framed photo of her, her husband, and two teenage daughters hang on the wall.

INTERCUT between JONATHAN and JOYCE and CAIRO and JOYCE - two separate conversations that feel like one.

CAIRO

Mr. Miller asked me to write it.

JOYCE

Is that true?

Jonathan looks uncomfortable.

JONATHAN

Well, yes and no. The assignment was to write a short story in the style of their favorite authors. So yes, I asked her to do the assignment but I didn't specify the content.

JOYCE

And the mid-term is what percentage of the final grade?

JONATHAN

Twenty percent.

JOYCE

Henry Miller is not an approved author for public school studies.

CAIRO

We're both big fans of his work. Jonathan - I'm sorry - Mr. Miller is enthusiastic about his work.

JONATHAN

I'm sorry do you have any water?

JOYCE

How often do you see one another?

CAIRO

I haven't been feeling well, so recently not so much. But we used to see each other all the time before school. And in class, of course. And sometimes after school.

JOYCE

Do you smoke cigarettes?

JONATHAN

Yes. Is that relevant?

JOYCE

Do you smoke together?

CAIRO

Oh yeah, all the time. Usually really early in the mornings before class.

JONATHAN

We have smoked cigarettes together. Yes, on - on the grounds. I mean, we just happened to be in the same place, smoking a cigarette. That's how it started. Not that there's anything - I mean that's how we started smoking together. I'm not explaining this properly

Jonathan is sweating.

JOYCE

Do you see each other socially?

CAIRO

Sometimes, at his behest.

JONATHAN

Absolutely not.

JOYCE

Would you consider yourselves close?

CAIRO

Mr. Miller's very involved.

JONATHAN

God, I'm sorry. I just have the worst cotton mouth.

JOYCE

Have you ever seen each other outside of school?

CAIRO

He came to my house once.

JONATHAN

No. Well, yes. Sort of. It's so stupid. I suppose I had accidentally picked up her phone on my way out of class. I was just dropping it off.

JOYCE

Were you alone?

JONATHAN

My wife was supposed to go with me but she, um - didn't.

CAIRO

My parents were out of town.

JOYCE

And what did you do?

JONATHAN

Did she tell you we did something?

CAIRO

We...discussed the assignment.

JOYCE

You were in the house together, alone?

CAIRO

He was pretty specific about what he wanted.

JONATHAN

We didn't - it's not like that. Nothing happened.

CAIRO

Will this effect my standing as valedictorian?

JONATHAN

(flustered)

What did she tell you? That I encouraged this?

CAIRO

Mr. Miller's recommendation is so important for my application to Stanford...I just...I really wanted to impress him.

JONATHAN

*I'm not yelling, I'm just
incredibly frustrated. But you're -
I'm sorry.*

CAIRO

I have everything riding on my
grade in this class.

JONATHAN

Joyce, be real with me. How bad is
this?

CAIRO

I don't want to cause any trouble.

JONATHAN

If I could just talk to her, if I
could just-

CAIRO

May I go?

JONATHAN

To protect her. From me. Right.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jonathan leans against the sink. Beatrice stands in the
doorway, holding a stack of paper.

JONATHAN

I didn't sleep with her.

BEATRICE

You were in her house.

JONATHAN

It was raining.

BEATRICE

Why didn't she just bring it out to
you?

JONATHAN

We were discussing the assignment.

BEATRICE

In her house.

JONATHAN

Yes.

BEATRICE

You can tell me. If you fucked her I'd rather you tell me than find out later.

JONATHAN

I've never touched her.

BEATRICE

You've been suspended.

JONATHAN

I know.

BEATRICE

The ramifications from this - not only for you, but for me, for my career - are completely devastating, did you think about that?

JONATHAN

Do you hear yourself? Can you try not to be so self-centered for two seconds? Jesus.

BEATRICE

This doesn't effect just you.

JONATHAN

You think I don't know that?

BEATRICE

Your actions say otherwise.

JONATHAN

I don't know if I'll ever work in another school in this city again. The scandal alone for being suspended is practically career suicide - even if I'm acquitted, the idea that I could have done what she said - that's all anyone will see, I'll always be suspicious.

BEATRICE

Then I guess you should try not to look so fucking guilty.

JONATHAN

Excuse me?

BEATRICE

You let that little bitch *take you inside*. Are you actually that stupid?

JONATHAN

You obviously think so.

BEATRICE

What the fuck else would I think? Now we're going to have to get a lawyer that we certainly can't afford—

JONATHAN

Well you won't have to worry about that. They've given me a lawyer.

