

MILLER'S GIRL

Written by
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INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - 5:30 AM

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

I have nothing to say.

The words are deleted.

CAIRO SWEET, 17 and plain in a dark hooded sweatshirt, sits alone at a table in a large 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 a moment. Grainy black and white flickers cast shadows across her impassive 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. *

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MILLER'S GIRL

EXT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The house is a massive white Greek Revival hidden in the trees. A haunted place. A forgotten tomb in the woods.

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*

Cairo shuts a glass door behind her.

*

We follow her down a long path overgrown with thorny plants and dead leaves toward the porte cochere.

*

EXT. WOODS - EARLY MORNING

Cairo walks through the pathless trees. Mist hangs low and blue over the ground. Kudzu vines creep over everything.

Eventually, she breaks through the tree line. Ahead of her is a brick building surrounded by dilapidated sports fields.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Cairo walks down the empty hallway of an old school that hasn't been updated to the more industrial prison aesthetic of modern institutions.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY -MORNING

Cairo passes several wooden doors to different rooms, finally stopping at one at the end of the corridor.

ROOM 416 - MR. MILLER, CREATIVE WRITING

Soft classical wafts from the open door.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

SYMPHONY NO 6. in A Minor: 3 by MAHLER

Thick oriental rugs over the floors. Lamps are used in place of overhead lights. Floor to ceiling bookshelves and portraits of famous artists cover the walls. Desks spread out in concentric circles around a large, mid-century wooden desk at the front of the room.

A VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY banner hangs above a classic green chalkboard, on which is written *MR. MILLER - CREATIVE WRITING* in beautiful, cursive handwriting. Beneath that, a list of authors - *Nabakov, Twain, DeSade, Vonnegut.*

Cairo chooses a seat in front and takes a stack of books from her bag, opening her library copy of James Joyce's **FINNEGANS WAKE**.

JONATHAN MILLER (elegant, warm, 30s) enters carrying a stack of freshly printed pages. He wears a uniform of camel and olive. He isn't expecting a student this early in his class.

JONATHAN

Good morning.

She looks up.

CAIRO

Good morning.

JONATHAN

Class doesn't start for another hour.

CAIRO

I know.
I don't like crowds.

JONATHAN

Do you live very far?

CAIRO

Just down the road, in Lovell Hills.

JONATHAN

Wow, nice.

CAIRO

(shrugging)
My parents are lawyers.

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 the reading list for the semester.

JONATHAN
I assume you got this before the
holidays - have you had a chance to
look it over?

CAIRO
I've read it.

JONATHAN
I know it seems like a lot but I
promise we'll move through them
quick enough.

CAIRO
I mean I read the whole list.

JONATHAN
You read these books?

CAIRO
Yes.

JONATHAN
There are eighteen books on this
list.

CAIRO
I party hard.

WINNIE BLACK (17) enters as she would her own home. Every
space is hers. She sheds bags and coats and food and paper
until finally she is revealed - glorious, fleshy, femme. She
pauses after her performance to give Jon a once over.

JONATHAN
Winnie.

WINNIE
D'ja miss me?

JONATHAN

No.

WINNIE

That's too bad.

(re: his outfit)

Is J.Crew endorsing you for this?

JONATHAN

(re: her hair)

Nice feathers.

WINNIE

You like? They're sewn in.

JONATHAN

How do you wash it?

WINNIE

You don't.

JONATHAN

Cool.

Winnie leans on Jonathan's desk, facing Cairo. Jonathan writes the definitions for CENSORSHIP and SUPPRESSION on the chalkboard.

WINNIE

(to Cairo)

You're overdressed as usual, I see.

CAIRO

Your underwear as usual, I see.

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

Censorship.

WINNIE

Boring. 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

Instafamous.

JONATHAN

You're not wrong. Do you know why?

WINNIE

Yeah, do you?

CAIRO

The ease of discovery puts the responsibility on the learner - ignorance is a product of laziness, not limitation.

JONATHAN

Perhaps you two should lead class today.

WINNIE

Or perhaps you could come up with something more interesting to teach, Teach.

JONATHAN

If you find my class so tedious, why did you elect to take it again?

WINNIE

I like your outfits.

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

New semester, new me.

JONATHAN

Let's hope.

CAIRO

You want anything Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN

No thanks, Cairo. Sweet of you to
ask.

WINNIE

I see what you did there.

Cairo and Winnie exit.

Jonathan surveys the room and 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, charming, smarter than he looks) enters
with a pastry box and two coffees.

BORIS

Pretty suggestive for seniors,
don't you think?

Jonathan shuts the book. Boris sets his stuff on Cairo's
desk.

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.
It's not *just* 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 and walks around the room,
reciting. Jonathan follows him.

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 Sweet.

Boris grins.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

What's funny?

BORIS

She's gonna be Valedictorian. Talk
about porn.

JONATHAN

We're 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
Is that coffee for me?

BORIS
And a muffin too, if you want.

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

JONATHAN
Oh man, these smell -
(he looks up)
What are you doing?

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

BORIS
Welly well well, what have we here -
Apostrophes and Ampersands, six
gruellingly romantic short stories
by Jonathan Albert Miller. You've
got a *fan*.

JONATHAN
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. That's sweet.

Jonathan takes this book from Boris as well and returns it to Cairo's desk.

JONATHAN

Don't you have a class to teach?

BORIS

I've got an assignment up on the television.

JONATHAN

That doesn't count.

BORIS

Carl Sagan counts.

Boris finishes his coffee and free throws it into the trash.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Those muffins are fresh AF, by the way. Made them this morning.

JONATHAN

You have time to bake but not to teach?

BORIS

I have priorities.

Boris backs out of the room as Cairo enters. They bump into one another.

CAIRO

Excuse me, Coach Fillmore. Good morning.

BORIS

Morning, Cairo. Later, Brofessor.

Boris mouths "*split fig*" behind Cairo's back.

CAIRO

Forgot my wallet.

EXT. JONATHAN'S BACKYARD - DUSK

Jonathan's car pulls into the driveway of a modest craftsman home. He gets out and we follow him to a small enclosed backyard of unraked leaves. Off the side of the house is small, white shed. Kudzu curls over the top and around the sides in a slow, verdant smother.

INT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - DUSK

The space is small and well appointed. Rugs cover the rough hewn floor. Shelves of worn books stack to the ceiling.

Jonathan sets his bag on a built-in desk beneath a small paned window - its view obscured by a veil of green tendrils.

Several vintage liquors line the windowsill. He takes a look through them and, grinning, grabs a Pappy Van Winkle.

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

Jonathan walks in with the bottle and a single low ball glass. Sitting at a table is his wife BEATRICE (30s, rapier wit, minimal empathy). She types furiously on her laptop, a corona of Chinese food cartons spread around her.

He sits down at the table and, with a touch of ceremony, pours himself a glass and looks up expectantly at Beatrice. She doesn't notice. He takes a savoring sip.

JONATHAN

Are you gonna talk to me tonight or shall I continue contemplating my reflection in the back of your laptop?

BEATRICE

(still typing)

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 way to exorcise this day's lunacy.

JONATHAN

You want a massage?

BEATRICE

I want a lobotomy.

She finally looks up at him. Notes the Pappy.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Red letter day. Did Benson finally
get computers?

He laughs.

JONATHAN
It got a writer. And she's reading
Finnegans Wake on her own, can you
believe that?

BEATRICE
I'm forever stunned that the
children in that backwater shanty
can read.

JONATHAN
And guess what else?

BEATRICE
Infinite Jest.

JONATHAN
Apostrophes and Ampersands.

He grins.

BEATRICE
Look how proud you are, you're so
cute.

JONATHAN
She checked it out of the library.

BEATRICE
They carry your book at the
library?

Her phone rings. She looks at it in dismay.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Hark. A confederacy of dunces.

The conversation is over.

JONATHAN
Deep breaths. Happy place.

BEATRICE
My happy place has all of their
heads impaled on Montblanc pens.
(re: Pappy)
Share your riches?

JONATHAN

Sure.

She answers the phone.

BEATRICE

Hello, Amy. What is it?

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - EVENING

We follow Jon through the hallway of his house toward the kitchen. It's an older home with books and art and dead plants crammed into every available space.

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

For Beatrice June Harker. Every last word.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Jonathan puts some of the food cartons in the fridge and the others in the trash. Empty bottles of beer and literary magazines litter the counters. A record player sits on a table with another dead plant. He turns it on. **SMOKES LIKE LIGHTNING by LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**. His voice floats around the room like a ghost.

He dances himself to a cabinet filled with liquor, chooses a bottle of Four Roses Bourbon and pours a couple fingers into a lowball glass. Beatrice comes to the doorway. He holds the partially filled glass out to her.

BEATRICE

You forgot the liquor.

JONATHAN

Liquor? I don't even know her.

He pours a bigger glass. She smiles and saunters in the room, a drunk python.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

You ever read *Under the Roofs of Paris*?

BEATRICE

Honey I had to throw my first copy away, it got so sticky.

(MORE)

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

That beginning bit with the daddy
and the prostitute and the cum
money is filthy filthy *fuego*.

He hands her the filled glass and kisses her neck.

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

There it is.

JONATHAN

You want to reenact?
I can papier-mâché you with cum and
money.

BEATRICE

(laughing)

Gross.

