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Running with Scissors

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My name is Augusten Burroughs.

Where do I begin to tell the story

of how my mother left me,

and then I left my mother?

Maybe I should begin with the part about

how she'd keep me home from school.

That's how close we were.

I was so crazy about her.

Oh, hello, Miss Mimm,

this is Deirdre Burroughs calling.

Augusten won't be attending school today.

I over-conditioned my hair.

- He over-conditioned his hair.

- And the party.

And he has to help me with the dinner party.

Thank you.

My mother was crazy about me too.

I've always known that.

I guess it doesn't matter where I begin,

because nobody's gonna

believe me anyway.

Augusten.

Wake up. Wake up.

Augusten. Wake up.

I need you.

Okay. Testing. Testing. Can you hear me?

"Childhood is gone. What remains?

"Childhood is gone. And youth.

"And ties with people I have loved

are broken now.

"My grief is more than I can easily contain.

"My grief builds this town anew

"and raises all the dead to walk with me

this day.

"What's left?

"My future seems nefarious,

"drained of mystery

"known in my bones.

"Most of all, what I will miss

"is the extravagance of my entire future

"stretched out before me

like a highway in the desert.

"Waves of heat rising up, wrinkling the air.

"I weep for what is gone.

"And I weep for myself."

Okay, now I need your honest reaction.

Did it feel powerful to you?

Emotionally charged?

It really does seem like something

you'd read in The New Yorker.

You really think so?

The New Yorker's very selective.

They don't publish just anyone.

I really think they would publish this.

That thing with your paralyzed sister,

that was great.

Well, we'll see.

I just got a rejection letter from

The Virginia Quarterly.

That worries me.

Of course, if The New Yorker did accept
this poem, your grandmother would see it.

I can't imagine what she would say.

But I can't let her reaction

keep me from publishing.

Augusten,

your mother was meant to be

a very famous woman.

I have a reading. I have books to sign.

I told you to be here at 4:00. It's 4:30.

- I got stuck in traffic.

- Bullshit. You're trying to sabotage me.

Wanna play checkers, Dad?

Not right now, son. My back is out,

I've got papers to grade and I'm very tired.

So why don't you go outside and play

with the dog for a little while?

But I'm sick of Cream.

All she wants to do is sleep.

She's an old lady.

Testing. One, two, three.

Thank you for coming to my poetry

reading tonight.

"Childhood is gone. What remains?

"Childhood is gone. And youth."

"And ties with people I have loved

are broken now.

"My grief is more than I can easily contain.

"What's left?

"My future seems nefarious

"drained of mystery

"known in my bones."

Thank you.

I don't understand.

I polish my allowance.

I boil it clean,

then polish it with silver polish.

But why, Augusten? Why?

Because I like shiny things.

I really don't see myself in you at all.

I'm more like my mom.

I wanna be special and I wanna be famous.

Are you going to a funeral?

No. No, sweetie. It's a gown

for public appearances. You wanna cut?

See, the plan is, I'm announced,

at some place grand and serious

like Carnegie Hall.

And I come out in this.

And I stand in front of a black velvet curtain.

I'm gonna demand that in my contract.

And that way, everything fades away,

except my writing.

The mail came.

"And when the sun comes out

"the daffodil looks skyward.

"Wet from the rain

"but not broken.

"Triumphant trumpet."

Did you like it, Deirdre?

I've been working on it

since the last meeting of the poetry club.

You said, "Write what you know."

I love to garden so I thought

I would write about dirt and the sun.

It's shit, Fern.

It's sentimental. It's emotionally dishonest.

It implodes into nothingness. I was bored.

Were you bored, Christy?

It sort of didn't go anywhere.

You didn't tap into your creative
unconscious, Fern.

Honey.

I'm sorry, Deirdre.

I so wanted to have a creative outlet
and I thought maybe this was it.

But you're right. It's terrible.

If Anne Sexton writes about flowers, Fern,
the poem isn't about the goddamn flowers.

The flowers would wilt and rot.

She'd use metaphor to explore her
dead marriage, her pain. You understand?

Sexton's therapist told her to write poetry
as a way to exorcize her rage.

Now, she's not a housewife.

She's a rock 'n' roller. Okay?

Last week in Boston, 2000 people waited
in a fucking blizzard to hear her read.

That's power recovered.

So that's what you need to do, Fern.

You need to recover

by expressing your anger.

I am angry.

- Steve takes me for granted.

- There it is again. Men.

I'm so sorry.

No, don't you dare apologize, Fern.

You funnel that rage into the only escape
you have. Your art.

Who wants to read next?

Christy, you're hiding.

I'm just not quite there.

Get the rage on the page, women.

- You infantile tyrant!

- Jesus.

You'd like nothing more than to see me
slit my wrists!

Why don't you just settle down?

You know, you are hysterical.

You're so goddamn hysterical!

- I'm hysterical? You think this is hysterical?

- Yes!

You poor bastard!

You're so repressed that you...

