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# America

By Joyce Eliason

Kids, living on the street  
Have you ever talked to one?  
Most come from homes  
where they're abused,  
often by their parents who were  
supposed to protect them, but couldn't  
There's no peace  
inside of these children  
Pain is the quickest path to pleasure,  
and they cope by hurting themselves  
just so they can feel  
something, anything  
We now have whole  
generations who are raised in  
and then lose their children to  
a very broken foster care system  
Children who live  
confused, betrayed, angry,  
yet still yearning for a  
home, for a family, for love  
This boy is one of them His name  
is America and this is his story  
I love you I love you  
so much You're my baby  
I love you  
I work at a residential  
treatment facility  
that's the end of the road  
for way too many of these kids  
This is their last stop  
For me, it's where  
the love has to start  
Here's the boys' dorm. The  
girls' are on the other side.  
Don't get any ideas.  
Girls' dorms are off-limits.  
Only places where everybody mixes  
are in the common areas downstairs,  
classes, cafeterias,  
rec rooms.  
During the day when you're in school or  
therapy, all of these rooms are locked.  
No access or  
unsupervised entry.

up here for quiet time.

Quiet time is for homework.

You got dinner at 5:00,

lights out at 10:00.

This is your room.

This is your bed  
and your dresser.

- Any questions?

- No.

Get anything to eat yet?

Come down to cafeteria,  
we'll get you some food.

I'm not hungry.

You got therapy at

And, America, meet

your new roommate, Fish.

Hi. I'm Fish.

America Vega?

America? Hi.

Come on in.

Sit right here. Either  
seat's all right.

I'm Dr. Maureen Brennan.

You can call me Dr. B.

I will be your counselor  
while you're here at Ridgeway.

Just so you understand,  
everything that you say during  
our sessions is confidential,  
with a couple of exceptions.

Number one, if you tell  
me someone's hurting you.

Number two, if you tell me  
you're gonna hurt yourself.

Or number three, if you tell me  
you're gonna hurt someone else. Okay?

Do you have any  
questions, America?

Did you understand  
what I just said?

- Yes?

- Yeah.

Great. Would you sign  
this for me, please?

Just says that I told you what  
our sessions are going to be about,  
and what the rules are,  
and all that mumbo jumbo  
they make you do nowadays.  
Thank you very much.  
I cannot believe that I am almost blind  
without these glasses. Did you know that?  
I turn 42, totally  
went downhill.  
I can't read without them  
So what's on your  
mind, America? Anything?  
Anything on your  
mind you wanna share,  
or something that might help me  
get to know you a little bit better?  
I read in your file that you've  
done this a couple of times,  
this whole therapy thing,  
so I'm sure you remember, the  
first session's always the toughest.  
So, why don't we just  
end early for today  
and start off tomorrow with  
a bang, what do you say?  
- Is that good for you?  
- Fine.  
Okay, great. You can go.  
I'll see you tomorrow.  
Thank you. Nice to meet  
you. Have a good day.  
- Come on, you're gonna let me go through?  
- No.  
No? I'll tickle you!  
Got a problem, man?  
America! America!  
What a sweet baby  
Where's that boy?  
Easy Where's that boy?  
Where is my sweet baby?  
Where's that boy? America.  
I see you, mister. I see you.  
I found you! I found you!

You like that ring?  
I had it when I  
was a little girl.  
You know what? One  
day it'll be yours.  
And if you rub it, it'll  
bring you good luck every day.  
Good luck every day  
Good luck  
Yes, we're trying to  
work together as a team.  
- You're supposed to talk to each other.  
- That's right, communicate!  
We're gonna get this ball going  
as fast as we can around the room.  
Hold up. Heads up, heads up. Hold up!  
Come on, get it around, get it around.  
I like this, I like what I'm  
seeing! Come on! Good job! Good job!  
Good tossing, good  
tossing, good tossing!  
Get it around here. Right.  
Come on, come on, come on.  
Team work! Team work! Come  
on. Good job, good job!  
Hot potato, hot potato,  
hot potato, two. One to you!  
- Get the ball over here.  
- Right here.  
- Yo, man, what's up?  
- Yo, you all right?  
You just gonna  
leave? Just like that?  
All right. Well,  
don't forget to write.  
- All right, hot potato back in!  
- Come on, guys.  
Let's go! Let's go! Let's  
go! Let's go! Let's go!  
Shut up!  
You know, we've been here a long time.  
You think you're ever gonna talk to me?  
You got my file. Read it.  
I read it. It's full

of facts, not feelings.

