

MILLER'S GIRL

Written by

Jade Halley Bartlett

Henry Huang  
Heroes and Villains Entertainment  
(323) 850-2990  
henry@heroesandvillains-ent.com

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 of 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)

*Iiiiiiiiif 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 Pfeiffer 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.