JONATHAN

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

He unbuttons her blouse.

BEATRICE

You're expecting a heavy load then?

JONATHAN

A full body of work.
I'm the Kandinsky of Cum.
The Brecht of the Boom Boom.

She laughs. He picks her up in his arms and starts to slow
dance her around the room, singing along. She wraps her legs
around him and they make out in the middle of the kitchen.
Her phone rings.

BEATRICE

Oh for fuck's sake.

Jonathan sighs into her neck.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Take care of these dishes and I'll
give you a handy later.

She kisses him on the nose and slides out of his arms.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

(answering)

*It's Pushkin not Pollyfuckinanna,
Amy. I'm not changing the ending.*

She walks back to the dining room, drink in hand, blouse unbuttoned. Jonathan adjusts himself in his trousers and turns to the sink.

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, which he opens to Jonathan.

JONATHAN

This is the best part of my morning.

They cheer one another with a muffin.

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 make it through my day.

JONATHAN

Without getting arrested?

BORIS

Without getting blasted. But I guess that too.

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.

They both look out at the sun rising over the vine choked forest.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Do you think there are ghosts in there?

JONATHAN

Why don't you go see?

BORIS

I don't go in the kudzu.

JONATHAN

My granny told me to keep my windows shut tight so it couldn't get me.

BORIS

It feeds on the souls of the dead. That's how it moves so fast.

JONATHAN

Something about the verdancy of cemetery trees...

BORIS

It's a Wallflowers song.

As they watch, Cairo emerges from the forest like a wraith. She listens to headphones.

From Cairo's POV, Jonathan and Boris cut figures of Vladimir and Estragon against the backdrop of the old school. She can see their mouths moving, little puffs of air evaporating in front of them. She approaches.

CAIRO

Good morning.

BORIS

Do you always walk alone through the woods?

CAIRO

That's a peculiar question to ask a young lady, Coach Fillmore.

BORIS

I realize that, but do you actually? It's dangerous in there.

CAIRO

Not for me.

(sotto)

I'm a witch.

Boris squints, considering her.

JONATHAN

What are you listening to?

CAIRO

Celine Dion.

JONATHAN

Really?

CAIRO

Really.

BORIS

(horrificed)

But...why?

CAIRO

Why not?

JONATHAN

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

BORIS

Do vows of secrecy mean nothing to
you? To the grave, man!

CAIRO

No judgement.

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?

She takes one and bites into it.

CAIRO

(impressed)

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

I 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.
Do you really walk through the
woods alone?

CAIRO

Yes.

JONATHAN

Audacious.

CAIRO

Is it?

Jonathan finishes his cigarette.

JONATHAN

Yes.

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.

She drops a stack of books. Boris turns.

WINNIE

Oops.

BORIS

Oldest trick in the book, Winnie.

WINNIE

It worked, didn't it?

He eyes her. She grins.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Aren'tcha gonna say something?
I dressed up just for you.

BORIS

If only that were true and legal.
What do you want?

WINNIE

I wanna get into your physics
class.

BORIS

Why?

WINNIE

I love electricity and neurons and stuff.

BORIS

You're bored.

WINNIE

Ease my suffering.

Students and teachers begin to crowd the halls.

BORIS

You'll be too many tests behind.

WINNIE

Don't you tutor?

BORIS

You don't need lessons.

WINNIE

Then what do I need?

BORIS

A better education system.

(sighing)

I'll see what I can do.

WINNIE

You won't regret it.

BORIS

You might.

Cairo watches Winnie and Boris from the shadow of a doorway. They could be any teacher talking to any student. Boris walks away from a blushing Winnie and Cairo goes to her.

CAIRO

Whatcha doin.

WINNIE

I think I'm seducing Coach Fillmore.

CAIRO

Why?

WINNIE

He's hot. And he's nice.

Winnie closes her locker and they move down the hallway.

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

JOCK

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

WINNIE

(not missing a beat)
Hit me up when you finish growing
out your vagina.

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

CAIRO

You're a lesbian.

WINNIE

I'm an equal-opportunist.
Are you jealous?

CAIRO

If I say yes, will you lay off him?

WINNIE

If I say yes, will you lay on me?

CAIRO

You're giving me mixed signals,
Winnie.

WINNIE

We gotta lean in, you know? It's
how you build character.

They've come to the cafeteria.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Chicky bisky?

They turn and walk inside.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Cairo sits at the front of a full classroom, listening to a student stumble through a piece of text.

Jonathan watches her. She feels his gaze on her and turns, coolly and openly meeting his eyes a moment before turning back to the recitation.

Class goes on and Cairo watches Jonathan speak in front of the class. His eyes don't meet hers again. Winnie watches them both.

At the end of class, he passes out graded papers. A sticky note attached to hers reads:

See me after school?

Class lets out and she and Winnie walk out the door together. Cairo shows her the note and then folds it into her pocket.

INT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - OTHER CLASSES

We watch Cairo sitting in a series of different classrooms.

She folds the note between her fingers as she listens.

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 is nasty.

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

It's not.

BORIS

You mean you're not.

JONATHAN

No. Yes. No.

She's preoccupied.

BORIS

With how good I deep-dicked her in her dreams last night.

JONATHAN

I think you mean *well* and that's revolting.

BORIS

What time is dinner?

JONATHAN

Seven. Please take a shower first.

BORIS

What, you worried Bea's gonna get hot for this?

(he stands and rubs his body)

This luscious sweaty man-meat?

JONATHAN

Top three worst nightmares.

Boris Roger Rabbits out of the room.

BORIS

I got moves. I got skills.

JONATHAN

You've got brain damage.

BORIS

(singing)

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

JONATHAN

Hey.

She stifles a grin. He tries to be cool.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

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

CAIRO

I won't tell.

JONATHAN

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

Waiting for Winnie. Sounds like a
Gin Blossoms album.

JONATHAN

Gin Blossoms.
What's she doing?

CAIRO

Applying to Vandy, you'll be
pleased to know.

JONATHAN

Are you?

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

How far?

CAIRO

Stanford far.

JONATHAN

Because you wanna eat pot brownies
and read Joan Didion all day?

CAIRO

Because I hear the literacy rate is
high.

JONATHAN

Have you been to the Scroll
Sessions at Mollie Fontaine's?

CAIRO

What's that?

JONATHAN

Poetry slam every third Saturday of
the month down in Victorian
Village.

CAIRO

What's that?

JONATHAN

How can you disdain of Tennessee
without having done a thorough
cultural investigation?

CAIRO

Educated judgement.

JONATHAN

I've heard things there that haunt
me.

CAIRO

Because they're bad?

JONATHAN

Because they're beautiful. Maybe
you should go this weekend. I think
you might be surprised.

She smiles.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Let's chat about this week's
assignment.

CAIRO

Okay.

JONATHAN

I asked for a first person short
story from a social perspective
different than your own. Your peers
wrote varying articles about social
hierarchies - some attempted a
comment on classism, Miss Black
delivered a scathing satire on
popularity - and you wrote about a
reluctant spider.

They look at one another. Then he recites her work to her.
From memory.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

*'Survival and desire amalgamated
and turned an aphotic eye inward.*

(MORE)

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

*I saw my expectations dismantled
and dismembered by those harsh and
starving dogs of reality -
-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.
We are what we are.
And all creatures must eat.'*

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

All fiction is confession.

JONATHAN

And what does your spider confess?

CAIRO

That the weak are made to be
devoured by the strong.

JONATHAN

That's dark.

CAIRO

That's nature.

JONATHAN

That's right.

CAIRO

You memorized it.

JONATHAN

I'm eidetic.

She laughs.

CAIRO

Are you really?

JONATHAN
It's a good party trick.

CAIRO
I'll say.
Spider confession?

JONATHAN
I'm all ears.

CAIRO
I read your book.

Beat.

JONATHAN
Reviewers, of which there were
three, found my
work...overreaching. *Ambitious
without direction*, to quote.

She thinks a moment.

CAIRO
I would describe it as grand and
tragic. Romantic horror.

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

FLASH TO:

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - CAIRO'S BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

Cairo sits in a clawfoot bathtub filled with pillows, reading
the plastic sheathed library version of *APOSTROPHE'S &
AMPERSANDS*.

We look up at her from the page of the book. The text appears
projected on her face. She recites his work aloud.

CAIRO
*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

It's the tickle boundary.

JONATHAN

The what?

CAIRO

Tickling is technically painful,
but our brain tricks us into
laughing as it tries to navigate
the sensation of pain coming from
someone we trust. How fucked is
that?

JONATHAN

Is that true?

CAIRO

You know it is. You wrote about it.
The horror of loving. The elation
and the anguish.
It's why I wanted to take your
class.

He stares at her, unsure what to say.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Too much? Is that weird?

He laughs.

JONATHAN

(sincere)

I'm flattered.
It was the first thing I'd ever
written that felt tangible. Like
I'd touched something.

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

CAIRO

Is there more?

JONATHAN

I haven't written in a long time.

CAIRO

Why not?

JONATHAN

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

CAIRO

You're uninspired.

JONATHAN

(teasing)
Are you judging me?

CAIRO

No way.
More like...*challenge accepted*.

JONATHAN

That's my job.
Speaking of which -
(beat)
You want a jump-start on the
midterm?

CAIRO

Yes.