I'd much rather talk to  
you than read about you.

I'm too tired.

You know, I'm kind  
of tired myself.

How about we just end today a little bit  
early and start again tomorrow morning?

- Okay.

- Okay.

I'll see you tomorrow.

- Got nowhere to go?

- What?

I don't know. Seem lonely  
sitting here by yourself,  
so I figured you had nowhere  
to go for the weekend.

Fish is one of the lucky ones. He  
always has places to go on the weekends.

It's hard at first, you know,  
adjusting and everything,  
but trust me, it'll be fine.

You know, you kind  
of look all mixed up,  
like you have a little  
bit of everything in you.

Your name fits you, America.

I'm in America, I'm in America

I'm in America and America is me!

And we live in

Michigan, in America.

- I'm America.

- Hot dog! Yes, you are.

Yes! America is a place where  
we live, and it's also your name.

- I'm in America, and America is me.

- Watch out!

- How about that!

- I'm in America, and America is me.

You know, I think my mom slept  
with almost every guy in America.

Now she's started on Mexico.

She's a flake, but...

- You want some?

- No, thanks.

Food here's pretty good. It's not that bad.

I mean, there's like vending machines everywhere, and they always refill them every Friday, so...

Here.

So, America, I know you don't want to talk about it, but three months ago, you tried to kill yourself. Why? Why don't you read my file? Why don't you read your file? So interested in what it says?

I don't need to read it. I already know what's there!

Look at you! Look at you, boy, look You a man now! You a man now!

- Wanna talk about Mrs. Harper?

- No.

You lived with her and her brother Reggie, right?

- Why you asking me what you already know?

- I don't know everything.

I know you were taken from your mom

- when you were just a baby...

- Nobody took me.

Listen, I know this is hard stuff, this is painful stuff to talk about, to remember, to feel.

You were taken from your mom by CPS, Child Protective Services.

They did it to keep you safe, America.

You were placed with a foster family?

They were rich and my skin was too dark, so they gave me to their housekeeper.

- Mrs. Harper?

- Yeah, Miss Harper.

And she tried to adopt you?

You think about her a lot?

Yeah, I think about her. I think about a lot of things.

- Like what?  
- Like, you wouldn't understand.  
Well, maybe I  
would. So try me.  
Well, listen. I saw  
good work today. Really.  
Nice job. I'm gonna  
let you out early.  
- America, are you okay?  
- Yeah, I'm fine.  
- Should I go...  
- No! Just leave me alone, okay? I'm fine!  
Are you mad at me?  
No, I'm not mad at you, okay?  
Just leave me alone, all right?  
I'm fine. Go back to sleep.  
I'm fine. Leave me alone.  
We've got books, and  
there's some good books,  
and there's books  
here for everyone.  
So I want everybody to come  
on up and take your pick.  
Come on! Come on  
up! Take your pick.  
Okay, now, some of the books were  
donated, but some of them are mine.  
So, respect, please.  
Lemony Snicket's A Series  
of Unfortunate Events  
You should like that, Marshall.  
That one's pretty dark.  
Okay, now just remember that you have  
to give a little report on the book  
that you choose to the  
class. So choose wisely.  
- This one's got pictures.  
- That's good!  
That's a good one for you.  
Now here is a popular book.  
It's called The  
Catcher in the Rye  
- I read it.  
- Did you like it?



It's a good book.

You should read it.

- So what's going on?

- How long do I have to stay here?

Depends. How long is long? A

week? A month? A year? What?

- Long is whenever they feel like deciding.

- And who is "they"?

Everybody. The state,

you. Long is long.

How long?

Long is long.

1-3-1-3-1-4-6

9-8-5-3

- How long?

- Just a couple of days.

Then you'll be back here

and start kindergarten.

Hey, kindergarten! You're a

big boy. Can you believe it?

An unsupervised visit,

that's what I can't believe.

Now, you know how

to call us, right?

Only zero first for collect.

Do I have to go?

Honey, your mama

wants to see you.

- You're my mama. You adopted me, right?

