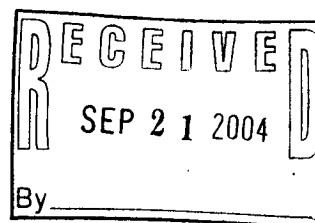


Running with Scissors

by
Ryan Murphy

based on the memoir by
Augusten Burroughs



SCANNED

This really happened.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY -- 1977

A GURNEY smashes through double doors. AUGUSTEN BURROUGHS, 13, is wheeled toward an operating room at warp speed. His eyes are closed. A HAND slaps his sweaty pale face.

FEMALE VOICE

Augusten. Augusten, stay with us.

Semi-coherent, Augusten cracks his eyes to see looming above him, speed-walking with the gurney, a WOMAN IN WHITE and DEIRDRE BURROUGHS, his mother. Deirdre is crying, hysterical.

AUGUSTEN

(sleepy)

Who are you?

NURSE

I'm a nurse. You're in a hospital. We have to get these pills out of your stomach. You don't really want to die, do you?

Augusten loses consciousness.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Oh, God. Augusten, don't you die on me.
Wake up. Augusten, wake up!

SMASH TO BLACK.

TITLES FLOAT UP. "Four years earlier." Soothingly, from the void:

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

Augusten, wake up.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- DAY -- 1973

A sleeping nine-year-old Augusten is gently shaken awake.

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

Augusten.

Augusten cocks open an eye revealing his mother sitting on his bed. She is wearing a blue Marimekko caftan and an Hermes scarf around her head.

DEIRDRE

I need you.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOME OFFICE -- DAY

A tidy room in this modern Amherst house in the woods.
Deirdre flicks a metal microphone held in place by a stand.

DEIRDRE

Testing, can you hear me?

Augusten nods, excited. He's sitting rapt on a twin bed converted into a couch with stylish Indian throw pillows.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

(nervous)

Okay. "Childhood." By Deirdre Burroughs.

She begins to recite her poem, as if she were at a reading.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

"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 this day
with me."

Deirdre elegantly drops a page of the epic "Homer"-like poem to the shag carpeting. We DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOME OFFICE -- DAY (ONE HOUR LATER)

Pages of white paper are banked around Deirdre's manicured toes like a mound of snow.

DEIRDRE

"I weep for what is gone. And I weep...
for myself."

The last page flutters down. She looks up at Augusten and turns off the microphone, suddenly all business.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Okay, now I need your honest reaction.
Did it feel powerful to you? Emotionally
charged?

AUGUSTEN

Wow. That really does seem like something
you'd read in *The New Yorker*.

DEIRDRE

Do you really think so? *The New Yorker* is
very selective. They don't publish just
anyone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Deirdre lights up a More cigarette and inhales deeply. Augusten is more than her son. He is her confidant.

AUGUSTEN

I really think they would publish this. All the stuff about your mother pushing you into the heart-shaped goldfish pond in the backyard, the thing with your paralyzed sister, that was great.

DEIRDRE

Well, we'll see. I just got a rejection letter from *The Virginia Quarterly*, and that worries me.

(picking up the pages)

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 stop me from publishing.

Deirdre looks up at Augusten and smiles sweetly.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

You know Augusten, your mother was meant to be a very famous woman.

Augusten grins, excited.

INT. BATHROOM -- MINUTES LATER

Augusten sits on the toilet, mesmerized as Deirdre prepares for an outing. She removes the Hermes scarf revealing that she has a freshly cut shag haircut, ala "Klute." She peers in the mirror and fluffs her hair at the crown, displeased.

DEIRDRE

That hateful Jane Fonda, she makes it look so easy. Something's not right...

AUGUSTEN

Mom, why do you want to be famous?

DEIRDRE

If you're famous, you're special. You've done something with your life. And it's not that I want better tables at restaurants. I just feel society has an obligation to recognize genius.

AUGUSTEN

So...you want to be known...like the people on TV? Like Maude?

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

I love Maude. But popular culture fame is cheap. The only kind of fame worth having is literary fame. Like the kind Anne Sexton has. Or Emily Dickenson.

With careful precision, Deirdre applies frosted lipstick.

AUGUSTEN

Can I come with you?

DEIRDRE

No, sweetie. But I'll tell you all about it tomorrow.