She laughs, quietly.

BEATRICE

Jon, what the *fuck*.

JONATHAN

And this is exactly what I was worried about, isn't it? I told you I was concerned, and you completely dismissed it.

BEATRICE

No I didn't.

JONATHAN

Yes, you did.

BEATRICE

I wasn't trying to diminish your concerns.

JONATHAN

Of course you weren't because you couldn't be bothered, could you? God forbid you take an interest in something other than your precious novel, God forbid you take an interest in anything but *you*.

BEATRICE

(vicious)

You wanna know the truth of it, Jon? I wasn't concerned about it because I really just don't give a fuck.

Beat.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

You're the banner boy of mediocrity waving your flag of spotless virtue like some kind of middling American hero - You are insufferably pedestrian. What would I possibly worry about other than *dying of boredom having to listen to your inventions of conflict?*

She's cut him deep.

JONATHAN

How can you say that?

BEATRICE

How can you not see it?

JONATHAN

I didn't invent this.

BEATRICE

Give yourself more credit, baby. You made it all the way in her house on a rainy afternoon. It writes itself.

JONATHAN

WHY ARE YOU PUNISHING ME?

BEATRICE

Did her sycophancy get you hard or was it the smell of teen spirit?

JONATHAN

Oh very grown up, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

Explain the parallels in this story, Jonathan. The harpy wife? *The fucking tampons?* She knew I was on my period.

(she throws the papers at him)

Explain this. Explain how this girl got so easily confused about your relationship because it looks fishy as fuck.

JONATHAN

I don't know.

BEATRICE

That's not good enough.

JONATHAN

It doesn't matter how she got there - she's a straight A student and a girl and *extra fun*, her parents are both attorneys.

BEATRICE

No. You don't get to be the victim in this.

JONATHAN

Jesus, I *am* the victim.

BEATRICE

Oh, you are? You're victim to a seventeen year old girl?

JONATHAN

I know how it sounds.

BEATRICE

It sounds like you're lying.

JONATHAN

She was my friend.

BEATRICE

Your friend. You're a grown ass man. What business did you have befriending a seventeen year old? Did you text her? Did you kick it at the arcade?

JONATHAN

WOULD YOU HAVE EVEN NOTICED?

BEATRICE

I suppose it's my fault, is it? I'm the negligent wife who was so busy doing the thing you can't that you had to go stick your dick in a child to feel like a man again? You selfish fuck.

JONATHAN

No, you're a text-book narcissist who treats this relationship like an autocracy while I run around behind you hoping one day you'll notice for once that I'm your fucking *husband* and not your errand boy.

BEATRICE

Oh how your self-sacrifice moves me. You're such a goddamn martyr, Jon.

JONATHAN

Don't.

BEATRICE

This isn't about the forfeits of your *wonderful fucking life, GEORGE BAILEY*, this is about some bitch who flattered you, who read your little book and your *inevitable* surrender to adulation. God, are you so starved for approval? What does that say to you? You fucking *fell for it*. Finally, *finally* someone read your reductive little short stories and you can't help but get hard for it because you suddenly feel worth something?

JONATHAN

YES, SHE MADE ME FEEL WORTH SOMETHING, WHAT DOES THAT TELL YOU?

BEATRICE

I feel sorry for you. I really do. For your insufficiency, for the ruin of your precious fucking morality. You're just so...effete.

JONATHAN

Stop.

BEATRICE

Why should I? Did you?

JONATHAN

I DIDN'T FUCK HER.

BEATRICE

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU.

JONATHAN

CAN YOU STOP ATTACKING ME FOR TWO FUCKING SECONDS? I DIDN'T FUCK HER. I NEVER TOUCHED HER. I barely understand how this happened, something I'm trying my hardest to expiate and you just won't give me a *fucking break*. I need someone on my side Beatrice, because this is going to be *bleak*. So do you think you can be a big girl and get your goddamn priorities in order and remember your fucking vows? Do you think you can do that? Because if we're going to try to figure this out, I'm going to need you to not be such a self-righteous fucking cunt.

Beatrice and Jonathan stand off.

BEATRICE

I'm sorry.

JONATHAN

Are you?

BEATRICE

I'm a self-preservationist.

JONATHAN

That's not the same thing. Try harder, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

I'm sorry this happened.

Jonathan looks at her, expecting more but it's all she can offer. He is entirely defeated. He sits down and stares at nothing.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Cairo is sitting on her bed, leaning against the wall, hand writing on a legal pad in red ink. She smokes and ashes into a coke can. Winnie enters without knocking.