You mistake creative passion for hysteria!
Don't you see?
This is how you're killing me.
Nobody is trying to kill you, Deirdre.
You're doing
a perfectly good job of it yourself.
I wish you'd rot in hell.
I regret the day I ever married you.
Will you two stop fighting?
This is between me and your father!
Your father is the one...
Well, I live here too, you know!
Look at you. Look at your damn face.
You got the face of a man twice your age.
Forty-five going on 90!
Will you just shut up?
He's not moving!
No, he's just playing another one
of his horribly manipulative games.
Get up, Norman!
Get up, Norman.
Enough of your pranks.
Please don't kill her.
He's not gonna kill me.
He'd rather suffocate me with
his horribly oppressive manipulation
and then wait for me to cut my own throat.
Go to bed. Go to bed, Augusten.
You've got school in the morning.
I don't want to go to school.
You've got to go, Augusten!
You can't keep skipping or I'll get arrested.
Why can't we just be a normal family?
Oh, thank God.
Hello there.
Please come in.
I've just been a frantic wreck
waiting for you to get here.
It's okay now, Mrs. Burroughs.
Oh, no, please. Call me Deirdre.
Where's Norman, dear?
Oh, he's passed out drunk.
- I see.
- I was afraid for my life tonight.

I thought for sure he was gonna kill me,
that this would finally be the night.

Would you like a Sanka?

I'd like some slices of bologna
with a side of horseradish.

Do you mind, son?

Don't you worry about your parents,
buckaroo. We'll get this all sorted out.

Good luck.

I just pray to God Norman doesn't snap.

One of these days he's gonna snap
and kill us all.

Enough!

That's not the way to talk around your son.

You need to comfort him, not frighten him.

That's right. I know.

I'm sorry, Augusten.

I'm just very upset right now.

Sit down, Deirdre.

Good night, Augusten.

Now.

I'm gonna ask you a number of questions
if that's all right with you.

They may seem rather personal.

In fact, you may not see the relevance.

But I believe that's up to me,
as the doctor, to decide.

So,

your

anxiety level.

How would you describe it?

Well, I'm just frantic.

I'm very, very upset. I'm very anxious.

I feel very emotionally charged.

And I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

Tell me about your bowel movements.

Have you noticed any changes

either in regularity,

or the shape and density

of the bowel matter itself?

Is that really...

I mean... Do we have to...

What I'm getting at is constipation.

Both literal and subconscious.

Are you constipated in your life, Deirdre?

Stuck?

I am.

I am stuck.

I understand you write a lot.

Are you energetic when you write? Frantic?

Well...

When I write I'm writing from
my unconscious. Or I'm trying to.

Do you have sex with your husband?

- Yes.

- Do you enjoy it?

Back to your anxiety for a moment.

You have thoughts of suicide, Deirdre?

Do you have suicidal thoughts?

Do you ever think of killing yourself?

And how often would you say
you have these thoughts of suicide?

Right after I have sex with my husband.

What are those?

Valium.

To quiet the nerves.

Is he an MD doctor?

Yes, and as I've told you 100 times,
he got his MD at Yale.

And you heard about this guy from where?

Dr. Nupal.

Augusten's allergist.

If you were more of a man and involved
in your son's life, you'd know who that was.

I smell manure.

I don't smell anything.

I do, I smell manure.

It's coming out of your ears.

Fucking bitch.

I'm unhappy.

I'm unhappy.

Norman, if you're so unhappy,
why stay in this marriage?

I don't know why.

My son.

I don't think that's why you stay, Norman.

I think you stay because it's comfortable.

It's what you know.

You were trapped in your childhood
by a castrating mother,
and as an adult male you have sought
the same female archetype.
Well, that's just brilliant. And very true.
Deirdre, smoking is a great privilege
in my sanctuary.
But for you, I will allow it.
Thank you.
So you're saying we should split up?
In order to reach that conclusion, Norman,
I would need to see both you and Deirdre
on a regular and disciplined basis.
For five hours a day.
I'm available, Dr. Finch.
Five hours a day?
I can't do that. I have to work!
See, Dr. Finch, I told you.
I'm married to a narcissist.
Norman, if I'm willing to clear my schedule
to save your marriage but you're not,
then get out.
Leave this office, go home,
and start dividing your books
and your record albums.
This is bullshit.
This is really fucking bullshit.
What are you writing?
"Norman Burroughs is homicidal.
He is an unapologetic alcoholic.
"He is dangerous, a threat to himself,
his wife and his child."
Finally, somebody sees.
Deirdre, express yourself. Let it out.
Tell Augusten and I why you are crying.
'Cause I...
I did love Norman once, long ago,
but I never should've married him.
So why did you?
He threatened to kill himself if I turned
down his proposal. I'm not a murderer.
I've failed as a wife and a mother.
Yes, you have.
But Deirdre,

you can't stay with a man
who doesn't see your gift.
You are a brilliant, brilliant poet.
Augusten, have you any questions
to ask me
concerning the state of
your parents' marriage?
I do have one question.
What's behind that door?
That?
That leads to an adjacent room
where I masturbate.
Dr. Finch...
As evolved as I may indeed be,
I'm still a human being, Deirdre.
A male human being.
I am still very much a man.
Would you like a tour?
What is this, Hope?
Jesus Christ, Dad!
You scared the shit out of me.
Hope, you've no business being in here!
This is my masturbatorium!
- And you're using my blanket.
- I was just taking a nap.
Nap? This is not the place for naps!
Go mind the telephone. Make fresh coffee.
Do your job, like a responsible woman.
He's leaving.
Now I can focus on my writing.
This is nice.
Maybe I'll become a doctor.
It's just down here, on the right.
That's not it.
Is it?
It can't be.
This is it, Augusten.
This is Dr. Finch's house.
No doctor lives here.
Hello, Agnes.
Hello, Deirdre. Come in.
Oh, Freud.
Well, you must be Augusten,
isn't that right?

Yes, well, I'm Agnes. I'm Dr. Finch's wife.

Well, make yourselves at home.

I'll go get the doctor.

I'll wait in the car.