(to her own reflection)

Okay, I see what's the matter. Augusten, hand me that box, would you?

Augusten hands her the box of Kotex maxi pads on the floor next to the toilet bowl. Deirdre carefully removes two pads, peels off the backs and slides them through the neck of her silk dress. She fusses, then turns, triumphant.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

What do you think of that! Instant shoulder pads.

AUGUSTEN

Neat.

DEIRDRE

You have a very creative mother.

(looks at watch, darkening)

Where's your father?

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY (LATER)

JUMP CUT: cigarettes are smoked to the butt then angrily smashed into a Murano glass ashtray. O.C.: a car crunches up a gravel driveway. Deirdre simmers. Augusten wraps the obedient family dog CREME in aluminum foil, turning her into a glamorous space-age pet.

NORMAN BURROUGHS slumps in with his briefcase. A University of Massachusetts math professor, Norman looks like he wears tweed even while sleeping and has the loving outgoing personality of petrified wood. Deirdre springs up cat-like.

DEIRDRE

I have a reading. I have books to sign! I told you to be home at four, it's four-thirty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN
I was stuck in traffic.

DEIRDRE
Bullshit! You're trying to sabotage me.

She storms out, slamming the door behind her for emphasis .

AUGUSTEN
Wanna play checkers Dad?

NORMAN
No, son. My knee's acting up, I've got papers to grade, I'm tired. You go outside and play with the dog.

AUGUSTEN
But I'm sick of Creme. All she wants to do is sleep, she's an old lady.

Norman doesn't answer and exits.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

QUICK CUT...snapshots of a creative boy's secret life. In front of a mirror, Augusten brushes his hair into a smooth blond sheet. Content, he polishes his signet ring with a Q-Tip as he watches "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." Program completed, he turns it off and slowly approaches his Holy Grail...his mother's lime-green PURSE.

He opens the bag and carefully examines the contents...broken cigarettes, a comb, a tube of lipstick. He leans into the purse and deeply inhales his mother's smell. He smiles, safe.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT (LATER)

Norman prepares the first of the night's ten vodkas. He notices something odd -- a pot rolling to a boil on the stove. He slowly approaches and looks in at what Augusten is cooking for his dinner: quarters and dimes.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Shelves lined in aluminum foil gleam in this deep blue bedroom. Pictures of JEWELRY have been cut from magazines, glued to cardboard and propped upright. We PAN to --

-- a LADDER. Augusten is re-directing his track lighting. It pools in a theatrical spotlight. He climbs down, steps into the perfect O of light and addresses his imaginary audience.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

Thank you for coming to my poetry reading tonight.

(clears throat and begins)

"Childhood is gone...and youth..."

Augusten closes his eyes and smiles broadly as a HUGE WAVE of APPLAUSE washes over him...a tsunami of love and acceptance. The poem continues in real time as we MATCH CUT TO:

INT. NORTHAMPTON BOOKSTORE -- NIGHT

Deirdre is happily captive in the same spotlight.

DEIRDRE

"...and ties with people I have loved are broken now. My grief is more than I can easily contain..."

Suddenly, a HARSH SOUND -- the roar not of applause but of a vacuum. Confused, Deirdre squints into the blackness to locate the source. BACK ON Deirdre, the spotlight in the velvet darkness is gone revealing she's at A LECTERN shoved into a corner. Twenty metal folding chairs are empty. The only person attending her poetry reading is a JANITOR.

Spell broken, Deirdre's eyes fill with humiliated tears. She pauses. And then just projects louder, to be heard.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

"My grief builds this town anew and raises all the dead to walk with me..."

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Augusten finishes the poem and bows deeply.

AUGUSTEN

Thank you.

He looks up to reveal a deeply disturbed Norman at the door.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT (LATER)

The pot continues to boil. A shamed Augusten has been called on the carpet by his father at the kitchen table.

NORMAN

I don't understand.

AUGUSTEN

I polish my allowance. I boil it clean and then I polish it with silver polish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

7.

NORMAN
Augusten...why?

AUGUSTEN
I like shiny things.

A choked sob of regret suddenly escapes from Norman's throat.

NORMAN
I don't see myself in you, Augusten.

AUGUSTEN
I'm more like mom. I want to be special.
I want to be famous.

Norman just stares.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Augusten colors as Deirdre, reading glasses on, flips through the morning's mail. The gas bill, The New Yorker...