JONATHAN

I want you to write a short story
in the style of your favorite
author. I think it could be the
highlight of your portfolio
submission to Stanford.

CAIRO

I think that's a terrific idea.

JONATHAN

I hoped you would.

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

WINNIE

She wants me to have *four* new
pieces in OIL. Four. Do I look like
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.

JONATHAN

Hi, Winnie.

WINNIE

Mr. Miller? Is that you?
I'm blind with hunger.

Cairo grabs her things.

CAIRO

I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Miller.

JONATHAN

Goodbye, girls. Make good choices.

They leave. Jonathan smiles to himself.

INT. WINNIE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

HEARTBEATS by THE KNIFE

Winnie's car is filled with crumpled paper, used books, and candy wrappers. 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 the two of them.

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

EXT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

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

INT. WINNIE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Winnie leaves the car running.

WINNIE

You want anything?

CAIRO

A pack of 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 different with 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.

She leaves.

INT. WINNIE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Winnie drives and eats a candy bar.

Cairo is doodling on the dashboard with a silver sharpie - a
Henry Miller quote that reads:

EVERYTHING WE DENY SERVES TO
DEFEAT US IN THE END

INT. LOCAL 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)

I don't see any Michelin stars
here, 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

Coors Light. 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.
Another for you Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN

I'm good, Winnie. Designated
driver.

WINNIE

(to Boris)

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

In a good way. You're like a nice
pastoral.

She goes back to the kitchen.

BEATRICE

She's cute.

BORIS

And a 4.0 student. And a talented
painter.

BEATRICE

You like her.

BORIS

So do you.

JONATHAN

I've got her in my morning class.
She's a good kid.

BEATRICE

Oh oh - is this the last scion of
Joyce?

JONATHAN

No, that's Cairo. They're best
friends.

BEATRICE

Popular?

BORIS

Winnie is. Cairo's a nerd.

BEATRICE

What a lovely departure she must be
from the Future Farmers of America.

BORIS

Did he tell you Cairo read his
book?

BEATRICE

He sure did. Is she pretty?

JONATHAN

She's talented.

BEATRICE

Even worse.

BORIS

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

JONATHAN

I feel like I'm finally getting to
enjoy my job. It's exhilarating to
be so engaged, so -

BORIS

Worshipped?

JONATHAN

I can be meaningful in the career
of a person who has something that
matters.

BEATRICE

That's nice, baby. I'm happy for
you.

BORIS

Enjoy it while you can. Pickings
are slim in the PS system.

BEATRICE

Rural education not as romantic as
you thought it'd be, huh?

BORIS

I thought it was gonna be Friday
Night Lights. Maybe even a little
Legends of the Fall. But it's just
fucking bureaucracy. Red tape and
homogenization and standardizing
that leaves us sitting around with
our dicks in our hands,
regurgitating under-funded,
outdated programs that do fuck-all
for nothing and no one while the
private schools are learning
meditation and oat rolling and
getting bonuses.

JONATHAN

I had no idea you had so many
feelings.

BORIS

I *wanted* to be a teacher. I wanted
to make a difference. But this is
the public school system. We don't
grow presidents and peacemakers.

(MORE)

BORIS (CONT'D)

We grow celebrities and domestic abusers. You wanna make a difference? Grow a fucking tree.

BEATRICE

Cheers, Boris.

They cheer each other with the remainder of their drinks.
Jonathan makes a face.

BORIS

The professor disapproves of my cynicism.

BEATRICE

He's judging you.

JONATHAN

I'm not.

BEATRICE

Are too.

JONATHAN

The 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 to Slytherin.

BORIS

You think I've given up.

JONATHAN

I think you're placing the burden of inspiration on your students rather than being that engine for them. You have nothing to rise to, so you have nothing to earn.

BORIS

That's rich coming from you. I wanted to be a teacher. You fell back on it.

JONATHAN

I love teaching.

BEATRICE

You're much better suited for it, I think.

JONATHAN

Than what?

BEATRICE

Writing.

JONATHAN

What does that mean?

BEATRICE

You don't have brain damage, we don't have kids. You stopped writing because, I imagine, it wasn't for you. Or, you weren't for it. 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 is incredulous.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I've hurt your feelings.

JONATHAN

I didn't realize you saw me that way.

BEATRICE

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

JONATHAN

Because you married a writer.

She looks at him.

BEATRICE

I did, didn't I?

She goes off to find the bathroom.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

The bedroom is a cavernous, Gothic wet dream. All dark blue and green velvet, black painted hardwood floors, dripping candles.

Cairo is staring her laptop, smoking a cigarette and ashing into a coke can. Winnie lays on a plush king size bed eating a popsicle. Her tongue is purple. Her work uniform is crumpled on the floor. She's in her underwear and an oversized tee shirt.

WINNIE

So you're a smoker now?

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

You like it?

CAIRO

It feels like something I never knew I was missing.

WINNIE

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

CAIRO

You wanna come to a poetry reading with me?

WINNIE

I'd rather get fucked in a dumpster. Let's go shopping.

CAIRO

I'd rather lick a city bus tire.

WINNIE

Let me dress you up.

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

You can be both. What are you doing?

CAIRO

Willing my cursor to blink itself
into my Stanford essay.

WINNIE

You dry?

CAIRO

Unqualified.

WINNIE

What's the subject?

CAIRO

*What has been your greatest
adversity to date, and how have you
overcome?* The only legitimate
adversity I've experienced was
stomaching the grainy fois gras at
Daddy's forty-fifth birthday.

WINNIE

Don't diminish it, your life is
rife with adversity! Awesome absent
parents and being an only child
holed up in your mansion with your
books and all. A hard knock life,
indeed.

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

It's not that hard.

CAIRO

But it is. I have no interest in
getting legacied into Yale and I'm
sure as fuck not going to a state
school and for double fuck not in
this state. Which means I have to
get in on my merit. But is a 4.2
GPA enough? Fuck to the no. Because
we're like, so super fortunate to
grow up in a post 90's politically
correct clusterfuck, where hard
work isn't the winning ticket -
tragedy is. They don't give a shit
if you're smart, they give a shit
if you're *sad*.

WINNIE

You're clever. You'll invent something.

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

You could write a treatise on teacher-student affairs.

CAIRO

Only if I made it first person. You're not seriously gonna fuck him are you?

WINNIE

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

CAIRO

You really want 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 have been harvesting virginity since the dawn of time.

CAIRO

So it doesn't mean anything to you?

WINNIE

What?

CAIRO

Your virginity.

WINNIE

I mean, it's *meaningful*, but it's not necessarily romantic. I just want it to feel so hella good.

CAIRO

Then why not drop it for any of the rando plebes at school?

WINNIE

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

(beat)

(MORE)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

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

Why not? He's fine as hell. And he'd take his time to get me good and juiced. And then he'd give me aftercare.
I know what I'm looking for.
(Cairo makes a face)
And I think I know what Mr. Miller's looking for.

CAIRO

What does that mean?

WINNIE

He sees you. Even though you hide in plain sight.

CAIRO

Shut up.
Tell me more.

WINNIE

Like you haven't noticed. It's like he's been living in gray-scale and you're the first thing he's seen in color.

Cairo smiles, just a little.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

C'mere.

Winnie drags Cairo to the mirror. She undoes her knotted hair and pulls Cairo's sweatshirt tight against her form.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I'd fuck you.

CAIRO

I know.

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

WINNIE

Make him love you.

CAIRO

For what?

WINNIE

For sport. For love, if you like.
I'll get BFill and you get JMill.
Oh my God, rhyme schemes are the
best schemes.

CAIRO

I don't want him to fuck me, I want
him to respect me.

WINNIE

Guess what?

CAIRO

(rolling her eyes)
He can do both.

WINNIE

The student becomes the master.

CAIRO

I don't have to dress up to make a
man to like me.

WINNIE

You'd wear armor into battle
wouldn't you?

CAIRO

Are we going to war?

Winnie rests her head on Cairo's shoulder and her arms around
Cairo's waist.

WINNIE

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

EXT. MOLLIE FONTAINE'S - DAY

The sky is bruise purple and fat with unlet rain. Cairo walks toward a large, gilded Victorian house. A sign out front says **SCROLL SESSIONS: 2:00 PM.**

She walks up the front steps and into the house.

INT. MOLLIE FONTAINE'S - DAY

Stained glass windows kaleidoscope a wide foyer aswarm with hipsters and academics. A long table is set with wine and snacks. Cairo walks over to it and takes a glass of red.

A woman in a calico dress speaks to the group. This is SUZETTE (30s).

SUZETTE

If y'all want to make your way into the parlor and grab a seat, we'll begin in five minutes.

HIPSTER

Thank you, Five!

The room politely giggles.

INT. MOLLIE FONTAINE'S - PARLOR - DAY

Cairo moves into the parlor before anyone else and snags a low velvet loveseat in the back. A podium is set before a large fireplace and various chairs are smattered about the room. A baby grand is positioned in front of a bay window. Taper candles illuminate the room.

And it begins to rain.

People enter and take their seats. They all clearly know one another and Cairo observes their casual intimacy with casual detachment. She feels a presence behind her. A beautiful mouth leans to her ear and whispers.

JONATHAN (O.C.)

Her Majesty has ventured among the people.

She turns to the familiar sound. Jonathan squats behind the couch, his face close to hers. His hair is wet. He smiles at her, all warmth and satisfaction glowing all over her.