No, no, you will not wait in the car.

It'll be hours and it's rude.

You just stay here.

Get along with the Finch children.

Up here, Deirdre.

Abigail,

what are you doing here?

Would you like to try some?

No.

Thanks.

Why does everybody make such a fuss?

It's just a little kibble.

That stuff's not clean.

It's for dogs.

Well, I guess you're afraid
to try new things, Augusten.

Sad.

Isn't it a little early for Christmas?

You mean late.

It's been up for two years.

I just pooped.

Oh, way to go, kiddie-poo.

Hey.

I'm Natalie. The other daughter.

- Augusten.

- I know.

What's with the clothes, choir boy?

Are you going to church?

I just pooped.

John Moses is the kid
of one of my dad's patients.

We watch him sometimes.

Come on, I'm supposed to
keep you occupied.

- What is it?

- It's an electroshock therapy machine.

My dad used to use it on patients
all the time.

Until the police came.

Come on, it'll be a wicked blast.

Help me move it.

So why is Dr. Finch seeing patients
in his house now?

Well, you know how President Carter makes
us drive 40 miles out of our way to buy gas?

Because we're in...

An energy crisis?

Right.

Well, that means people don't have
extra money for luxuries like mental health,
so he's lost a lot of patients.

He's downsizing.

Are you ready?

For what?

Are you retarded?

To play doctor.

Okay. Well, I'll be the doctor
and you can be the nurse.

I'm not gonna be some cunt-licking nurse.

I'll be my father and you be your mother.

Okay.

How are we feeling today, Deirdre?

I'm blocked, Dr. Finch.

I can't tap into my subconscious.

I feel I do have a classic in me.

I feel I am owed a Pulitzer Prize,
even though I've only published one book
I paid for myself.

It's very clear to me now.

There's only one treatment available
that could resurrect your creative spirit.

Electroshock therapy.

We'll start with 1000 volts.

Is this gonna hurt?

Well, maybe if you pass out you won't
have to go to school.

Put in the mouth guard.

What are you guys doing?

He's repressing a memory. We need to
go deep into his subconscious mind.

Awesome. But can you do it later?

Dad wants to see Augusten in the kitchen.

We have to get you in a place
where you will feel.

Feel warm and you will feel...
Take a seat, son.
Augusten, your mother is in a state of crisis.
That's an understatement.
Your mother is in trouble with your father.
Your father may want to murder
your mother.
Murder?
Your father is a very, very sick man.
Your mother needs to be protected.
What do we do?
Well, I'm gonna take your mother to a motel
and you're gonna stay here.
But...
I don't wanna stay here.
Deirdre, talk to your son.
When you're finished, I'll be in the car.
Mom, what's going on?
Your father has a lot of anger
about how his life turned out.
He's projecting it onto me.
Dr. Finch is spiritually evolved.
We'll be safe with him.
Can't I come to the motel too?
I love those little soaps.
No.
The doctor thinks that it's best.
For how long?
Not long. A few days, maybe a week.
A week? I can't stay here for a week!
Augusten, don't argue with me. Not now.
I'll visit you in my dreams.
Did you know I can do that?
Once, I had a dream I went to Mexico,
and when I woke up
there were pesos in my hand.
I'm going to go now.
We'll be okay.
Telephone call.
Hello?
I have an emergency collect call
from your son, Augusten.
Dear journal, somebody has to write
down what's happening to me.

It's not to be believed.
So I guess that person is me.
Day seven and still no sign of my mother.
This place is worse than any loony bin.
I'm not kidding.
Every decision in the house is made by
something the Finches call...
Bible dipping.
It's like asking a Magic 8-ball a question,
only you're asking God.
Ask God a question, Augusten.
I don't know.
Oh, for goodness' sakes, Augusten,
it's not that hard.
Should we have fish sticks for dinner?
"Awakening."
As in, awakening our taste buds.
Super, God wants us to have fish sticks.
Shit, I wanted McDonald's so bad.
Of the daughters, Hope is by far
Finch's favorite. I know this because...
Hope, you are by far my favorite daughter.
Stop antagonizing me, Natalie. Just stop
transferring all of your anger onto me.
Please make an appointment to see Dad.
You know what? Your avoidance tactics
aren't gonna work, Miss Hope.
You're the one that hates me
and you're gonna have to confront that.
Is this really our dinner?
Fish sticks and grapes, that's all you get.
I am not a maid and I'm not a chef.
You know, Natalie, you're so oral
you'll never get to anal.
And you're never gonna get a dick in
your dried-out cunt, you old maid.
Excellent, Natalie,
your hysteria is spectacular.
You're moving from the anal
onto the phallic.
I'm very proud.
Oh, did I mention that Hope is an
animal lover? She has a cat named Freud...
- Freud is dying.

- ...that speaks to her.
She told me through her purrs,
which I can translate.
Hope, Freud wasn't talking to you,
because fucking cats can't talk.
This is animal abuse.
Augusten, be sexier. Make them want you.
She asked me to do this to her.
She contacted me during REM sleep
and said that she'd hung on
as long as she could.
And she wants me to sit with her
so she doesn't die alone.
What are you all doing in here?
You better not be engaging
in pot or other activities.
Shut up, you hag. Leave us alone.
So how long are you gonna be
carrying around that basket?
Until Freud dies.
Which should be the end of the week.
According to Hope,
Freud died of kitty leukemia.
According to me,
Freud died of being trapped in a laundry
basket for four days without food or water.
Augusten, pay your respects.
Am I coming home for good now?
No, baby. Just a weekend visit.
You should let me cut your bangs.
It'd be really cool.
So is that what you wanna be?
A hairdresser?
Well, don't say "hairdresser."
Say professional, licensed cosmetologist.
But what I really want is
to own my own hair empire, you know?
Like Vidal Sassoon.
What?
What do you wanna be?
Her.
Coed, majoring in literature.
You should apply.
They'd never let me in.