- Well, not yet. I'm trying.

We have to wait till

the judge says so.

- I don't wanna go.

- Honey, she's your mama,

and she wants to see you.

Just remember the numbers.

You need me or your Uncle

Reggie, and we'll come for you.

All right. Now, you be bad and your

mama gonna send you back here quick.

- All right?

- Do not listen to Reggie.

America America

America, look at me.

Whatever you don't deal with now,  
you're gonna have to deal with it later.

- I don't care.

- Well, you should care.

You're 17 years old. When you  
turn 18, you age out of the system.

- You know what that means?

- No.

It means no more services  
for you, the state's done.

They raised you, out!

You're on the street, alone.

You know what happens to those  
kids? Jail or homelessness.

That's not a life for you.

Or you could get your GED.

If you get your GED, you know what, the  
state will pay for you to go to college.

It's your choice.

- Can I go now?

- Yes, you can go.

But you know what? At some  
point, America, it's up to you.

It's up to you.

You think about it, okay?

What's that

supposed to be, Liza?

- Well...

- It's a whale.

- Shut up, Shoelaces.

- What did you say?

I said, "Shut up, Shoelaces!"

Shoelaces here, he tried to  
hang himself with shoelaces.

I mean, how stupid is that? I  
bet you like arts and crafts...

Guys!

Stop! Stop! Stop!

Stop!

Both of you need to stop!

You're gonna get in trouble!

- You asked for it, Shoelaces.

- His name isn't Shoelaces!

- Is that true?

- What?  
- You tried to kill yourself?  
- So what if I did?  
I don't like people who are gonna die,  
okay? People that try to kill themselves.  
Had nothing to do with  
you. Why are you so mad?  
- Because.  
- Because why?  
I have my reasons, okay?  
Just promise me that you'll  
never try to take your life again!  
- Promise me!  
- Okay, okay.  
- Say it!  
- Okay, I promise, fine.  
Hey, you two Grab a  
broom This place is filthy  
- What's up with the shoelaces?  
- Nothing.  
What is that? Where  
did you get that?  
No lighters allowed,  
America. Sorry.  
America! America! America!  
Somebody help me! America,  
no! Somebody help me!  
You got that?  
- Meat or pasta?  
- America, move up.  
- Fish, who is that guy?  
- He's mean, that guy.  
- Meat or pasta?  
- Pasta.  
I've never seen  
him here before.  
He went but he comes back.  
I think his name's Brooklyn.  
- He's mean, that guy.  
- Yeah, I know. You said that.  
These are your brothers This  
is Brooklyn, and that's Lyle  
Look, I'm jacked. I'm wired,  
and I've been up for, like, two,

three days, I don't even know how long.  
No. No, see, I had to do something  
really, really important, okay?  
I had to... I had to make a  
run, all right? But I'm done now.  
I'll be there in five  
minutes, okay? Wait for me!  
No. No, look, you  
can wait for me, okay?  
Please. Please, okay? Please  
wait for me, all right? Okay.  
- Mama!  
- No, let me get in the door first, OK? OK.  
All right, yeah, I'll be  
there in five minutes. Okay.  
All right, now. Now, America,  
these are your brothers.  
All right, this is  
Brooklyn, and that's Lyle.  
And... And they're gonna watch you  
for me. You're gonna watch him, right?  
Okay.  
Right, now listen, baby,  
I gotta go on an errand.  
- But I'll be right back, okay.  
- Mama!  
No, no, no, no! Stay there, and  
don't open the door for nobody. Okay?  
I'll be back. I'll be back.  
- What you got there?  
- Candy.  
Give them to me!  
- Mama!  
- No, no, no, no! Stay there,  
and don't open the  
door for nobody Okay?  
Brooklyn, Brooklyn.  
Meat or pasta?  
Brooklyn...  
- Which one? We ain't got all day.  
- Meat.  
Man, you cover for me, man?  
Hey. Dwayne, you see  
America? Yeah? Thank you.

Yo.

Yeah. You missed your session.

Yeah, okay. How do you  
get to go in the kitchen?

- What?

- How do you get to work in the kitchen?

- How do you get to serve food?

- Why do you wanna know?

- Just tell me.

- You earn it.

It's reserved for the residents  
in the drug treatment program.

- Why do you wanna know?

- It's not important.