Deirdre stops, excited. This is the day her life begins. A letter-opener slices through the envelope revealing...

...a rejection form letter. "We regret to inform you..."

Deirdre is crushed. She pauses, then with great fury crumbles the letter into a hard ball. Deirdre lights up a cigarette and rubs her temples. Augusten is concerned.

AUGUSTEN
Are you blocked again?

DEIRDRE
Yes honey, I'm blocked. Come on, we have to get you ready for school.

AUGUSTEN
I don't want to go to school. I want to stay home with you and explore my issues through creativity.

Deirdre smiles, touched her son is parroting her important philosophies.

INT. AMHERST ELEMENTARY -- DAY (LATER)

A SECRETARY stuck in 1965 answers a phone.

SECRETARY
Principal Hahn's office.

INT. BURROUGHS LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Bare birch trees sway through magnificent floor-to-ceiling glass windows. With great concentration, Augusten -- pins in mouth -- wraps Deirdre's hair in rollers as she smokes and talks on the phone.

DEIRDRE

Miss Mimm, hello, this is Deirdre Burroughs calling. Augusten won't be attending school today.

AUGUSTEN

My hair doesn't have any body. I overconditioned it.

DEIRDRE

He overconditioned his hair.

AUGUSTEN

And the party.

DEIRDRE

And he has to help me with a dinner party.

She hangs up, as if these excuses were completely normal.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

TIGHT on a RECIPE for Coq Au Vin. As Aretha Franklin blares, Augusten helps Deirdre prepare a complicated meal for ten.

Augusten pours a glass of chilled Riunite for his mother and a mug of apple cider for himself. They clink glasses like sophisticated adults and begin cooking as they dance around the kitchen, having a ball, laughing. A team.

Carrots are chopped, onions are diced, the chickens are stuffed. Deirdre seems confused by the recipe, however.

DEIRDRE

Red wine vinegar. Hmmm.

AUGUSTEN

We don't have that.

Deirdre is perplexed. But then an idea comes. She reaches in the cupboard and pulls down a jar of Smuckers.

ANGLE: four hands rub messy grape jelly on the chickens. A joyous Augusten and Deirdre laugh as we JUMP CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The chickens are swollen mottled wrecks. We CIRCLE the table populated by STUFFY UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS and their BORING UNFASHIONABLE WIVES (all in their 50s). They pick at the chickens in polite mortified silence. Norman is pissed. Deirdre is revealed, smoking, silent, quietly pained.

MATH PROFESSOR

(clears throat)

I'd like to make a toast. To Norman, in celebration of his tenure.

They clink glasses.

INT. DEIRDRE AND NORMAN'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Deirdre takes off her make-up in her vanity mirror. Norman is revealed behind her, likewise getting ready for bed.

NORMAN

The chicken was like rubber.

DEIRDRE

I followed the recipe.

NORMAN

I was embarrassed. It was lousy.

DEIRDRE

The chicken's always lousy, Norman. And the house is always dusty and your shirts are always over starched because I'm not good at it.

(a beat)

I've never been good at any of it. You're usually just too drunk to notice.

NORMAN

You know Deirdre, I put up with your mood swings and your little poetry hobby --

DEIRDRE

My writing is not a hobby.

NORMAN

-- so the way I figure it, the least you could do is get good at it. The least you could do is try, goddammit. Because we're going to be socializing with these people for the next twenty years.

He exits to the bathroom. Deirdre stares at herself.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Another pot of coins is dumped steaming into a colander.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY (LATER)

Augusten stealthily polishes change behind a mid-century Edward Wormley couch, listening to a WOMAN reading a poem.

FEMALE VOICE

"And when the sun comes out/the daffodil
looks skyward..."

We SLOW PAN UP the back of the couch to reveal Deirdre holding court with FOUR '70S HOUSEWIVES. All mid-to-late 30s, they are perfectly groomed members of her poetry club. FERN STEWART -- a shy Breck Girl (38) turned mother of four -- nervously reads her literary effort to the group.

FERN

"...wet from the rain. But not broken.
Triumphant trumpet."

The women sigh with awe. Fern is thrilled at their reaction. But then Fern notices that Deirdre is not smiling. She is stone as she imperiously lights a cigarette.