Why not? You're smart.
But I'm a Finch.
I'm used goods.
Besides, can you imagine
the college background check?
When they find out what goes on in
that house, it'd be like Frankenstein,
when the villagers surround the castle
and then burn it to the fucking ground.
I'm gay.
Big deal.
I know.
My adopted brother Neil's gay too.
Where does he live?
He used to live out back in the barn.
Then he got mad at my Dad because he
wouldn't give him a real room in the house,
so he moved to some boarding house.
He rents a single room out there.
Kinda like a pied--terre.
You two should meet.
I think you'd really like each other.
Two, please.
Thanks.
That director is fucked up.
I've seen that like four times
this week already.
I love French movies.
First cousins fall in love and then stab
each other as the weeping clown appears.
I don't really understand
the weeping clown part but...
It represents the loss of innocence.
Wanna check out my wheels?
- Sure.
- Come on.
So do you see your mom at all?
Sometimes.
On the weekends.
It's tough to have a sick mom, right?
My mom couldn't handle me either.
Neither could my dad.
Yeah, mine too. He never wants to see me.
Where does that leave you?

At the crazy house of the even crazier Finch.
Do you think he's crazy?
In a good way. I think he's a genius.
Like when I was your age
and I'd have a rage seizure,
he'd put on music
to lower my blood pressure.
Nat King Cole, Stardust,
revolutionary sort of stuff, you know?
Worked every time.
If he hadn't adopted me, shit,
I don't know what I would've done.
Well, here she is.
But couldn't you have just been his patient?
I mean, I don't understand
why he had to adopt you.
Well, Finch believes that
a person becomes an adult at 13.
At that age, no adult can tell them
what to do.
And they can choose their own parents.
I did it.
Natalie did it.
Natalie?
Natalie never mentioned that to me.
Oh, really?
Ask her about Terrence Maxwell.
You're over 13, right?
Finchy saved my life, that's for sure.
He was the first person I told I was gay.
I'm gay too.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
so that's what this is about. You're gay?
Yeah.
I thought Natalie had told you.
Small world, right?
You, me.
Crazy.
Smoke?
Here, let me light you.
Want a ride home?
Please.
I won't go fast.
Maybe.

What just happened?
You think you're gay, right?
That's what gay men do.
Just wanted you to know what you're in for.
Want a beer? Smoke?
No.
Journal, what can I say?
He drove a cool car.
And it sure beat another crazy dinner
at the Finch house.
There's a first time for everything, right?
I took those. In New York.
They're not very good.
I'm not very good at anything.
Shut up.
What?
Nothing.
One positive thing has come out of this.
Nobody can ever say again
that I'm afraid of trying new things.
Come on, get dressed.
I have to drive you back to Finch's.
I wanna go to my mom's.
You okay with what happened?
Yeah, sure.
Well...
Thanks for everything.
Thank you.
Thank you for everything.
Oh, Fern. Fern. Fern...
No, Fern, it's okay.
No, no, no, it's okay.
Augusten. Augusten.
I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.
Oh, God. God.
I wish you enjoyed school more.
Although I guess it must be very dull
compared to your life with me.
Would you hand me my cover-up? I'm chilly.
Watch it, Augusten!
I've got a lit cigarette in my hand.

Don't act out in anger.
If you're upset by this, talk to me about it.
How could I not have known?
How long has this been happening?
I've been in love with Fern
for a very long time.
Our relationship became physical
a number of weeks ago.
The intimate details
are between me and Fern.
Journal, I'm confused.
How can my mother be with Fern?
Fern drives a Chevy Nova.
I worry about you so.
I worry about you in school.
- The law says you have to go.
- Well, fuck that!
Augusten, please don't smoke
my cigarettes.
You have a pack of your own.
- Although I wish you wouldn't smoke.
- Well, I do.
All my life I've been oppressed, Augusten.
And all my life I've worked hard
to fight that oppression.
When I was a little girl
living in Cairo, Georgia,
I had a black nanny named Elsa who
lived in a shack on the other side of town.
And in those days black people
were called niggers.
And I knew that word "nigger"
was a dirty word.
And I knew it was a word
filled with hatred and anger.
I knew Elsa was no nigger.
I knew it was wrong.
It's taken me all my life
to claim myself as an artist
and to claim myself as a woman.
I have struggled against
the oppression of my mother
and the oppression of your father,
and for the first time in my life

I feel I am truly able to claim myself.
And so, Augusten, I hope I have
your support in my relationship with Fern
because at this stage in my life I do not
need and I will not accept more oppression.
I have spent my entire life
fighting oppression.
I hope I don't have to fight you too.
Can I have \$5?
"May I have \$5?"
Why?
So I can skip school tomorrow
and go to the movies.
Go get my pocketbook. I'll take a look.
Do you like my new house?
I need high ceilings.
So, you've been spending a lot of time
at the Finches' house.
Are there other options I'm not aware of?
What is this?
Adoption papers.
Dr. Finch has agreed to become
your legal guardian.
What?
After discussing this with the doctor,
we both feel this really is the best option.
He and his family can give you
the attention you need.
You're giving me away to your shrink?
No.
I'm doing what's best for you.
What's best for us.
I love you very, very much.
I will always be your parent.
And you will always be my child.
And my fucking father
won't even give me money for food.
He won't take my calls.
Yeah. He's basically worthless.
Just like my mom.
Just like the fucking nuns who beat me.
God.
Sometimes I feel like just taking
a butcher knife and just stabbing them both.