It's important to

me. I'd like to know.

Look, why don't you just  
leave me alone, okay?

What do you bother me for? Go  
home, take care of your own kids.

- You think I have kids?

- I don't know. Maybe you don't have kids.

Maybe it's just you. Maybe  
that's why you're here.

You know how to play cards?

Solitaire, gin, poker, anything?

This is a ace, stupid

Now we got a war going

Two of spades beats

everything, including aces.

- Do you know aces?

- I don't know.

This is a ace, stupid.

Now we got a war going.

- War.

- War.

All right. Cut the deck.

- You know the rules?

- I don't know your rules.

Everybody's got their  
own rules for war.

Two of spades beats

everything, including aces.

Got it.

Do you want to know my rules?

I don't do sessions

in the game room.

You have to show up to my  
office, every day, on time.

We don't have to stay  
there. We could take a walk.

We could go somewhere else.

But you must show up, America.

- You understand?

- Yeah, okay.

Okay?

Okay.

Okay.

War!

I get it.

I don't know.

- Hey, you just fall back.

- Look at him, he's scared.

Shaking like  
the lunch Jell-O.

Hey, Fish! Maybe you'll  
fall and hit your head  
and blood will just  
be gushing everywhere.

Come on, guys!

- Come on, you can do it.

- I don't want to get hurt.

Fish, you can do it.

I know you can do it.

- Spotters, are you ready?

- Ready!

- Fish, you can fall now.

- Falling.

- Fall.

- Go on.

- Yeah!

- Yeah, Fish!

Good job.

I trusted you, right?

People shouldn't hurt each other  
or kill each other, not even ants.

- Shut up, Fish!

- No, you shut up!

Okay, okay, cool it. All right, who's next? Who's next?

- I'll go.

- Me.

- You done?

- Yeah.

I was in this foster home once, with this other kid, we ate what the families left on their plates. It was gross!

Yeah. I've been in some pretty bad places, too.

Of course, when the Earth runs out of water, there won't be any food.

- We'll just waste away.

- You're weird.

So are you.

Look at your hands.

Big as my whole face!

You know what they say about guys with big hands, right?

Big gloves!

- I like you.

- What?

- I said I like you.

- Why?

I don't know why.

One of life's mysteries.

- Son of a bitch!

- America, what's wrong?

- There's glass in my bed.

- Glass?

- Yeah, glass!

- America...

I should get the nurse.

No, I don't want the nurse.

I'm no snitch.

- I wonder who did it.

- I know who.

- I know who did it.

- Marshall?

America, you mustn't kill him.

- You mustn't never kill nobody.

- I know, Fish. Not even ants.

Not even ants.

Come on in. Hey. You're early.

- What's wrong?

- I'm sick of this place, okay?

I want to get out of here!

- Where would you go?

- Home.

And where is home?

- I'm bad! So do it!

- Where is she?

- Why do you care?

- Is she ever coming back?

- Just shut up!

- I'm bad!

Reggie said if I was

bad, you'd send me home!

So do it! Send me home!

Hey, I know it's not so great  
being here, I totally get it.

- Let me help you.

- I don't want any help.

- I know. But everybody needs help.

- I just want to get out!

Okay! I hear you,

you want to get out.

Let's talk about how you  
get out of here, okay?

Take a breath. Come, sit.

Come on, sit, talk to

me. Tell me what's wrong.

Bad dream. Dreamed

there was a monster.

- Did it get you?

- No, it got Mama.

- Is she ever coming back?

- You're my baby. I love you.

I love you so much. You

know that, don't you?

I can't take this anymore.

I just can't.

Excuse me! Hello,

chore list is up! Hello!

Chore list up for

the week! Listen up!