CAIRO

Hi. You're wet.

He flips his hair at her, spraying droplets on her face.

JONATHAN

So are you.
(he grins)
May I sit?

She nods. He does. They are close on the small couch. A few people in front of them say hello to him.

CAIRO

Do you know all of these people?

JONATHAN

Most of them. We've been coming here for a couple of years now.

CAIRO

What, like group therapy?

JONATHAN

Yes, exactly like that.
(re: the wine in her hand)
Whatcha got there, young lady?

CAIRO

Sacramental grape juice.

JONATHAN

Said the lawyer's daughter.

Suzette sits at the piano.

CAIRO

Who's that?

JONATHAN

Suzette. She's the youngest person ever to play with the Tennessee Philharmonic.

CAIRO

Is she a writer?

JONATHAN

You'll see.

The room falls silent. Suzette plays **NOCTURNE NO. 2 in C MINOR by JOHN FIELD.**

Over the song, Cairo and Jonathan watch as various people approach the podium to speak.

Both are visibly moved by whatever it is they're hearing. Jonathan watches her...his eyes trace her eyelashes, her nose, the curve of her lips and neck. She turns to him then, eyes shining with emotion. They stare at one another the way one does a painting in a museum that resembles them - with the wonder of how someone knew their face three hundred years ago.

The room erupts in applause and everyone stands but them.

They are only what they are, there, on a couch together in a Victorian house in Tennessee.
Two little ghosts in recognition.

INT. MOLLIE FONTAINE'S - PORCH - DAY

Heavy rain creates a cocoon of white noise. Jonathan and Cairo stand alone in a screened porch. They each have a glass of wine. They each are a little buzzed.

CAIRO

I concede.
That was really something.

Jonathan laughs, delighted.

JONATHAN

Hotdog.
You thought it was gonna be trash,
didn't you?

CAIRO

I admit, my expectations were
limited.

She lights a cigarette.

JONATHAN

You smoke?

CAIRO

Don't you?

She passes it to him. Trying on casual intimacy.

JONATHAN

I'm real glad you liked it.

CAIRO

You ever read at these?

JONATHAN

Only a couple of times, early on.

CAIRO

What a waste. You're better than everyone I heard this afternoon and these people *moved* me.

JONATHAN

You're just saying that so I don't tell on you for drinkin' and smokin' and cussin'.

CAIRO

I say only what I mean.

They look at each other. Thunder crashes. Cairo turns to look out at the rain. Smoke haloes around her.

INT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - FRIDAY 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 puss.

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

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. WINNIE'S CAR - MORNING

Cairo sits in the passenger seat, holding a tray of three coffees in her lap. Her hair is down, her make up is done. She looks...adult.

WINNIE
(admiring)
How do you feel?

Cairo takes a deep breath.

CAIRO
Visible.

WINNIE
Ain't no use in keepin' that light
under a bushel.
Now get out of my car so I can
watch'at ass walk away.

Cairo grins and gets out. Winnie rolls down her window to cat call her.

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

EXT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - MORNING

Cairo rounds the corner of the building.

CAIRO
Gifts for the wallflowers.

She offers them the tray.

BORIS
What's this?

CAIRO
It's coffee.

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

CAIRO
(cheeky)
Like a big girl?

BORIS

Yes ma'am, 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

(re: coffee)

Thank you for this. It's very generous.

CAIRO

No one should have to suffer cafeteria coffee.

BORIS

Muffin, muffin?

Boris opens a white pastry box to her.

CAIRO

Oh my God, these smell incredible. What flavor?

BORIS

Split fig.

Jonathan chokes on his coffee. Cairo stifles a grin.

CAIRO

You should get a logo and sell these to raise money for the team.

(Boris laughs)

Don't you laugh! You'd buy some, wouldn't you Mr. Miller?

JONATHAN

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

CAIRO

Winnie could design it for you, you know. She's great at that stuff.
(inspired beat)
Coach.
You could call yourself the Muffin Man.

JONATHAN

Nice.

CAIRO

Winnie and I could help you get it off the ground.

BORIS

What's in it for you?

CAIRO

Work experience on our college apps.

BORIS

Would you really buy my muffins?

JONATHAN

Why pay for what I already get for free?

CAIRO

I would. All the girls would.

He thinks a moment.

BORIS

I'm the Muffin Man.

CAIRO

Once more with pride!

BORIS

I'm the motherfucking Muffin Man!

She throws up a hand for a high-five and he returns it.

CAIRO

Go live your dreams, Coach.

BORIS

Good goddamn you're smart.

Cairo shrugs and smiles. Boris jumps up and down a little in the cold.

BORIS (CONT'D)

It's colder'n wearin' a brass bra on the shady side of an iceberg out here. Y'all coming in?

JONATHAN

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

BORIS

Soon't yourself, Brohan.

(to Cairo)

Thanks again. For the all the pick-me-ups you brought this morning.

Boris leaves.

JONATHAN

You're sweet.

CAIRO

When it suits.

Jonathan opens his pack of Camels to her. She opens her pack to him.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

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

INT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

Jonathan is exiting the teacher's lounge with a sludgy cup of coffee when his phone dings with a text from Beatrice:

B: Weekend getaway? xxx

His face registers happy surprise. He responds:

J: For real?

B: Amy's been fucking me long enough. Your turn. Hurry home.

Jon is interrupted by the sound of high heels approaching. He looks up to see JOYCE MANNER, VICE PRINCIPAL (sharp, 50s).

JOYCE

Texting in the halls is a punishable offense, Mr. Miller.

JONATHAN

Oh excuse me, *Vice Principal*
Manner.

JOYCE

I hope it was worth it.

He blushes.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

It was. I won't tell the Principal.

JONATHAN

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. I think this job
may have been a lateral move.

JONATHAN

Bummer. Well you look great.

JOYCE

Thanks, I bathe in the blood of
underachievers. 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 strong this year.

JOYCE

Your student reviews were
outstanding. Are you giving them
weed?

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 tools 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?

CAIRO

(smiling)

He didn't have to say anything.

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, Winnie.

WINNIE

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

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

WINNIE (CONT'D)

You ready?

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

Can I watch?

Cairo shuts her locker.

CAIRO

With pleasure.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Winnie is on her phone by the door, keeping a watchful eye on the scene. Cairo enters the room. Jonathan packs his bag and shuts down his computer. He's happy to see her, but hurried.

JONATHAN

Hey, kid. How are you?

She sets her things on her desk.

CAIRO

Hey.
You in a hurry?

JONATHAN

Headed on a little weekend vacation with my wife.

CAIRO

What do writers do on vacation?

JONATHAN

Pretend to write in a different location, I guess.

Winnie's in the door. It's a dance for them to be alone together.

CAIRO

Can we talk about the midterm?

JONATHAN

Of course. What's on your mind?

He has all of his things in order. He comes around and sets his stuff on Cairo's desk. They stand close.

CAIRO

I want your approval on my author before I start.

JONATHAN

Okay, who is it?

CAIRO

Henry Miller.

JONATHAN

Provocative.

CAIRO

I can justify him.

JONATHAN

His structure is challenging to emulate.

CAIRO

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.

He raises an eyebrow at her.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

You don't think I can do it.

JONATHAN

Miller is public enemy no. 1 to the censors - he's top of the list we discussed at the start of the semester. He's controversial.

CAIRO

Yeah, and I'm applying to Stanford. If it's not controversial, it's not interesting.

JONATHAN

Okay.

CAIRO

Okay yes?

JONATHAN

I trust you.

A moment of suspension passes between them - Cairo smiles and he returns it a moment before remembering himself. He gathers his stuff.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

I gotta go.

CAIRO

I know.

JONATHAN

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

CAIRO

I'll rest if you write.

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

JONATHAN

I'll see you Monday. Bye Winnie.

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

WINNIE

But like...omigod. Y'all are...on.

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,
huh? Seduction game ON POINT.

CAIRO

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

BORIS

Am I interrupting?

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

CAIRO

We were just leaving.

BORIS

Cairo - I think your idea is whiz-
bang. And I'd love your help too,
Winnie.

WINNIE

With what?

BORIS

Can you keep a secret?

WINNIE

Sure can't.

Beat.

BORIS

I bake muffins.

CAIRO

And he's going to have the baseball
team sell them to raise money and
they're going to call themselves
the Muffin Men and he wants you to
design the logo.

Winnie takes a moment.

WINNIE

I think that's really cool.

BORIS

(surprised)

You do?

WINNIE

It's fun to be good at something.
I'd love to help.

BORIS

(grinning)

Cool. Well. I guess I'll call you girls out on your lunch and we can go over the specs-

WINNIE

Here. Give me your phone and I'll put myself in. It'll be a lot faster if I can just text you ideas.

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

BORIS

Great. Thank you.

CAIRO

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 going to voicemail.

CAIRO

Shit.

Winnie hangs up and stuffs Boris's phone in her bra.

WINNIE

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

CAIRO

I just had it a minute ago.

WINNIE

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

She starts 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 and it shocks him.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Danger danger high voltage.

He smirks.

BORIS

See you later girls.

Winnie and Cairo leave, arm in arm. Once out of ear shot:

CAIRO

You're unbelievable.

WINNIE

I'm practically a professional.