I understand.
You're the only one who does.
How close are you to Bookman, Augusten?
It started out as just friends,
and now it's more than that.
This is a sexual relationship?
Bookman isn't a stable man.
His problems run very, very deep.
He seems okay.
Well, I'm not saying you can't see him.
After all, as you say,
you are already involved.
But I just want you to keep me abreast
of the situation.
Fine.
Now, would you like some of these?
What are they?
Well, I just got some samples in the mail,
so I don't know.
So let me see.
This is mild anti-anxiety medication
which might help you feel a little calmer...
I'm calm.
...when I tell you
you have to go to school.
- I go to school.
- I'm on to your clever tricks, son.
I know you stay until homeroom, when
they do attendance, and then you skip out.
I know when you've been naughty.
What are you, Santa Claus?
If by that you're asking
am I the great patriarch, the father-giver,
who fulfills wishes and challenges dreams
and brings merriment
to those who are suffering,
well, then yes, Augusten, I am Santa Claus.
I'm not going!
You're in junior high, for Christ's sake.
It can't be that bad.
I don't fit in.
Where would we be
without our painful childhoods?
Well, the only loophole, or way I can see

of getting you out of school
for any considerable length of time,
would be for you to commit suicide.

- You want me to kill myself?

- Well, if you try to kill yourself,
I could explain to the school board
that you are psychologically unfit to attend,
and that you needed intensive treatment.

It would be a staged suicide attempt.

Of course, your poor mother would have
to find you and drive you to the hospital,
where you would stay for three weeks,
or a month, for observation.

I don't know, it doesn't... I don't...

Augusten.

Where is your spirit of adventure?

Augusten, stay with us!

You're in a hospital. We gotta get
these pills out of your stomach.

Oh, God, Augusten, wake up!

Don't you die on me! Wake up! Augusten!

Wake up! Wake up!

Please, stop! Please!

No, please!

I can't breathe.

No, get away from me! Get away!

The lady at the store said it has illustrations
of all the procedures
that cosmetology students have to master
before they earn their license.

Cold waves. Those are really hard.

Well, now you can learn how to do them.

It's good to have a dream, Augusten.

Dreams get you through the hard times.

What's your dream?

Me?

I was never fancy enough
to have one of those.

I was always too busy.

Working.

Well, so the doctor could go to school and...

No.

Then the kids came and...

Raising a family keeps you on the run and...

Maybe that was your dream.
To have a family.
Yes.
That was a dream.
It's a good one to have.
Hello?
Fern, it's me.
Why can't we do it?
Get out.
I miss you.
I miss the smell of you.
Who is it?
I'm not interested in what you're selling.
Please don't call here again.
Shit!
Shit! It's all shit!
I'm digging this new look.
I think you look much better.
Oh, my fucking hair! Oh, my God!
That was funny.
You should be laughing.
You know what, Augusten?
I'm not gonna throw you a pity party.
So fucking just get over yourself.
Fuck you, Natalie. You don't know
what it's like to be sent away.
You're right, I don't.
And you don't know what it's like to
have a boyfriend that's just using you!
Lucky me.
Who's Terrence Maxwell, Natalie?
I've never heard of him.
Tell me who he is.
- Tell me who he is.
- Shut up.
- It kills you, doesn't it?
- Shut up.
- Let it out!
- Shut up.
- Tell me who he is, Natalie!
- Shut up.
Tell me so I don't feel so alone!
He was the only one I ever loved
and he doesn't want me anymore!

Do you feel better?
A little bit.
How'd you meet him?
Terrence started seeing my dad
after his mom died.
She left him everything.
He was 41 when I was 13.
He told me I was pretty.
And he made me believe it.
One day he broke my collar bone
and I had to hitchhike
to the emergency room,
and I passed out on the side of the road
and somebody found me.
My dad told him that he would press
charges and that he would go to jail,
unless he donated money
to my college fund.
And he did.
\$75,000.
That's so great.
- So, if you just apply...
- My dad spent it.
Every penny.
So that the IRS wouldn't take this house.
So I do know what it's like, Augusten,
to love somebody who doesn't deserve it.
Because they're all you have.
God, I hate my life.
I hate this kitchen.
I need high ceilings.
Me too.
Let's get rid of it, then.
Let's take down the ceiling.
Deirdre, I need to talk to you.
I'm a fuckup and it's your fault!
That's right, Neil,
blame your father for your inability to focus.
Direct all that rage at me
if it makes you feel better.
I can't focus because of the voices!
I see you for what you are.
Yeah? Camera never lies, see?
My parents have given you

thousands of dollars and I'm still sick!
You haven't helped me get better!
You know what I do!
And you haven't helped me get better!
Deirdre?
Did you hear me?
Hello, Agnes.
Why am I here?
Well, you have an appointment.