CAIRO

Sure. Come on in.

WINNIE

Where have you been?

CAIRO
I have been...
(she writes)
...one acquainted with the night.

WINNIE
What?

CAIRO
*I have walked out in rain, and back
in rain, I have out-walked the
furthest city light.*

WINNIE
Robert Frost?

CAIRO
Yeah, thanks for that. You just
inspired the opening for my essay.

WINNIE
Essay.

CAIRO
Yes, Winnie. For Stanford?

WINNIE
Oh you're just working on your
essay? That all?

CAIRO
I'm smoking a cigarette too, if you
wish to be very literal.

WINNIE
Answer me.

CAIRO
Question me.

WINNIE
Don't be a bitch. Why are you
avoiding me?

CAIRO
It hasn't been with any great
effort, I assure you.

WINNIE
You won't return my phone calls.

CAIRO
I've been busy.

WINNIE

Clearly. What are you doing to Mr. Miller?

CAIRO

I'm testifying against him.

WINNIE

Why?

CAIRO

Oh you didn't hear? I've been victimized.

WINNIE

Like fuck you have.

CAIRO

He exploited my trust and abused my faith in him as a teacher.

WINNIE

Are you reciting a rape pamphlet to me?

CAIRO

I think they call it sexual battery by an authority figure.

WINNIE

You sound like a PSA.

CAIRO

Jonathan Miller asked me personally to write a special short story for the midterm - one that he wanted to proofread himself. He told me to write in the style of my favorite author, who as it turns out, is Henry Miller. I requested his permission to do so, and he was enthusiastic about the idea. So much so, that he came personally to my house to pick it up - came in my house, in my bedroom. Jonathan Miller deliberately procured an inappropriate relationship with me, his student. Come to think of it, it might also be aggravated sexual exploitation of a minor. Six of one, half dozen of another, right?

WINNIE

That's...that's a fucking lie.

CAIRO
What would you like me to say?

WINNIE
The truth.

CAIRO
I'm telling the truth.

WINNIE
Your version of it.

CAIRO
Is there another version?

WINNIE
This isn't funny, Cairo.

CAIRO
Am I laughing, Winnie?

WINNIE
You can't take do this.

CAIRO
Watch me.
(she looks at her pad and
recites)
*"In the end, ultimately, I
understood the severity of our
actions. Our mutual naiveté, my
trust and his arrogance, exposed us
to the caprices of modern society
and rendered us defeated, suddenly
alone in separate camps. I stand
firm in mine, burdened and acutely
aware that my puerile conceptions
about adult relationships were just
that – the infantile notions of the
American girl, learned early and
perpetuated into an unhappy
adulthood. I cannot say whether or
not I am grateful for the
experience, for the knowledge; is
ignorance truly bliss, even at the
expense of personal happiness? The
answer evades me. The felicity of
youth has been ripped from me like
skin, and exposed as I am, sore and
open as I am, I can feel the growth
of something new over me, like
armor. And it will serve me as both
shield and weapon."*

WINNIE
 (reeling)
 You created this.

CAIRO
 I engendered it, certainly.

WINNIE
 This is really fucked up. Even for
 you.

CAIRO
 Even for me...what does that mean,
 Winnie? Even for me.

WINNIE
 You know what it means. You're so
 unassuming that you think no one's
 watching you creep under them like
 a fucking virus, taking what you
 want and decimating everything
 else.
 You're going to ruin his life. And
 for *what?* To avenge your *rejection?*
 To punish him because he didn't
 want to fuck you?

Cairo lights another cigarette.

CAIRO
 (singing)
*I've got no strings to hold me
 down, there are no strings on me.*

WINNIE
 I'll testify against you.

CAIRO
 No you won't.

WINNIE
 Excuse me?

CAIRO
 I'll show them what evidence I have
 against you and Boris and not only
 will your credibility be shot to
 shit, but you'll incriminate him as
 well. Two teachers can lose their
 jobs. Oh hey...we could double
 team.

WINNIE
 This isn't what I meant.

CAIRO

Isn't it? Haven't I played it out exactly like you imagined?

WINNIE

I didn't want this, I would never want this for - I was *joking* -

CAIRO

You weren't joking, you just didn't expect me to follow through.

WINNIE

You're a monster. Why are you doing this?

CAIRO

Because there is no greater tragedy than mediocrity.

WINNIE

The fuck are you talking about? This isn't a game.

CAIRO

You're right. It's adversity, and I will overcome it.