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

Suitcases are packed and ready to go by the back door.
Jonathan reads ON WRITING by STEPHEN KING. Beatrice is on her phone.

BEATRICE

(On the phone)

Yeah, I fucking *know*.

(to Jon)

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.

The intro to **POPPIN MY COLLAR by THREE 6 MAFIA** emanates from his bag. He stares at it. It stops. It starts again. Jonathan sticks his hand inside and retrieves a cell phone.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
(answering)
Hello?

INTERCUT between CAIRO'S HOUSE and JONATHAN'S KITCHEN.

Cairo sits outside on a terrace overgrown with ivy and covered in leaves. A stack of books sit in front of her on a wrought iron table, where she has her feet propped. She talks on a house phone.

CAIRO
Hi. You have my phone.

JONATHAN
And whose phone do I have?

CAIRO
Cairo Sweet's.

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

CAIRO
Sticky Fingers Miller.

JONATHAN
How are you?

CAIRO
Tethered to a landline.
Are you already gone?

JONATHAN
I should be.

Beatrice enters to pour herself another drink.

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 need to drop something off at a student's house.

BEATRICE

Great. Take care of it.

Beatrice pours four fingers of bourbon neat.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

(to Amy)

It's not enough, Amy.

A dark, shining beetle crawls across Cairo's foot.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Can you grab me some tampons,
please? The organic ones if you can
find them.

(to Amy)

Not you, Amy, obviously. Get me a
better deal and you can plug my
pussy.

The beetle makes its way up Cairo's leg.

JONATHAN

You big-time, road-head owe me.

Cairo looks up. Silver maples above her are turning their
leaves up to the promising rain.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, honey. You still there?

CAIRO

Still here.

JONATHAN

You live over in Lovell Hills,
right?

CAIRO

How did you remember that?

JONATHAN

Eidetic, remember?

CAIRO

Show-off.

JONATHAN

And Mensa.

CAIRO

Shut up.

JONATHAN

My mom is really proud.

Jonathan watches Beatrice down her entire glass of bourbon in one go.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

What's your address? I'll come drop
it off before we leave, if that's
okay.

The wind picks up. Cairo's long hair moves around her like a curtain.

EXT. LOVELL HILLS - AFTERNOON

LOVER YOU SHOULD HAVE COME OVER by JEFF BUCKLEY

Thick dark clouds hang low over the horizon.

We pass massive estates on rolling acres. The houses are separated by thick groves of oak and magnolia.

CAIRO (V.O.)

400 Huxley. Might be hard to see
for the trees, but it's there.

JONATHAN (V.O.)

I'll see you soon.

CAIRO (V.O.)

Hurry. It's gonna rain.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Cairo walks toward us down a dark, vast hallway of windows.

EXT. LOVELL HILLS - AFTERNOON

Jonathan drives toward us, one arm out the window. The reflection of the storm on the windshield obscures our view of him.

EXT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - THE TERRACE - AFTERNOON

Thunder rolls. Rain drops smack against the books on the table. On top, is **APOSTROPHES AND AMPERSANDS**.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - LOWER GALLERY - AFTERNOON

We follow Cairo past enormous original Egon Schiele paintings. Her face is luminous. Not smiling exactly, but bright.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Her fingers trail up the bannister. Her bare feet pad on the steps. Up and up she goes, past hallways of countless rooms.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

We follow her into her bedroom, then into her bathroom.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM

Smooth walls into soaring ceilings. Clawfoot bathtub. Cathedral windows. She looks at herself in the mirror. Rain shadows streak down her face. She puts a little perfume behind her ears. Finger brushes through her hair.

EXT. CAIRO'S DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Jonathan's car moves through the overgrown trees.

As he comes upon it, we see Cairo's house in full.

INT. JONATHAN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Jonathan sits in the driveway, idling his car. He turns Cairo's phone over in his hand.

He looks up at her house. The view is blurred by rain.

Her ghost stands at a second story window. Then it moves away.

He opens the car door.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - PORCH - AFTERNOON

Cairo opens the front door. The house is dark and vast behind her.

Jonathan stands in the rain.

A long moment passes between them - the curtain of rain the only thing separating them.

CAIRO

Come here.

Jonathan makes a decision.

JONATHAN

No. You come here.

Without hesitation, Cairo steps off the porch into the rain.

BLACK.

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

Beatrice types at lightning speed on her laptop. She is surrounded by paper. A bourbon rocks sweats in a glass next to her.

Jonathan is across from her, also 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 keys.

FLASH TO:

EXT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - EARLIER THAT AFTERNOON

Slow motion rain waterfalls off the second story porch. Behind the water - a white form, a ghost.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jonathan looks up. Beatrice is staring daggers into him.

JONATHAN

What?

BEATRICE

What are you doing?

JONATHAN

I'm working.

BEATRICE

On what?

JONATHAN

I don't know yet.

Beatrice pinches her nose between her fingers.

BEATRICE

Baby...I know we were supposed to have this weekend together and I'm sorry that my team is the fucking tasteless worst and I promise to fire them the moment this gets to press, but I can't work like this.

JONATHAN

Like what?

BEATRICE

I can't work with you sitting there across from me sucking all the inspiration out of the room. I can feel you trying to conjure it from the air and it's fucking my flow.

He blinks at her.

JONATHAN

Are you serious?

BEATRICE

(dead serious)

Please go away.

He shuts his computer and gets up.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

I'll be nicer when it's over.

JONATHAN

I'll be outside.

BEATRICE

You gonna cut down that kudzu before it eats our home?

JONATHAN

I think it's pretty.

She looks at him a moment before returning to her laptop. He leaves.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Jonathan walks across the yard. A curtain of kudzu has grown across the door to his shed. He maneuvers under it to get inside. He doesn't close the door behind him.

INT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - NIGHT

Jonathan sits at his desk, pulls down a bottle of bourbon and pours himself a tall glass. Wet night sounds whisper through the open door.

He looks at the blank document on his laptop.

He closes his eyes.

FLASH TO:

EXT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - EARLIER

The rain slows and the ghost is revealed. Cairo looks different in his memory - still and shining, a penny wish in a fountain.

INT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - NIGHT

He opens his eyes.

Leaves crowd the window, hundreds of little peeping toms. A single vine has broken through the rotted wood of the sill. He reaches out a hand to touch it - thinks better of it, and pulls his hand away. He leans back in his chair.

FLASH TO:

EXT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - EARLIER

Jonathan looks at Cairo.
She looks amused. She looks at his mouth.

CAIRO

Come here.

The sound of rain turns to white noise.

JONATHAN

No.
You come here.

We see them in profile. A suspended moment of her in the dry space and him in the wet.

Then she crosses that barrier.

She moves into the rain. Her hands reach for his face.
Her lips press to his mouth.

He gives, just a little. Just enough.
She slides her tongue inside him.

He closes his eyes. She doesn't.

INT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - NIGHT

DING.

A chime pulls Jonathan from the memory.

NEW MAIL.

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

He smiles.

The subject title: **FOR JONATHAN, LOVE CAIRO**

He opens it.

EXT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - NIGHT

Gold light within illuminates the little room, turning it bottle glass green against the vines. A jewel box in the overgrown yard.

It begins to rain.

BLACK.

EXT. THE WOODS - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY - MORNING

ADAGIO FOR STRINGS AND ORGAN IN G MINOR - RESPIGHI (SUITE III/ BOCCHERINI: QUINTETTINO)

Cairo looks like Jonathan's dream version of her, only all in black. Her hair is done. She wears makeup.

She walks alone through the misty woods. A pink dawn glows above her.

We follow her through the trees to the back of the school...

EXT. BENSON AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Cairo breaks through the tree line. We follow her to the school, into...

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

...Jonathan's room. It's empty and dark. The clock ticks.

She goes around the room turning on the lamps and then over to the window to watch the sun rise through the trees.

Eventually, Jonathan enters and freezes. They stare at one another in the reflection of the window a moment before she turns to him, smiling.

CAIRO

Good morning.

He walks to his desk and sits without saying hello. He pulls a stack of papers from his bag. She watches him but says nothing. He's got his hand on her short story.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

He starts to say something. Stops. Reconsiders.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

He looks like he's bracing for impact.

JONATHAN

Your story.

CAIRO

Oh.
You didn't like it?

JONATHAN

You need to choose another author.

CAIRO

Why?

JONATHAN

This is inappropriate.

She repeats the word back to him as though she's never heard it.

CAIRO

Inappropriate.
What do you mean?

JONATHAN

Why did you write this?

CAIRO
You asked me to.

JONATHAN
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
No Cairo, this is you.
I can't...understand it.

She stares at him a moment.

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

JONATHAN
You deliberately misinterpreted the
assignment.

CAIRO
I was clear about how I intended to
write it.

JONATHAN
This is pornography.

CAIRO
Yes.

JONATHAN
So then put it in your diary and
not on my fucking desk.
(beat)

(MORE)

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Write a new story with a new author. I won't indulge this.

CAIRO

The story or us?

JONATHAN

Both.

His mouth is sticky.

CAIRO

But you already have. You inspired it.

JONATHAN

I can't accept it.

CAIRO

Can't or won't? Because it sounds like you're scared. And it looks like you're measuring. Stop talking to me like a stranger and say what you mean.

JONATHAN

What did you expect me to do with this?

CAIRO

Read it. Grade it.