Your regular 2:

Yes. Why are you here?
Because I want you
to stop seeing my husband.
You're right, Neil, you're right.
I've done nothing, apparently.
I've never pulled any strings,
gotten you a scholarship
to the University of Rochester
to pursue your photographic interests.
Absolutely nothing.
You just wanted to get rid of me.
I don't wanna get rid of Augusten.
He's part of the family now.
It's just you. I just need you to go.
But then I'd miss my therapy.
I need Dr. Finch.
No, I need Dr. Finch!
I'm not as pretty as you
and I don't have your talent.
All I have is this family.
And this family doesn't work without him.
Why won't you let me live in the house
and be a part of this family?
Because I am the patriarch, and when the
patriarch says jump, you jump, God damn it!
You don't cooperate, Neil,
and for that you're punished.
That's not why you won't let me live
in this house.
You won't let me 'cause you're afraid of me,
aren't you?
Of what I could do to you in the
middle of the night while you're sleeping?

You're afraid of my anger,
aren't you, Doctor?
Our time is up, Neil.
I believe we've made a breakthrough today.
Really?
I am to see the doctor now.
Hello, Neil.
Hello, Mrs. Burroughs, you look wonderful.
Oh, thank you. How's my son?
He's just great.
- Will you be kind to him?
- I will.
That's why I'm blocked, Dr. Finch,
I'm sure of it.
You're not blocked because of Fern, Deirdre.
You're constipated creatively
because of the rage you are not expressing.
Scream, Deirdre, scream. Express the pain.
Fern has ceased to be
a suitable companion, Deirdre.
You need someone who worships you,
who will feed your talent.
I have just the candidate.
Deirdre, I'd like to introduce you
to Dorothy Ambrose, my 3:00.
Dorothy is creative like you. She paints
her fingernails to match her mood.
What color are we today, Dorothy?
Shell pink. I've had a nice day.
Dorothy has a trust fund.
It was established by her father
after he showed her his penis in a rowboat.
I've always wanted a daughter.
The ceiling was crushing us.
So we made a skylight.
I think it brings a much-needed
sense of humor to the kitchen.
Vienna sausage. I've been looking for these.
I'll get it.
Don't touch my sausage.
- Dr. Finch?
- Yes.
Michael Shephard, IRS.
Where will I treat the people who need me?

How will I provide for my family?
You got an extension, Dad.
Six weeks.
After six weeks they take the house.
We'll pray. God will help us.
And when God turns a deaf ear
we can all just live in the car,
because at least that's paid for.
You are a terrible daughter.
Well, fuck you, kiss-ass.
Just remember,
Daddy's like a great ocean liner.
If he goes down,
he's taking a lot of people with him.
Stop.
- Damn it, Bookman!
- What?
Something's not right.
It's your hair. It lacks proper body.
That's because you've been pulling at it
for two hours.
Well, I wouldn't have to pull at it
if it wasn't so naturally hideous.
I'm not complaining. I love it.
I love everything you touch.
Maybe you could work on my mustache.
No, this is useless.
Natalie, come here, let me try on you.
No, no. Fuck that. Forget it.
I am through being your guinea pig.
Look, my hair's coming out in fistfuls.
Stop scratching at it.
You look like you have Down syndrome.
Hope.
Well, look, one of you
is gonna have to help me, okay?
I don't get into beauty school
unless I master the cold wave.
Guess you're stuck with me, jocko.
Being in love is fantastic, Hope.
You should try it.
I'd hardly call you an expert.
Are you saying my relationship
with Augusten isn't real love?

I'm saying your relationship with Augusten is not mature love, no.

Bullshit!

Neil, if you're not man enough to handle the truth, then maybe you should not be with a child.

I'm not a child, Hope.

You're right, Augusten, you're not.

I'm sorry, you're very mature.

It's just that I was speaking of the love you have when you're older. Mature love.

And what do you, Miss Iceberg, know about mature love?

When was the last time you had anything in your twat besides a tampon?

That is the fucking truth.

All right, Bookman, that's enough!

I'm certainly not gonna listen to you when you're talking like a teenage boy!

What's in this? I'm starving.

Oh, this and that. My secret ingredient.

Would you like to try?

What's the secret ingredient?

Freud.

Freud's dead, Hope. You buried her.

I heard her calling me.

She wanted me to dig her up.

She asked to be reincarnated as a stew.

Oh, my God.

Oh, my God. Oh, my God!

You fucking lunatic!

I knew you were insane!

I don't eat pussy. Psycho.

Come on, Augusten, let's go.

I want my beads back, Hope.

I was just kidding, you jerks!

Got some of my anger out.

Today, we are going to explore sense memory.

I'd like everybody to take

their blade of grass

and stroke their cheeks

with their eyes closed.

Other senses are heightened

when the eyes are closed.

It's very soothing, isn't it?

All right.

Neil, I believe you have a poem
you'd like to read today.

Yes.

Deirdre, I'm not sure I feel comfortable
with a man in our safe space.

I guess, emotionally.

I just need time to process this.

Joan, Neil is a beautiful and sensitive poet.

He's part of my family

and we are going to welcome him today

with open arms and open ears.

Okay, fine.

But he's a man.

Joan, what you need to focus on
is not the presence of a man in this room,
but the lack of your mother's presence
in your poetry.

Neil.

"The Angry Nun."

By Neil Bookman.

"Bitch!

"Whore of Jesus!

"Dressed in black, you do not bleed like
a woman should bleed between the legs!

"But with your ruler, your crucifix of hatred,
you strike my tender flesh!

"I bleed for you!

"Oh, Mother."

And then I ran out of ink.

Good anger.

It ended exactly at the right moment.

Augusten, would you make me
some iced tea?

My new medicine makes my throat so dry.

Baby, I'll get it. I got it.

All right, all right, Neil. Let's break it down.

Let's break it down for Neil.

Look, I always get my mom
something to drink when she works. Okay?