She turns back to her legal pad. She is in profile against the wall. We pull back to reveal the wall behind her, which is Jonathan's hotel bathroom. They lean against each other in different spaces and times.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NASHVILLE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Close in on Jonathan, who sits with his back against the door, red pen in hand, reading Cairo's short story. As before with Cairo, we look up at him from the page and watch the text project onto his face and in the air around him.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

Mr. Murphy drove with the resignation of the already dead. He imagined he felt the way Dylan Thomas did heading into the White Horse to take the drink that would kill him. He knew what they were and what they were not.

Slow close on the blue of his eye - in the reflection of his pupil we see the story playing out, the slow drizzle of rain and a dark haired girl standing at an open window. Closer and closer until we're there...

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - SHORT STORY - FANTASY

The dark haired girl looks out the window. Behind her, the room glows faintly with the soft diffused gray light of a rainy afternoon.

The window is open and fat rain drops smack against the sill. We hear a car pull into the driveway.

Rain splashes her hand. Her cell phone rings and she answers.

The quoted text appears with a blinking cursor. We see what she sees.

CAIRO
"Hello", *she said.*

JONATHAN (V.O.)
I'm here.

CAIRO (V.O.)
Alice thought immediately of a slaughtering lamb, though she couldn't be certain which of them was meant for sacrifice.

Close on a water droplet landing on the white windowsill into...

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A drop of water from the running bath has landed on the page Jonathan is reading. He wipes at it and the ink runs.

His face is unreadable, his pen unmoving.

CAIRO (V.O.)
He was outside. He was inside.

Jonathan blinks.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - SHORT STORY - FANTASY

When his eyes open, he stands before her in her bedroom, bag in hand.

The text floats over what we see, a reenactment of the story.

CAIRO
"You gonna plug a dam?" She said, noting the drugstore bag filled with tampons.

JONATHAN

"I thought this was a fashionable gift for young ladies." *He said.*

CAIRO (V.O.)

She laughed at him. With him. Their rapport was effortless.

(she puts a cigarette in her mouth)

"You want one?"

The flame and Cairo are reflected in Jonathan's pupils.

CAIRO (V.O.)

Smoke drifted from her mouth with practiced effort - something she'd picked up in some obscure noir she'd watched with her mother.

JONATHAN

It excites you, doesn't it? The surreptitiousness of it all.

CAIRO

Is it more romantic for you that way?

Mr. Murphy smiled wide, the lines around his mouth deepening into parentheses that framed his perfect lips into a punch line.

Jonathan's face fills the frame, looking right at us.

JONATHAN

This is no romance. I'm sorry to disappoint you.

He snatches her wrist and the cigarette falls to the floor, spewing ash and spark from its tip before being crushed with her shoe.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jonathan's eyes scan the page. He shifts on the floor.

CAIRO (V.O.)

Alice opened her mouth to say something, but the words fell away. Mr. Murphy loomed over her, his Cadillac-blue eyes hungry and bored.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - SHORT STORY - FANTASY

CU on Jonathan's mouth as the dialogue spells itself out of his mouth.

JONATHAN

In what peril you find yourself.

CU on Jonathan's face close to Cairo's. We don't see their legs, but we see them shift.

CAIRO (V.O.)

**He pressed the knee of his starched
chinos into the space between her
legs.**

JONATHAN

I want you to read to me.

CAIRO (V.O.)

**Alice watched in slow motion as Mr.
Murphy's tongue undulated when he
spoke - pink tide against the bone
shore of his teeth.**

JONATHAN

Read it to me the way you read it
to yourself.

CAIRO (V.O.)

**Their bodies separated like a
single cell splitting.**

ECU on Cairo's sticky glossed lips separating in slow motion.

CAIRO (V.O.)

**Alice took the tattered Henry
Miller paperback off of the
bedside table and spread it open on
the comforter of her bed.**

CU on a large framed print of Virginia Woolf - the last portrait taken of her, smoking a cigarette. In the reflection of the glass, we watch Cairo lean over the book and bed. Jonathan stands behind her.

JONATHAN

**"Page thirteen", he said, behind
her. One hand slid up the front of
Alice's short cotton dress, as the
other pointed to a sentence on the
page. "Begin here."**

CAIRO

Alice recited. "It's not because she's a child, it's because she's a child with no innocence."

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jonathan slips his hand into his pajama pants.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - SHORT STORY - FANTASY

A spider crawls across a window sill.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

He was against her then and Alice felt a push of muscular wetness between her legs. Mr. Murphy placed his slender hand over hers and guided her to the mound at her center, pressing her fingers into the dark fold there—

Fingers move over white fabric.