JONATHAN

You can't be serious.

CAIRO

I assure you I am.

JONATHAN

Rewrite it.

CAIRO

Why?

JONATHAN

You know why.

CAIRO

Tell me. Say it.

JONATHAN

If you don't rewrite this, I'll have to fail you for the midterm.

CAIRO

Tell me why.

JONATHAN

I don't have to tell you anything.

CAIRO

You're afraid, aren't you? It made you feel something that scared you.

JONATHAN

Don't put words in my mouth.

CAIRO

Then say them yourself. Tell me what it made you feel.

JONATHAN

Incredibly foolish for having trusted this material to a child.

CAIRO

A child. And what was I before you read it?

JONATHAN

My student.

CAIRO

You're lying.

JONATHAN

We're done here.

CAIRO

Did it get too real for you? You built the world, you built the fantasy but it wasn't on the page it was in *real life* and now that it has flesh you can't bear the weight of it.

JONATHAN

This conversation is over.

CAIRO

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

Beat. They stare at each other.

JONATHAN

Let me be very, very clear with you; You are my student and I am your teacher and that is all. Any misconceptions of that are, regrettably, something you shoulder alone.

Cairo's face shifts backwards on her skull.

CAIRO

Write what you know, is what you said.

JONATHAN

I know what I said.

CAIRO

You don't know anything you say.
(beat. Then, slowly)
This is good. You know it is. So let's examine the real issue, which is not my writing, but yours.

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.*" Do you know what that means? It means you weren't brave enough to be better. It means you're deliberately impotent. *It means you are mediocre.* You wanna fail me? I fucking dare you. But you better make it mean something to you and you better *know what it means* because the cost is high, Mr. Miller. And if you're not very, very careful...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.

She moves toward him. A viper. His pupils dilate.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

How disappointing you must be to
those who believed you'd be more.

(venomous)

No wonder you're a public school
teacher.

She leaves. He watches her go.

He is still. So still as to be inanimate.

Then he stands and turns to the chalkboard. He raises the
chalk, makes a short stroke - then presses his forehead to
the board. Anguish shatters his face.

His arm drops and the chalk streaks against it like the trail
of a falling star.

EXT. BENSON HIGH SCHOOL - OUTSIDE - MORNING

Sleepy students are starting to arrive. Cairo walks through
an outside corridor, into the parking lot and out into the
field behind the school, where she disappears back into the
choked trees.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jonathan enters, exhausted.

Beatrice is cross-legged on the couch, all of her electronics
lit up in a corona around her. She wears pair high waisted
knickers and a tee shirt. A sweating glass of bourbon rests
between her legs. She looks up at him and smiles, buzzed.

He sets his bag down and slumps in a chair next to the couch.
A large window is behind him.

BEATRICE

How you doing over there,
Professor?

JONATHAN

I've had a very bad day.

BEATRICE

You want a drink?

She hands him her bourbon. He drinks it in one go.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

They make you plough a field or
something?

JONATHAN

I had a very unpleasant conversation with a student about the midterm assignment.

BEATRICE

Juicy. More info.

JONATHAN

Don't make fun of me.

BEATRICE

I'm not.

(off his look)

I've been a cave troll for weeks - I long for experiences of the outside world. Tell me.

(beat)

Oh. Was it with her?

(teasing)

Your acolyte?

He looks at her. She can see he's torn up about it.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

What happened?

JONATHAN

She drafted something that makes Henry Miller look like Dr. Seuss.

BEATRICE

You let a teenager run with Miller and you're surprised it was vulgar?

JONATHAN

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

BEATRICE

Go on.

She unfolds her legs and moves closer to him. Her cheeks are liquor flushed. She engages fully.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

What's the subject matter?

He's reluctant. She's expectant.

JONATHAN

An English teacher and a student
who have an illicit affair,
complete with pre-cum and cherry
popping. Those words exactly.

BEATRICE

Show me right now.

Jonathan considers her - skeptical of her interest and
starving for her attention. She crawls over the couch and
onto his lap, surprising him.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I wanna know what shocked you.

He reaches into his bag and retrieves the story. Hands it to
her. She reads it right there in his lap, in his face.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

For Jonathan, Love Cairo.
Oh baby, it's a love letter.

JONATHAN

It's pornography.

BEATRICE

Shh. No disclaimers.

She settles herself into his lap.

Jonathan looks over his wife as she reads. Her breasts
beneath her shirt. The way her eyes shimmer over the words.
His hands rest on her thighs. She moves forward on him, in
approval.

She smiles. Then she laughs. She's enthralled. The quoted
text appears on the screen as she recites.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

*"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
Tuesdays."*

Beatrice looks at him like this is the cleverest punchline
she's ever heard.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Her Tuesdays. Like her Tuesday
panties.

JONATHAN
Yes.

She whistles.

BEATRICE
She's got it bad.

She sets down the pages, looks into his eyes.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Tell me what else happens.

JONATHAN
You can read it right there.

BEATRICE
No. You tell me.
Because I know you remember it word
for word and I want you to do the
thing. Tell me how she describes
you.

She moves against him again. Encouraging him. His hands slide
over her skin. She looks down at him through heavy lids as he
speaks.

JONATHAN
(reciting from memory)
*"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
indecentcy he felt when he lay his
eyes on the young unripened bodies
of his female students.*

Beatrice slowly presses herself into him until he is
practically saying the words into her mouth.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
*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.*
(MORE)

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

*None were exempt from his salacious
reveries. All cunts were created
equal and magnificent in his mind."*

BEATRICE

Are they?

She grinds against him.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Or are some cunts *remarkable*?

He resists her. Torturing himself.

JONATHAN

(half-hearted)

Stop.

She doesn't. She intensifies. He's losing focus.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

You're drunk.

BEATRICE

I'm indecent.

He pulls her tight against him. They grind into one another. They breathe together. He slips his hand inside her panties and she sucks in a breath of air.

Through the window behind Jonathan, a pair of headlights illuminate the yard.

She gasps again and cums against his fingers - she arches back and issues a hearty laughs.

She kisses him. Reaches a hand to his cock and gives it a squeeze. Then she leans into his ear.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

We've got company.

He looks at her with anguish. The front door bangs open.

BORIS (O.C.)

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

Beatrice dismounts her husband and grins at him before walking into the foyer, just as she is. Shameless.

BEATRICE (O.C.)

(warm, to Boris)

What up, player?

Jonathan teeters on the edge of too many feelings.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - THAT EVENING

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

WINNIE

What, so he was offended?

CAIRO

He was affected.

WINNIE

You still into him?

CAIRO

NO. Are you kidding? He's a pretender. At least with Boris what you see is what you get. Jonathan Miller is like fucking imitation crab meat in gas station sushi.

WINNIE

Savage.

CAIRO

You fuck Fillmore yet?

WINNIE

You know I'd tell you.

CAIRO

If I knew I wouldn't be asking.

WINNIE

You know when I'm in my luteal phase. I tell you everything.

CAIRO

Distract me.

WINNIE

(down)

What would the lady have?

CAIRO

Bloodsport.
Text Boris. Say you're drunk
texting him - that way he'll
imagine you drunk and what you
might be doing drunkenly.

WINNIE

For real?

She is. Winnie starts to draft a text to **B_FILL**.

CAIRO

Ask him what he's up to.

Winnie types the text and sends it.

WINNIE

What do you think he's doing?

CAIRO

Masturbating.

DING. **B_FILL: I was just thinking about you.**

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Ask him what he's thinking about you.

She does.

WINNIE

Do you think he likes me?

CAIRO

Do you want to be liked or fucked because those things are different for girls who look like you.

WINNIE

I want both.

CAIRO

You're better than him.

WINNIE

I like him.

CAIRO

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

DING. **B_FILL: What are you doing?**

CAIRO (CONT'D)

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

She types. **DING. B FILL: And what might that be?**

CAIRO (CONT'D)
Tell him we're 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.

DING. B FILL: What does that entail?

They share a look.

CAIRO
Take off your shirt.

Cairo hops off the bed and walks to her wardrobe.

WINNIE
What are we gonna do?

CAIRO
We're gonna make out.
For them. Not for you.

WINNIE
It can be a little for me.

Cairo undresses in front of Winnie. She puts on a lace bra
and takes her hair down.

CAIRO
How's this?

WINNIE
Yeah.
Good.

Cairo gets back on the bed and faces Winnie.

CAIRO
Well?

Winnie pulls off her shirt. Cairo scans her - making her feel
self-conscious and aroused all together.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Give me your phone.
Sit on your knees and face me.
Closer.

Winnie bends at the waist.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

What are you, a dutch clock?
Come get right up on me.

Winnie does, leaning in to the moment. Their bellies touch.
Cairo sets the phone to face them, framing them in the shot.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Ready?

They kiss. Soft at first, then more urgent. Cairo snaps the picture and a flash bleaches them in white light.

The kiss doesn't end with the flash. Winnie's hands are on Cairo's back, in her hair. Cairo bites Winnie's lip. Hard enough to force her to pull away.

They stare at one another a moment. Cairo hands Winnie the phone.

CAIRO (CONT'D)

Send it.

WINNIE

What do I say?

CAIRO

Nothing. Just send it.

She does.

FLASH TO:

Earlier that day: Cairo walks through students like a ghost, making her way to her locker.

WINNIE

Are you gonna text Jonathan?