Billy, you are dusting.  
Don, you are mopping.  
Carla, you are sweeping.  
Lyle, you are doing laundry.  
Marshall, you have trash.  
Let me see. Joe,  
you're washing dishes.  
Fish, you are sweeping.  
America, you are doing laundry.  
Bob, you are washing dishes.  
- Brooklyn.  
- What the heck are you doing here?  
You're not supposed to be  
in here. Get out of here!  
- I need to talk to you.  
- Need to? Can't you see I'm busy, man?  
Okay, so when are you not  
busy? When can we talk? When?  
Look, meet me here at  
Go. Get out of here.  
Brooklyn, get the soup, man!  
Yeah, yeah.  
- What are you doing here? Get out!  
- Let him do it.  
- I don't wanna get in trouble.  
- Do what?  
- Never mind, Shoelaces.  
- He want me to brand him.  
You do it.  
You scared?  
No.  
Both shoulders.  
- You're crazy.  
- Look who's talking.  
- You stoned?  
- Just one little pill.  
Make sure you get  
it good and hot.  
- Here?  
- Yeah.  
You ready for the other one?  
I'm keeping the lighter.  
Let's go hit that car.  
Come on, Brook!

Let's go, America.

Let's beat it.

So I'll see you after  
group. All right?

Nice. It's nice to see  
you smile for a change.

- Hey.

- Hey.

Nice one! You like basketball?

It's okay. I'm not  
very good at it.

Well, two in a row, better  
than me on a good day.

Brennan has the ball. It's  
at the three-point line.

She looks, she shoots!

Off the rim! You  
got a favorite team?

- Pistons.

- Detroit Pistons.

Good choice. I like them.

- Watch them on TV?

- Went to a game once.

- No kidding?

- Yeah. Reggie took me.

Yeah!

It's my favorite thing to do.

Couple friends, stadium  
full of people cheering,

- get a hot dog...

- Yeah, and a beer.

You had a beer?

Little one on one,

what do you say?

What do you think?

Yeah? Wanna take it up?

Before we start, I just  
want you to see one thing.

Look at that! Look at that!

Yo, we done? America?

You hiding?

Yeah. I like it down  
here. It's nice and quiet.

- Want some gum?

- No, thanks.

Missing out on a lot.

Have you ever seen that  
IMAX about Mount Everest?

No.

It's so high up.

It's all snow and ice.

It's higher than any  
place in the whole world.

- Sounds beautiful.

- It is.

You don't know where the  
clouds start and the snow stops.

Yeah, but you have to  
worry about that frostbite.

Turn your skin all  
black, start to fall off.

Next thing you know, your whole  
nose is gone just like that!

Want it?

- Give me a fresh piece.

- Come on. Don't be a baby.

You have a sexy mouth.

- Give it back.

- No, you're not getting it back.

Give it!

What's this?

- It's cut and stitch.

- What?

I used to cut myself and then  
stitch it with a needle and thread.

Wait a minute. Weren't you the one  
crying, begging me to never hurt myself?

I told you. I

don't do it anymore.

- Goes up your whole arm.

- My legs too, my belly.

I liked to feel the pain on  
the outside, not the inside.

That's what Dr. B says.

When you cut open your skin,  
you see life running out.

I've done worse.

What?

I've done something so bad  
that I can never tell anybody.  
I'm not anybody. It's  
me. Come on, tell me.  
- I can't... I can't tell you.  
- Tell me.  
Tell me!  
I know you probably don't want to  
hear this, but I'd be better off dead.  
Don't say that! Don't  
you ever say that!  
You're just a  
jerk! I hate you!  
- Wait! Come back!  
- I don't want to see you again!  
Liza, wait. Come...  
What do you want?  
- Where'd you get that?  
- Why, you want some?  
I thought you  
were getting clean.  
What happened? What  
happened to you, Lyle, Mom?  
You got me out here in the middle  
of the night to ask me what happened?  
You know. You were there.  
We got separated. It's  
over. Done. Forget it.  
Now let's get this straight.  
You and me, we ain't brothers, we  
ain't associates, we ain't nothing.  
You got that?  
Why'd you show up then,  
if we ain't nothing?  
Can you tell me  
about your brothers?  
After the cops came  
I never saw them again.  
- Separated, different foster home?  
- Yeah, in and out for 3 stupid years.  
- Must have been horrible.  
- I kept telling them the numbers.  
- Mrs. Harper's phone number?  
- Yeah, Mrs. Harper.

You got lost in the  
system, but you're back

You a man now!

We've been looking for you.

You know what they said?

"You got lost in the system. "

- But you're back! You're back! Reggie!

- Yeah.

- Here he is. He's back.

- Yeah, there he is. Look at you, boy.

Oh, no! You a man now!

You got to go

back to her, right?

- You got to go back to Mrs. Harper's?

- Yeah.