FERN

Did you like it, Deirdre? I've been
working hard on it since the last meeting
of the poetry club. You said write what
you know. I love to garden, so --

DEIRDRE

It's shit, Fern.

Deirdre coolly exhales. Fern is devastated.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

It's sentimental, it's emotionally
dishonest, it implodes into nothingness.
I was bored. Were you bored, Christy?

CHRISTY fears her leader's wrath. Quietly --

CHRISTY

It sort of didn't go anywhere.

DEIRDRE

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

Fern bursts into sobs. Deirdre is compassionate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Oh, honey.

FERN

I'm sorry, Deirdre. I so wanted a creative outlet and I thought maybe this was it. But you're right. It's terrible.

DEIRDRE

It is. But Fern, some of the writing in your haiku, it was lovely. It really was.

FERN

Really?

DEIRDRE

But misguided.

(leans in, impassioned)

If Anne Sexton writes about flowers, Fern, the poem isn't about goddamned flowers. The flowers would wilt and rot -- she'd use metaphors, to explore her dead marriage, her pain. Understand?

Fern doesn't. A frustrated Deirdre takes a beat.

DEIRDRE

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. Last week in Boston, two thousand people waited in a fucking blizzard to hear her read, that's power recovered.

(a beat)

So that's what you need to do, Fern. Recover by expressing your anger.

A beat, then with a red-faced ejaculate of relief --

FERN

I am angry. Steve takes me for granted.

DEIRDRE

There it is again. Men.

FERN

We have four kids, everybody's in sports and on different schedules. So I don't just have to cook one dinner, I have to cook five. It's like I'm running a cafeteria. But who cooks for me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PUSH IN on Deirdre. Moved and relating completely.

FERN

(wipes eyes, embarrassed)
I'm sorry...

DEIRDRE

Don't you dare apologize, Fern. Funnel
that rage into the only escape you have --
your art.

(a beat)

Who wants to read next?

Not surprisingly, no one volunteers. Creme plods up to Augusten. He sneezes, betraying his hiding place.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

A SWATH of smooth unblemished eight-year-old SKIN fills the frame...Augusten's back. Suddenly, strange TOOTHPICKS dipped in solution prick his epidermis.

We PULL BACK to see Deirdre, watching as Augusten's dignified Indian allergist, DR. NUPAL (50s) runs his annual allergy test. Suddenly, like magic, the pricks on Augusten's back raise up into reactionary red WELTS. Dr. Nupal studies them.

DR. NUPAL

Augusten, you remain highly allergic.
You're not making any progress.

DEIRDRE

You need to give up the dog, sweetie.

AUGUSTEN

No. All families have dogs.

As Dr. Nupal writes in his chart, Deirdre stares out the window at the suffocating snow sifting down.

DEIRDRE

The bad chromosomes are from his father,
Dr. Nupal. He has skin conditions too.
Psoriasis. He looks like a dried
mackerel.

DR. NUPAL

We'll have to continue the shots.

QUICK CUTS: a harrowing hypodermic needle is plunged into Augusten's bare buttock. Dr. Nupal opens his chart, crosses out "NINE" under Augusten's age category then writes "TEN." Another hypodermic is stabbed into flesh, then another.

(CONTINUED)

A final shot is given. Dr. Nupal writes in "TWELVE" under the age category and we pull out to see Augusten, on the verge of puberty, with perfectly feathered 1977 hair.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Augusten is doing homework. His parents are in the middle of yet another knock-down-drag out. Gone is the apathy. Augusten is now caught between two characters who are channeling Albee. A drunk Norman pours himself another vodka as Deirdre twists a tassel on her crocheted vest. Her eyes burn atomic.

DEIRDRE

You infantile tyrant. You goddamn bastard. You'd like nothing more than to see me slit my wrists.

NORMAN

Deirdre, will you just settle down. You're hysterical, just hysterical.

DEIRDRE

I'm hysterical? You think this is hysterical? Oh, you poor bastard. You lousy excuse for a man. You're so repressed you mistake creative passion for hysterics. And don't you see? This is how you're killing me.

Deirdre closes her eyes and makes her Edith Piaf face.

NORMAN

Nobody's trying to kill you, Deirdre. You're killing yourself.

DEIRDRE

I wish you'd rot in hell. I regret the day I ever married you.

AUGUSTEN

Can't you two stop fighting? You always fight and I hate it. I live here too!