CAIRO

No.

WINNIE

You have his number don't you?

FLASH TO:

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

CAIRO (V.O.)

All warfare is based on deception.
Move your enemy but don't be moved
by him.

FLASH TO:

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

Winnie stares at Cairo.

CAIRO

Any tool is a weapon if you hold it
right.

WINNIE

How do you just come up with this
shit?

CAIRO

Do you listen to anything I give
you?

WINNIE

Only the compliments.

CAIRO

It's Ani DiFranco. Do yourself a
favor and have a listen through the
canon.
And 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 gonna draw this on you.

WINNIE

What?

CAIRO

The logo. On your tits.

Winnie grins at her.

WINNIE

Do it, you nasty bitch.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT

Beatrice and Boris sit in the kitchen. Cartons of fried food and several beer bottles are spread over the table. Beatrice and Boris are drunk-ish. They laugh.

BEATRICE

...and anyway, I'm almost finished.
Gonna fire the lot of them once it
gets to publishing.

BORIS

Did you come up with a title?

BEATRICE

Yeah, but they hate it. Said it
sounded like a sad love song. I
told them it is.

BORIS

What's it called?

BEATRICE

*Lesser Expectations of a Greater
Love.*

The phone rings. Beatrice gets up to answer it. Boris texts 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 stares at himself in the mirror. He looks sick.

FLASH TO:

Jon's POV. Cairo sits on the desk across from him, laughing at something he's said.

Beatrice pops her head in.

BEATRICE

Jon?

He watches her mouth move.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

(covering the receiver,
drunk)

It's ah, Joyce? Want me to tell her
you'll call her back from prison?

She guffaws. He focuses on her tongue behind her teeth.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Too soon?

He snaps to.

JONATHAN

I'll take it.

He takes the phone and Beatrice leaves. He takes a breath.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Hey Joyce, what's up?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

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

BEATRICE

Who is she?

BORIS

Not telling.

BEATRICE

Becky? Tara? Tiffany.
A stripper, naturally.

BORIS

Why are you so mean?

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

That'll do, Pig.

BORIS

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

BEATRICE

Don't go.

BORIS

I've got forty-five pop-quizzes on
thermodynamics to grade. Or fail.
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 leans down to kiss her and she turns her head so he kisses
her mouth. It's a millisecond too long.

BEATRICE

Gotcha.

Beat.

BORIS

I gotta go.

BEATRICE

So go.

He looks at her a moment longer and then leaves. Jonathan
enters, visibly shaken. Beatrice swivels her head at him.

JONATHAN

Joyce got the story.

BEATRICE

What?

JONATHAN

Well, it had "*For Jonathan from Cairo*" written at the top, so you know, no mistaking. She'd 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.

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

That's not all you could lose.
Did something happen between you?

JONATHAN

Nothing I invited.

She stands. Sways a little.

BEATRICE

Teenage girls are dangerous,
Jonathan. I hope you know what
you're doing.

She walks past him into the kitchen. He stares at nothing.

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's hungover. Boris enters the track and jogs over to him with a spring in his step.

BORIS

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?

BORIS

On perfectly pert perky tatas,
painted to look like muffins.
It's genius.

JONATHAN

Where do you find these girls?

Boris swipes to another picture, this one of Cairo and Winnie kissing.

BORIS

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

Jonathan launches the phone back at Boris.

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

You don't think this is deliberate?
They're fucking with you man, can't
you see that?

BORIS

Calm down. 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 damage?

JONATHAN

Cairo turned in her midterm and...I
mean, I've read some prurient stuff
before but she wrote some
shameless, Marquis De Sade shit for
me, man. Like a love letter. Like,
she *told* me she did.

(MORE)

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

And in a classic character foible reserved for schmucks like me, I mishandled her *feelings* and she admitted the goddamn thing to administration and I know how this will 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

You can't be serious.

BORIS

Look, I know you've been marooned on the Island of Sexless Toys and then along comes this attractive, intelligent girl who thinks you invented the Oxford comma, who worships you...you give her your time, your attention, your *effort* - I mean, you *like* her. I wouldn't blame you if you had a little thing.

JONATHAN

You think I could have a little *thing*? She's only seventeen.

BORIS
(shrugging)
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 ideal - that I
fantasize about being with her?

BORIS
Do you?

JONATHAN
What difference does it make?

BORIS
It's not exactly a mystery how you
both have been feeling.

FLASH TO:

Cairo and Jonathan talk with Boris in the morning.

JONATHAN
Come on.

BORIS
She's special to you. You don't
have to be ashamed of it.

FLASH TO:

Cairo and Jonathan on the porch at Mollie Fonatine's.

JONATHAN

It was never my intention to blur the line.

BORIS

Yeah but did you have any intention to clarify it?

JONATHAN

But clarify *what*, exactly? We got on. We enjoy each other's company. I'm her teacher, she's my student. How could it be any clearer?

BORIS

Oh, I don't know...maybe without the special treatment, the socializing, the preemptive assignments, the *clear* favoritism...
I just think you have to examine your own actions before you accuse a kid of going after you.

FLASH TO:

Cairo smiles. What once was sweet is now sinister.

JONATHAN

The story is fetishistic. It's filth. 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.

FLASH TO:

Cairo brings a cigarette to her lips.

BORIS (CONT'D)

That's why you're so riled and why you can't stop obsessing over it.

JONATHAN

Quit telling me what the fuck you think I think.

BORIS

You want me to lie to you?
You know 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 while people like
you are looking at naked pictures
of your students.

BORIS

Oh, I'm shaking in my boots. You
know what your problem is? You're
just not fucking cool enough to be
honest with yourself about *anything*
that doesn't fit your narrative.
So what? You wanted to fuck her.
Maybe you even loved her. You
didn't need to humiliate her to
capture the moral high ground.
It's not a war.

FLASH TO:

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

JONATHAN

No, it's a witch hunt.

BORIS

You're the adult.
Take some responsibility.

JONATHAN

Fuck you.

BORIS

Cool, Jon.

Boris leaves Jonathan sitting on the bleachers.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - LIBRARY - MORNING - SAME DAY

Morning light cuts into a vast and dark library through
partially drawn velvet curtains on floor to ceiling windows.

Shapes are hard to make out in the dimness of the room.
Everything is still.

Then, we see her. And only because she moves to light a cigarette. Cairo sits in the shadow of the window, looking out. Smoke billows above her.

INT. JONATHAN MILLER'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

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

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.

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...you had.

JONATHAN
I haven't.

WINNIE
You don't text or anything?

He looks at her.

JONATHAN
Did she tell you we do?

Beat.

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

He's at a loss. So is she.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
I don't understand what's
happening.

His eyes flash with gentle accusation.

JONATHAN
Don't you, Winnie?

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

INT. JOYCE MANNER'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

JOYCE MANNER, 40s, Assistant Principal at Benson High School, sits behind her desk. Her educational diplomas from Northwestern and a framed photo of her, her wife, and two teenage daughters hangs on the wall.

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

JOYCE
How did it start, in your own words?

CAIRO
It was sort of like we recognized each other.

JONATHAN
She's exceptionally talented. Singular in that, at this school.

JOYCE
Did you exhibit favoritism? Give special mentor-ship?

JONATHAN
Of course.

CAIRO
He was excited to give me the midterm assignment in advance.

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

JONATHAN
Twenty-five percent.

CAIRO
Enough to destroy my GPA and ruin my shot at Stanford.

JOYCE

You do know that Henry Miller is not an approved author for public school studies, right?

JONATHAN

She's better than the curriculum, Joyce. You know that. I wanted to help her stand out.

CAIRO

I think he was impressed that I knew who he was. Have you read his work?

JOYCE

How often did you see one another beyond classroom time?

CAIRO

Before school, and in class, of course. Sometimes after.

JOYCE

What would you do?

CAIRO

Talk about literature, things we care about. Sometimes we'd share a cigarette.

JONATHAN

We just happened to be in the same place, smoking a cigarette. That's how it started, I guess. Not that there's anything - I mean that's how we started smoking together.

JOYCE

Do you see each other socially?

CAIRO

We went to a poetry reading together.

JONATHAN

Absolutely not.

JOYCE

Would you have considered yourselves friends?

CAIRO

Without question.

JONATHAN

I think we are as close as would be appropriate for a student and a teacher.

JOYCE

Have you ever seen each other alone outside of school?

CAIRO

Only the one time.

JONATHAN

Yes.

Sort of.

I mistakenly picked up her phone on my way out of class and I went to return it right away before my wife and I left for a business trip in Nashville.

CAIRO

He came to my house.

JOYCE

Were you alone?

JONATHAN

Yes.

CAIRO

My parents were out of town.

JOYCE

And what happened?

JONATHAN

Did she tell you something happened?

CAIRO

Nothing that didn't seem okay at the time...

JONATHAN

I returned her phone.

JOYCE

Did you go in the house?

CAIRO

He told me to come outside to him.

JONATHAN

I was brief.

CAIRO

Mr. Miller always took the time to validate me.

JOYCE

And what happened when you went outside?

CAIRO

We kissed.

JONATHAN

I didn't touch her. And when she sent me the story, I told her it wasn't appropriate for school.

(beat)

Listen, I think this is a teenage crush that took a hard leap sideways...I feel like there's nothing I can say to defend my position.