- That's our thing.

- Your mother is my thing now.

Are we having a stare-down contest?
Yeah.
What do you want?
What do you want? Money?
Here's 50 bucks.
Go chase the ice-cream truck.
Leave!
You think this whole thing is funny,
don't you?
You look at my mom's craziness
as something to entertain you!
You are so mundane.
Your mother is an artist.
If you want Hamburger Helper, cupcake,
you need to find yourself another mother.
Everyone! Come quickly!
Wake up! Wake up!
A miracle!
A miracle! A miracle has occurred!
What are you looking at?
Dad's morning shit.
See? See how the tip of the coil
is breaking out of the surface of the water?
Holy Father.
Doctor.
Let me draw you a nice bath.
Agnes.
Go get a shoehorn. A shoehorn, Agnes.
But what does it mean, Dad?
It means our financial situation
is turning round.
It means
things are looking upward, literally.
The shit is pointing out of the pot,
towards heaven, to God.
My turd is a direct communication
from the Holy Father.
No, no, no, no, children. No. Laugh. Laugh.
God is.
He is the funniest man in the universe.
Agnes, I want you to carefully remove this,
take it outside and let it dry in the sun.
We're starting a shrine, Agnes, a shrine.
Hope, let's prepare.

Now I'll never get into Vassar.

Agnes?

Somebody's gotta stay on top of things
in this house.

I am just trying to hold it all together.

I need to ask you something.

He's fine. The doctor will be fine.

He's just overextended.

- That's not what I wanted to ask you.

- What do you want, Augusten?

I want you to make me Hamburger Helper.

So there it was at last, the awful truth.

Thank you.

Unlike my mom, I guess I had finally tapped
into my subconscious.

Journal, I feel doomed.

I should be getting ready for college.

Instead, I'm in my mother's

psychiatrist's house

lying on a used twin bed

with pee stains on it.

How did my life take such a dismal turn?

What did I do wrong along the way?

I turned 15 today.

My parents used to make such a big deal
out of my birthdays, out of all the holidays.

I want it to be like it used to be, when I had
a family that tried to love each other.

Where nobody thought

that God was talking through their shit.

I want a curfew.

I want to be grounded for sleeping with
a 35-year-old schizophrenic.

I want rules and boundaries,

because what I've learned is that

without them

all life is, is a series of surprises.

Surprise!

We gotcha!

Surprise.

We gotcha! And you didn't see it coming.

No, you didn't.

Smile.

Augusten, what's wrong?

He's just overcome, that's all.
I'll go get the matches.
This is good.
Deirdre?
Deirdre, come along now.
I'm not going to any goddamn hospital!
Now, Deirdre, it's just for observation.
- This is bullshit!
- Dorothy!
I will not be observed!
Deirdre, I have arranged
a very, very nice retreat for you in Vermont.
But if you don't open the door,
we will have to get the police.
No, don't you call the police!
Why you gotta go to call the pigs?
Oh, please! Oh, that's right, you think
anyone that's not a lesbian is a pig!
- You're all pigs!
- Oh, you fucking selfish bitch!
Filthy, stinking pigs!
You just wanna hurt her!
Will you stop? Please!
You stop! You stop!
Oh, please, why don't you go out
and write your fucking poetry?
You don't need a mother!
You need an exorcist!
Oh, you need a fucking bone up your ass,
that's what you need!
And you'd like that, you'd like that!
Now.
- No, no.
- Shit, shit.
We love you.
No! No!
No, let me go!
Please let me go!
Let me go!
Thank you.
Thank you.
Oh, this is too much.
Thank you so much.
"Grief.

"The angels are gone.
"For weeks I searched for them
"and took the precise measurements
of each room,
"as if the house had grown smaller
in my grief."
Not good enough. Boring. Repetitive.
Journal, good news.
After only a week of observation, my mother
has been released from the loony bin.
Dr. Finch assures me she's doing well,
and is writing a masterpiece that will finally
get her on The Merv Griffin Show.
I wish I had that kind of discipline.
Watch out. That's how he gets you
to fall in love with him.
Our first date was at the movies.
My Fair Lady.
I was so nervous my palms were sweaty.
But Norman's hands were so dry.
I found out later it was from psoriasis.
He reached for my hand in the dark
and that was it.
Hello, Norman.
Hello, Deirdre. You look well.
I'm sorry, Suzanne,
this is my ex-wife, Deirdre.
And, Deirdre, this is my fiance, Suzanne.
Hello.
It's nice to meet you.
I've heard so much about you.
I've heard nothing about you.
I open up my mailbox every day,
hoping to get a child support check
from this deadbeat,
but all I get is my own voice
echoing back at me.
You drank our family's money away.
I don't drink anymore, Deirdre.
I haven't had a drink in three years.
Excuse me, could you get him a medal?
I want my money!
I sent your money
to that goddamn Svengali,

and his lawyer sent me a paper
signed by you giving him power of attorney.
No. I didn't approve that.
Dr. Finch wouldn't do that.
Did I tell you?
What? Did you tell her what?
What did he tell you about me, Suzie Q?
That I was a little housewife
with a stupid hobby?
Well, that hobby has become quite lucrative,
thank you very much.
I was just published in Yankee Magazine.
Ma'am, I'm gonna have to ask you
to quiet down and leave.
What else did he tell you about me?
That I was crazy?
He's the crazy one.
And he's a goddamn bastard.
He doesn't even see his own son!
He's tried.
From what I hear, neither do you, Deirdre.
Shut up, you cunt!
All right, that's it. Let's go.
Get your hands off me!
I'm leaving here.
I need a peaceful environment
to do my writing in.
Could you get me a towel, please?
Jesus. Fuck.
- Are you wet? Did you get wet?
- I'm fine.
Okay.
Like a sheep or a dog
that can predict an earthquake,
I've always been able to sense
when my mother is about to go crazy.
Her eyes burn electric.
Her body gives off a metallic scent.
She stops sleeping and starts developing
a taste for certain foods
like toothpaste sandwiches.
But journal, I think the worst is over.
I really do.
Hospitals make you better.