CAIRO (V.O.)

—just behind the damp fabric of her panties, feeling her feel herself.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

He found his way around the elastic at her leg and slid two deft fingers into the warm darkness of her virgin cunt. "Keep reading", he said.

CU on Cairo's mouth as she reads. CU on Jonathan's mouth as he listens.

CAIRO

(reciting)

"Look into her eyes and you see the monster of knowledge, the shadow of wisdom—"

JONATHAN (V.O.)

She felt him shift, his weight suddenly very low. He kissed her ass through her dress, pressed his face to it.

CAIRO

(reciting)

"-the roundness and shapelessness of childhood have scarcely left her body. She is a woman in miniature, a copy as yet incomplete."

INTERCUT between the hotel bathroom and Cairo's short story. Images of the real Cairo, Jonathan, Beatrice, Boris and Winnie begin to blend with what he sees.

Jonathan's hand is on her bare thigh.

CU on Cairo's hands resting between her legs under her desk.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

A thousand years of violence and conquering boiled within him as he held the mouth of her pubis like a hooked fish, a thing gasping for release, for mercy, for death.

Close on the back of Cairo's neck and Jonathan's open mouth against it.

CAIRO (V.O.)

Alice stopped reading.

Cairo's hands grip the comforter.

CU on a half-eaten muffin. An ant is picking away pieces of it.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

Her gullet tightened as he went deeper within - searching for the answer to a question he'd doubted-

CAIRO (V.O.)

-but there it was-

Jonathan is masturbating in the bathroom.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

-the answer and the question separated by that thin fleshy veil- the cicatrix that will never heal-

Blots of dark red ink drop onto a thick white page.

Winnie, wearing no make up, uses a fine watercolor paintbrush to thin out the ink in a long slender stroke.

CAIRO (V.O.)
-the serpent's apple.

The spider crawls onto the bed.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
*He would renounce everything he
 believed in for a taste of her. He
 would abandon all of his burdens-*

Beatrice sucks a raw oyster out of its shell.

CAIRO (V.O.)
*The impassive harpy wife, the
 marginalization-*

CU on Beatrice's hands as she uses *Apostrophes & Ampersands*
 as a coaster for her bourbon.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
The ethics, the abstemiousness-

Cairo watches Jonathan with his back to us, standing at a
 blackboard. She sits at her desk and scratches a raw mosquito
 bite on her ankle with her other foot.

CAIRO (V.O.)
*All surrendered and sacrificed to
 the seduction of subjugation.*

Cairo's earring is tangled in her hair.

Jonathan masturbates in the shower while Beatrice brushes her
 teeth at the sink.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
*He peeled the wet cotton down her
 legs and pressed into her from
 behind, the width of his face
 forcing her legs apart at their
 seam. Her cul was slick against his
 chin-*

Jonathan presses Cairo's bare shoulders onto the bed, his
 fingers splayed wide over her blades as her hair fans out
 above her. The muscles in her back shiver as he moves against
 her.

CAIRO (V.O.)
*Just as he imagined it was when she
 was alone, maybe in her bedroom-*

The spider crawls across Cairo's pillow.

Boris and Winnie pass in the hall. Neither looks at the other.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
Maybe in a bathroom stall at school, her own fingers knuckle deep - trying to rub out that itch-

A pair of shoes under a bathroom stall, panties stretched around the ankles.

CAIRO/JONATHAN (V.O.)
The ache inside.

Jonathan's face against Cairo's.

Wide shot of the hotel room. Jonathan with his back to us against the frosted glass bathroom door. Beatrice sits in bed, typing. Separate worlds.

JONATHAN (V.O.)
He saw himself burying his cock in her, brutally fucking away the exigency that swelled her clit and choked her better judgements. He would fill her up with come.

CU on Cairo's eye. Reflected in it is the spider, crawling across the sheets.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jonathan comes.

He sits there a moment, the papers and red pen beside him. He closes his eyes.

THE LIGHTS IN THE BATHROOM ARE SUDDENLY BRIGHT AND AUSTERE. He opens his eyes to...

EXT. COURTHOUSE - MORNING

Jon sits alone on a bench outside. He lights a cigarette.

Cairo walks toward him, her parents in tow. She wears a skirt, sweater and keds, and looks terribly young. She waves to him. A slow, sad smile spreads across her face.

CAIRO (V.O.)
 Checkmate.

END.