And then, when you were 16, you ran away. I

don't really understand that part, America.

All you wanted was to get back there,

and then after you were there, you left.

Can you tell me why? Would

you like to see her, America?

- She's probably dead now anyway.

- No, she's not dead.

She's in a nursing home not far from

here, and if you like, we could go see her.

- Yeah. Okay.

- Okay.

America

What happened just then?

We were talking about Mrs. Harper, and

you checked out. You went someplace.

- Where did you go?

- I didn't go anywhere, okay?

I'm here. I'm right here!

We all go away in our minds

sometimes. Everyone does it.

It's totally normal. Really, I mean,

things are too painful to talk about,

you don't want to think about it, you

get a little brain break, you know?

A little vacation in your

mind. Everything shuts off.

You go someplace safe.

Okay, I'm screwed

up, all right?

- I knew that already.

- You are not screwed up.

You're human! That's  
how we protect ourselves.

- I'm out of here.

- Hey, come on!

Have I ever walked out on  
you? Even once? Have I? No.

You gotta stop walking out on  
me, all right? We're past that.

When you go away in your  
head, tell me, where do you go?

Mount Everest.

- Mount Everest?

- Yeah.

It's cold, so cold  
you go numb all over.

And you don't feel  
anything there?

It's peaceful, quiet,  
and now that I told you,  
I don't think

I can go there anymore.  
Maybe you won't have to.

What's that word?

"This side up".

You're guessing.

Don't guess. Sound it out.

You think I'm dumb,  
and you don't like me anymore!

Well, I've always liked you.

Before, now, forever! America!

- That's a bunch of crap!

- Hey, come on. Come on, America.

You getting all riled  
up. Help me with supper.

We gotta take care of  
her. We a team, you and me!

Tuck your fingers  
under, like I showed you.

Professional, all right?

So you don't cut yourself.

Here you go. You

need to relax.

You're too tense.

Here, try this.

Come on, it'll relax you.

What are you? A little girl?

Come on, man! Look here.

Now try.

- That's better. Yeah.

- That better? Yeah. Good.

You be cool, and I'll

teach you how to spell.

I'll help you

with your spelling.

- Are you ready?

- Yeah.

- Yeah?

- Yeah.

- Yeah?

- Let's go!

- All right. What's that?

- "P."

- Right. And this one here?

- "E."

- Now here's a real difficult one.

- "N."

- And the easiest one of all.

- "I."

- And the snake! The snake.

- "S."

Now put it all together.

- "Penis. "

- What?

"Penis. "

- Say it!

- "Penis!"

Crazy! Here, have some more.

I don't think she'd like this.

She not going to know. It's

gonna be our little secret.

Now, go ahead, finish it up.

And now you going to drink or

you going to cut the celery?

- You look very nice.

- I ironed my shirt in the laundry room.

- Who taught you to iron?

- Reggie.

Yeah? Good guy, huh?

There's nothing  
wrong with Reggie.

- Are you ready?

- Yeah.

- You're sure?

- Yeah.

All right.

Then go right through here.

She used to talk about  
you. Her boy, America.

She doesn't talk much  
anymore, but I know she hears.

Mrs. Harper? Mrs. Harper? Guess  
who's here to see you? America.

Well, you've been waiting  
on him. Here he is.

Hello, Miss Harper.

It's been a long time.

Do you remember when we  
used to play hide and seek?

- Do you remember that?

- I remember.

And all the angels  
you used to paint?

Angels.

I'm sorry for what I did.

I never... I never  
meant to hurt you.

I...

Your ring. Your magic ring.

You like that ring? You like  
that ring? You like that ring?

Now if you have good luck,  
you gonna give me some?

I remember you used to say that if  
I rubbed it, I would have good luck.

Yes, good luck.

I love you.

I forgive you.

She smelled the same.

- Mint and Chap Stick.



- The smells of home.

Yeah.

- Hey, Dr. B.

- Yeah?

- I wanna work in the kitchen.

- Why?

- My brother works in the kitchen.

- Your brother?

Yeah, my brother Brooklyn,

he works in the kitchen.

I'll see what I can do.

- Brooklyn.

- What the heck are you doing here?

Working. I got a job here. I've had  
experience working in the kitchen.

Look, I'm not

trying to bother you,

but since we're both here, there's  
a lot of stuff we could talk about.