My mother is going to get better.
Dorothy's gone. She took everything.
I don't wanna be alone
so you're moving back in with me.
She's gone?
Just you and me, baby. Come here.
Augusten, hug back.
Could you make me some tea, sweetheart?
Sure.
Did I tell you I had a poem accepted
by Yankee Magazine?
Really?
That's great.
Mom, what are you doing?
Oh, I'm decoupageing my rejection letters
on top of the table here.
Why?
Well, I want a daily reminder of
my artistic journey when I become famous.
This'll keep me humble.
Mom, why did you mix your pills
with Dorothy's medicine?
Dr. Finch says that's what made you sick.
I'd rather not talk about that right now.
This whole episode's been
very intense for me.
But I do believe that may have been
my last psychotic episode.
I think I finally broke through
to my creative unconscious.
Did Dorothy take all the cups, too?
She's such a bitch.
Oh, no, no. They're out back on the lawn.
What the fuck have you been up to?
Giving my worldly possessions
a moon bath.
Anything the doctor's touched,
anything he's looked at,
needs to be sterilized by the night.
I can't believe I just trusted you.
You have to trust me. I'm your mother.
And honestly, Augusten, I worry about you.
I disapprove of your choices.
I haven't had a choice!

You did when you wrote this, didn't you?
- You read my journal?
- Don't try and compete with me, Augusten.
If you move back in with me, I won't allow it.
You'll only get hurt.
When I become a very famous woman,
they'll write that I had a son
who is a writer, too,
who doesn't compare to my brilliance.
I want more for you than that.
Did you mix your pills again?
Are you judging me?
Where are you going?
Are you gonna call the doctor?
That bastard! He took my money!
I won't be taken advantage of again.
Is that clear?
What are you doing in there?
Let me in!
Are you calling the doctor?
Neighbors reporting
domestic disturbance...
- Good evening, ma'am...
- Get off of my property!
Don't you dare tell me what to do, not ever!
You understand me?
- Ma'am, you need to calm down...
- Fuck you!
I will not be stifled in my own home!
- Hope, Hope. It's Augusten.
- You are the goddamn devil! You are a Nazi!
My mom's gone crazy again
and I need your help.
We need Dad.
Finch gave her a sedative.
I like watching her sleep.
She looks like she's dead.
Maybe she's finally at peace.
None of us'll ever be at peace,
until Finch and every bad seed
spawned from Finch
is dead.
You sound crazy.
Come on, let's go to bed.

Neil?

Neil?

- What are you doing, son?

- Shut up!

I'm not your son!

What in the hell is going on?

It's all right.

Neil.

Neil.

Neil!

- Where did he go?

- Away.

Why don't we ever have any relish
in this house?

What happened?

It was a family situation. It's been handled.

Natalie, you have to tell me, okay?

Where did Bookman go?

Where the fuck are you?

I needed to get away.

My father's very upset with you.

He feels like you're taking your mother's
side in this and he needs your support
because he wants to have her committed
for good to a hospital.

I don't think she needs to be committed.

- Look, where are you? We'll come get you.

- Okay.

Do you have a pen?

Yeah.

Okay, tell me where you are.

I'll tell you where I'll be tomorrow at noon.

The bus station.

I'm going to New York.

You're coming with me.

We gotta get away from them, Nat.

Your family, my mother.

It's the only way that
we can have a normal life.

What's going on?

What are we gonna do
in New York, Augusten?

Our only skills are restraining psychotics.

I'll write.

And I'll get a job so you can go to school.
I'll support us.
I'm afraid, Augusten.
Me, too.
But we can do this.
We have to.
Did a woman come in here by herself?
Can I take your order?
Yes, I'd like a TaB
and a slice of key lime pie.
Oh, nothing for me, thanks.
Aren't you hungry? You look skinny.
You really should eat something.
Don't pull that maternal crap
with me now, Mom.
It's too late for that.
No, it's not too late.
We can find a house together
where we both can write.
We can start over.
I am starting over.
In New York.
Really? Well, how are you gonna
make that work, Augusten?
You've no formal education,
no money, no furniture, no friends.
Yeah, well, could be worse.
Could be going to a prom.
Why did you come here then?
To say goodbye to you.
Did you pack enough warm clothes?
Yeah.
I'm gonna be okay.
Natalie's not coming.
I told her I'd deal with you.
Don't try to stop me, Agnes.
I'm going.
I'm gonna miss you.
I'll miss you, too.
You're the best son a mom could ever want.
You need to know that.
Oh, my God.
Agnes, there's a lot of money in here.
Penny here, a dime there.

It adds up.
The doctor doesn't know I have it,
of course. No one does.
You know, this morning the IRS came again
and I almost gave it to them.
And then I thought, no.
For once in my life
I'm going to invest wisely.
When you write a book, you send me a copy.
Goodbye, my sweet boy.
Agnes?
What are you gonna do now?
I don't know.
Maybe I'll take down the Christmas tree.
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