JOYCE

Because there isn't.

Cairo leaves Joyce's office. She's not smiling. Not exactly.

INT. LOCAL RESTAURANT - EVENING

Jonathan walks into Winnie's restaurant. Boris is already seated at the bar. Jonathan sits down next to him.

JONATHAN

Hey.

BORIS

You want a drink?

JONATHAN

Yes.

BORIS

I thought you might.

Boris passes him a draught of beer. Jonathan takes a long pull of it.

JONATHAN

I've been suspended.

Boris holds up four fingers to the bartender.

BORIS
On what grounds?

JONATHAN
Hers.

The bartender sets down two doubles. Boris looks at Jonathan.

BORIS
Did you love her?

Jonathan's face crumples. Boris squeezes his hand and lets Jonathan feel everything he's feeling.

BORIS (CONT'D)
To the grave, man.

Jonathan does his best to collect himself.

BORIS (CONT'D)
What can I do?

JONATHAN
Don't leave me.

BORIS
You're my best friend, Jon. I won't leave you.

JONATHAN
Everything is falling.
(beat)
It didn't have to be this way.

BORIS
Maybe it did.

Jonathan looks at him with bleary eyes. He's tired. Lost.

BORIS (CONT'D)
You fall in love with things that diminish you because...I dunno, maybe you don't think you deserve more. But you're not a ladder, man. And you've made yourself into one. So...maybe make yourself into something else.

JONATHAN
Like what?

BORIS

Something that can't be climbed or
crushed.

Jonathan tips the glass to his mouth and swallows the liquor
in one go.

JONATHAN

My wife is gonna put me in the
ground.

BORIS

Beatrice is a reptile. Take the
lashing and let it go.

JONATHAN

This will hurt.

BORIS

Like the goddamn devil.

Jonathan moves to pull out his wallet.

BORIS (CONT'D)

It's on me.

Jonathan stands. Boris gets up and hugs him, tight.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Go with God, Jon.
I'll still be here.

Jonathan leaves. Boris sits back down at the bar. Winnie
comes over.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Hey, sweetheart. Where you been?

WINNIE

I didn't want to bother you.

BORIS

You okay?

WINNIE

I'm...I dunno.
How's Mr. Miller?

BORIS

Fucked six ways to Sunday. How's
Cairo?

WINNIE
(heartbroken)
She dumped me.

Not giving a damn who sees, he puts his hand on her face.

BORIS
Natural disasters are bound to
occur, baby. You're gonna be
alright.

She looks at him. True tenderness exists between them. He
drops his hand.

WINNIE
I gotta get back.

BORIS
I'll see you.

She leaves. He takes a slow drink.

INT. JONATHAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jonathan leans against the sink. Beatrice stands in the
doorway. She's drunk. He's drowning.

BEATRICE
Did you fuck her?

JONATHAN
No.

BEATRICE
What happened?

JONATHAN
I don't know.

BEATRICE
You were there, weren't you?

Beat.

JONATHAN
She impressed me and I gave her
preference. She turned in this
story, which I obviously couldn't
accept - her feelings were hurt and
she lashed out. That's how I
understand it.

BEATRICE

You flirted with her and then you rejected her.

JONATHAN

It wasn't flirting.

BEATRICE

What was it, then?

JONATHAN

Affection.

BEATRICE

Are you attracted to her?

He can't answer her.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I'll tell you, then. This is about a girl who flattered you, who read your little book and your inevitable surrender to adulation. You fucking *fell for it*. Finally, *finally* someone gave your reductive little short stories a second glance 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?

She sways into the room and walks right up to him, pressing her hips into his. She puts a hand on his face as though she might kiss him.

BEATRICE

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

JONATHAN

Fuck you.

BEATRICE

Be my guest.

She tilts her head up to him - their mouths almost touch. Then she smiles. It's awful. He jerks away from her.

JONATHAN

Stop.

BEATRICE
Why should I? Did you?

JONATHAN
I didn't fuck her.

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

JONATHAN
I didn't do anything wrong.

BEATRICE
Didn't you?

He looks around at his kitchen. At his beautiful, cold wife.

JONATHAN
I'm in a futility myth.

BEATRICE
How romantic.

JONATHAN
Why are you so punishing?

A ragged, raging annoyance washes over her face.

BEATRICE
You wanted her. I can read it all
over you.

JONATHAN
How can you read anything in this
state, you fucking alcoholic. Jesus
Christ.

BEATRICE
It's the only thing that makes you
bearable.

She cuts him deep. He sucks in a sword of air through his
teeth.

JONATHAN
You're a monster.

BEATRICE
And you're a liar.
You're the banner boy of
mediocrity, waving your flag of
spotless virtue like some kind of
middling American Hero.

(MORE)

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

But Jon...you're the *villain*.
And you can't even see it, can you?
God, you are insufferably
pedestrian. You abused your power.
You manufactured all of this with
your refusal to accept your fucking
privilege.

They stare each other down. Truly looking into one another's
eyes for the first time in longer than either can remember.

JONATHAN

I love you.

BEATRICE

What?

JONATHAN

I don't understand how you can say
such things to me when I love you.

BEATRICE

You think that exempts you from the
truth?

JONATHAN

From cruelty.

She laughs.

BEATRICE

Honesty isn't cruelty, you fragile
fuck.

She walks right past him and pours a drink. To the brim. She
takes a long, slow gulp. He watches her.

JONATHAN

(anguished)

Don't you worry for me at all?

BEATRICE

What would I possibly worry about
other than dying of boredom having
to listen to your inventions of
conflict?

Beat.

JONATHAN

You are vile.

BEATRICE

But you've always known that,
haven't you?

(beat)

Why don't you write about it?

She saunters out of the bloodbath, leaving him alone and entirely defeated.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Jonathan walks out of the house and faces the shed. The kudzu almost reaches the ground and covers most of the windows.

Jonathan stares at it a moment, then, with his bare hands, begins to rip the vines away. They are tough and tear his skin. He cries and sweats and bleeds until it is all down.

Then he goes inside and shuts the door.

INT. CAIRO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Cairo is sitting on her bed, leaning against the headboard, hand writing on a legal pad in red ink. She smokes and ashes into a coke can.

Winnie enters without knocking. Cairo pays her no attention.

Winnie stands there - mirroring them in a happier time. She's upset, nervous.

CAIRO

(not looking up)

Spit it out, Winnie.

WINNIE

What are you doing?

CAIRO

Completing my Stanford admissions
essay.

WINNIE

Is that all?

CAIRO

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

WINNIE

Why are you avoiding me?

CAIRO

Because I don't want to talk to
you.

This hurts. Winnie is in uncharted waters.

WINNIE

Cairo.

CAIRO

(savage)
What?

WINNIE

...What are you doing to Mr.
Miller?

Cairo sets her notebook down and gives Winnie her full,
withering attention.

CAIRO

I'm testifying against him.

WINNIE

Why?

CAIRO

He underestimated me.
I overestimated him.

Winnie softens. Unsure what to believe.

WINNIE

Are you okay?

CAIRO

Of course. I'm *inspired*.

WINNIE

That's not funny.

CAIRO

It is, a little.

WINNIE

Please don't do this.

CAIRO

Why?

WINNIE

People go to hell for things like
this.

CAIRO

No, Winnie. They go to Stanford.

They stare at one another. It takes Winnie a second, but she connects the dots.

WINNIE

(reeling)

You created this.

CAIRO

No. I capitalized on it.

WINNIE

For *what*?

To punish him because he didn't want to fuck you?

CAIRO

He wanted to fuck me, Winnie.

Cairo lights another cigarette.

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

(weakly)

I was *joking* -

CAIRO

You weren't joking. You just didn't expect me to be better than you.

WINNIE

Why are you doing this?

CAIRO

Because he didn't stop me.
Because this is chess.

WINNIE

It's not 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 headboard. We pull back to reveal the wall behind her - Jonathan, sitting at his desk in his shed.

They lean against each other in different spaces and times.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NASHVILLE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Close in on Jonathan reading Cairo's short story. We look up at him from the computer 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.

Bold text appears on the screen, with a blinking cursor.

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.

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

Jonathan blinks.

INT. CAIRO'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - SHORT STORY/FANTASY

When his eyes open, he stands before her in her bedroom. The
text floats over what we see, a reenactment of the story.

She puts a cigarette to her lips.

CAIRO
You want one?

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

CAIRO (V.O.)
**Smoke drifted from her mouth with
practiced, cinematic effort.**

JONATHAN

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

CAIRO

Is it more romantic for you that way?

He smiles.

CAIRO (V.O.)

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 as the dialogue spells itself out of his mouth.

JONATHAN

In what peril you find yourself.

His face is 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 (V.O.)

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.

A slender finger points to the page. Another moves up her leg.

JONATHAN

Begin here.

CAIRO

(reading)

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.*

We watch what they describe.

JONATHAN

Keep reading.

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.

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 picks 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 cum.***

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

INT. JONATHAN'S OFFICE/SHED - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jonathan cums.

He sits there a moment, the computer bright before him. He closes his eyes.

THE LIGHTS IN THE SHED 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 and Joyce 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.

Checkmate.

Slow rise upward. Above the characters. Above the courthouse. Above the trees.

Kudzu chokes everything.

CAN'T NOBODY LOVE YOU by SOLOMON BURKE

END.