- I don't think so.

- Why not?

I told you before, I don't  
remember nothing. Nothing at all.

Look, it wasn't right, okay?

They should've kept us all  
together. We're brothers.

Get back to the

pots and pans, man.

- I been looking for you...

- Enough!

Give it up. Just give it up.

Forget it.

- Liza is hot.

- Fish, do you know what hot is?

I didn't think so.

Hey, Fish, wanna dance?

- No, I don't wanna.

- I'm guessing you don't dance, right?

- No.

- Figured.

Come on, girl. Come on.

America! America!

Dance isn't over until 10:00.

It's over for me. Your

boyfriend's looking for you.

- He's not my boyfriend. He's a jerk.

- Yeah, whatever.

I've missed you.

Missed talking to you.

You haven't missed anything,  
okay? Just leave me alone.

- Can you stop?

- Look, would you just leave me alone?

- My scars.

- It's okay.

You're beautiful.

More beautiful than  
anything I've ever seen.

- No, wait. Stop!

- It's okay.

I can't. Just...

- What's wrong?

- I don't want to anymore, okay?

- I don't want to.

- Why?

You're... You're all scarred up,  
okay. You're just... You're ugly!

- I know you, and this isn't you.

- Just leave me alone, okay?

- Stay away from me! Your an ugly skank!

- What's with you?

Just leave me alone, okay?

Just leave me alone.

Rice up!

- Enchiladas.

- Come on, man.

- So what happened?

- What do you think happened?

Liza wanted it bad.

She was begging for it.

Oh, yeah?

Come on, Shoelaces, don't be so stingy.

I mean, Liza wasn't last night.

She was all over me.

Yo, man.

Fight! Fight! Fight!

Fight! Fight! Fight!

Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Lose the knife!

- Let go!

- I'll kill him.

Chill, man! Just chill, all right? I'm gonna let you go.

Look, somebody clean this up!

Okay, dude,

you're out of jail.

Get back to your room.

- Don't get into any more trouble.

- Fine.

America. America, guess what?

- They're sending Marshall away.

- Good.

He's been transferred to

Fairfield. Fairfield, that's bad!

- And Liza's going home.

- Liza?

Yeah. Reunification,

I heard it.

She's a skank, huh?

No, Fish. That's not

true. She's not a skank.

America, what's a skank?

Liza! Liza!

What do you want?

You weren't gonna tell me you were leaving?

Why would you care?

I didn't mean any of that stuff I said the other night.

I know.

It was your first time, huh?

Kind of.

Come in.

- You and Marshall, you...

- I was mad at you.

My mom's coming to

pick me up this morning.

She's nuts, you know.

When I was eight years old, my dad pretty much shot his head off with a deer rifle.

I don't want to  
end up like them.

You won't. It's up to you.

One more.

Aren't you gonna say anything?

- What do you want me to say?

- Tell me you love me.

- What?

- Even if you don't mean it.

Just say it.

I love you.

Feels good to say it, right?

- Yeah.

- Feels good to hear it, too.

I should go.

- People are probably waking up.

- Stay, stay. Don't go.

I'll write to you, America,

but you have to write back.

Liza...

I love you, too.

Hey, Dwayne. Morning, Carol.

- Good morning, Dr. B. How are you?

- What you got there?

- Two messages.

- Okay, I'll do them after lunch.

Okay.

Hey. What are you doing here?

Come on in.

Come on in.

Why're you up so early?

- I couldn't... I couldn't sleep.

- You know why?

- Liza's gone.

- Yeah, but she's gonna be okay.

Did you really tell her

that cutting yourself...

lets all the pain

you have inside out?

Yes, I did. But you don't have to

cut yourself to let all the pain out.

- What else can you do?

- You talk to someone,

someone you trust, and

that's why I'm here.

- I'm sorry.

- Wait, don't.

- No. I'm sorry.

- No. No.

- I'm not gonna touch you again.

- Don't...

- Don't touch me.

- I'm sorry about that.

What's going on? Can

you... Can you tell me?

- No, I can't.

- Just tell me, America. Just say it!

- Everybody leaves, okay?

- Everybody like who? Like Liza?

My mother, Liza, my brothers.

- They all... They all go away.

- No one ever stays.

Okay.

People who are supposed

to protect me, don't.

People who are

supposed to care, don't.

Reggie, Mrs. Harper, my

brothers, my mother, everyone.

So confused you don't know what's

right, what's wrong anymore.

This is gonna be our special secret

This is gonna be our special secret

This is gonna be

our special secret.

I'm just teaching

you to be a man.

And you know what?

You're a good learner.

You're a good learner

You're a good learner

Yes, you did!

I didn't do nothing wrong! I keep

telling you, I didn't do nothing!

Then why do they keep calling

me, wanting to have a conference?

Your grades are going down.

They telling me you're disturbed!

No, something ain't right.  
Imagine having your fingers scraped  
like I'm scraping this carrot.  
Take the skin of your finger and  
peel it right off, just like that.  
Imagine that as a way to think about  
what might happen if you tell our secret.  
What about Mrs. Harper?  
What... What was that  
about Mrs. Harper?  
Nothing. The boy's just  
giving me trouble, that's all.  
I don't like carrots, is all.  
Since when? Since when  
you don't like carrots?  
- What's going on here?  
- Nothing. Everything's fine.  
Look, don't worry  
about America.  
I talked to the principal and the  
teachers, and they're working it out.  
And he's gonna  
straighten up, right?  
- Something's always with this boy.  
- Yeah, always!  
Yeah, he's just a little  
behind, that's all.  
Just a little dumb.  
- I ain't dumb!  
- Yes, you are! You're dumb!  
- I'm not dumb!  
- No, you're not dumb.  
He kept... He kept saying...  
He kept saying I would like it!  
And in the beginning I did, but  
then it stopped feeling good!  
You're talking about Reggie?  
Is that the way  
you going to be?  
Well, maybe I go find  
your precious Mrs. Harper,  
go find that old lady, huh?  
Is that what you want?  
Is that what you want?

He said he was gonna hurt her.  
- He was gonna hurt Mrs. Harper?  
- Yes. I...  
- I... I can't. I...  
- Yes, you can.  
You're so close,  
America, you're so close.  
What did he do? Tell  
me, what did Reggie do?  
He took care of me, okay? He  
bought me stuff. He was nice.  
Now you know all the things I do  
for you. Just remember that, huh?  
Just remember. Put  
that in your head,  
and then you don't have to  
worry about that old lady.  
She's just getting in the way.  
She's just getting in the way  
I had to do it!  
He said he was going to kill her,  
okay? I had to do something! I...  
- I just couldn't take it anymore.  
- What did you do?  
I knew where they  
kept some money.  
I was gonna pay her back, I swear.  
I would... I would never hurt her.  
I know you wouldn't  
hurt her, America.  
Look at me. Look at me.  
Tell me what happened.  
I wet some towels. I  
put them under her door.  
I put them I put  
them by her door and  
I was drunk and  
I killed him! I killed him!  
- I killed him! I killed him!  
- Okay.  
- I had to do it.  
- Okay. Okay, okay, okay.  
I saw it on TV.  
They were pulling his body out

of the house on a stretcher.

Mrs. Harper told them

he was smoking in bed.

She covered for me.

She loved you.

I didn't hate Reggie.

He was... He was kind.

He wasn't.

- What?

- Are you going to tell?

No, America. I'm

not going to tell.

Okay.

- Are you ready?

- Yeah.

You wrote down everything in there

that you need to say to Reggie?

- Everything?

- Yeah.

Okay. Now we bury it.

Now it's done.

I'm proud of you.

You take as long as you need.

I'll meet you inside, all right?

You try to bury the hurt and

hope the future will be better

Kids go away, released into the world

at 18 I never know where they may land

Most aren't ready

They go back to a family that's

unable or unwilling to care for them,

or they end up in the streets

It often feels hopeless

But at the end of the

day, I live for that moment

when I see one kid

heading down the right path

Foster, it means to support, to

encourage, to sustain, to cherish

Its very first meaning

was to feed or nourish

That seems pretty simple

All a kid needs is one

person to hang on to,



one person to see them,  
to listen, to care,  
to show up consistently  
One person, that's  
what I believe  
Another batch, and I always  
get a catch in my throat  
Maybe I'm naive, but I  
think in a country like ours,  
we can do better, we must  
These kids don't belong to somebody  
else These kids belong to all of us  
They are America's  
children They are America