DEIRDRE

This is between me and your father. Your father is the one who's making things difficult for us.

(acidly, at Norman)

Look at your damn face. You've got the face of a man twice your age. Forty-two years old going on eighty.

A humiliated Norman CHARGES. He begins to strangle her.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

Dad, stop it! Leave her alone!

Augusten bolts up, to separate them. In one motion, Deirdre shoves Norman, sending him reeling backward against the kitchen counter. His head hits the dishwasher on the way down. A pool of blood begins to form under his right ear.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

He's not moving!

DEIRDRE

This spineless bastard is only playing another one of his pitiful games. Get up Norman.

She nudges his bad knee with a red toe. No reaction. Deirdre silently begins to panic. She's committed murder.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Get up, Norman. Enough of your pranks.

Norman slowly rouses. With disgust and relief, Deirdre tears off a Bounty paper towel and hands it to him. To his father:

AUGUSTEN

Please don't hurt her. Please don't kill her.

DEIRDRE

Your father isn't going to kill me. He'd rather suffocate me with his horribly oppressive manipulation and then wait for me to cut my own throat.

NORMAN

Will you please shut the hell up Deirdre?

AUGUSTEN

Are you going to cut your own throat?

DEIRDRE

No, of course not. That's just a figure of speech sweetie, I'm a writer.

Deirdre kisses Augusten's head and scratches his back.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Go to bed, Augusten. You've got school in the morning.

AUGUSTEN

I don't want to go to school.

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

You have to go Augusten, you can't keep skipping or I'll be arrested!

AUGUSTEN

Why can't we just be a normal family?!

He exits. Deirdre smokes silently, concerned about her unraveling marriage and suddenly appearing quite fragile.

EXT. HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

A THICK EERIE FOG has rolled in. A decrepit Buick Skylark pulls up to the Burroughs home. A MAN carrying a doctor's bag exits in a heavy black coat. The tableau is reminiscent of "The Exorcist."

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

Deirdre paces, chain-smoking. The house is dim and hushed. The bell rings and Deirdre springs up to answer the door.

DEIRDRE

Oh, thank God.

DR. FINCH, 60 -- with the white beard and twinkle of a maniacal Santa Claus -- is instantly taken with her beauty.

DR. FINCH

Hello there.

DEIRDRE

Please, come in. I've just been a frantic wreck waiting for you to get here.

Finch enters. He sees a spying Augusten and winks at him.

DR. FINCH

It's okay now, Mrs. Burroughs.

DEIRDRE

Please, call me Deirdre.

DR. FINCH

Where's Norman, Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

He's downstairs. Drunk.

DR. FINCH

I see.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

I was afraid for my life tonight. I thought for sure he was going to kill me. That this would finally be the night. Would you like a Sanka?

DR. FINCH

I'd like a bologna sandwich. With horseradish.

Deirdre pauses, thrown, then nods and heads for the kitchen.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

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

AUGUSTEN

Good luck.

Dr. Finch heads for the kitchen. Augusten follows.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Refrigerator open, a spinning Deirdre prepares the sandwich as Dr. Finch sits at the kitchen table.

DEIRDRE

I just pray to God Norman doesn't snap. One of these days he's going to snap and kill us all.

DR. FINCH

(authoritatively)

Enough. That's not the way to talk around your son. You need to comfort him, not frighten him.

Augusten is stunned. No one has ever spoken that way to his mother, or for that matter ever been smarter.

DEIRDRE

That's right, I know. I'm sorry. Augusten, I'm just very upset right now. The doctor and I need to speak.

(turns to Finch, lowers voice)

But I am worried, doctor. I do believe our lives are in danger.

DR. FINCH

May I have one of those?

Deirdre follows his eyeline to the refrigerator. Finch approaches a solitary bag of soggy raw Oscar Mayer wienies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Oh. Would you like a hot dog instead of the sandwich I just made?

DR. FINCH

No. Just like this. As an appetizer.

(chews, content)

Goodnight Augusten.

Augusten exits. Deirdre sits across from the doctor at the table now. Finch reaches into his bag, pulls out an amber bottle and counts out TWO PILLS.

DEIRDRE

What are those?

DR. FINCH

Valium. To quiet the nerves.

Dr. Finch sticks out his hand. Deirdre hesitates, takes the pills and swallows as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. NORTHAMPTON COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

A drizzly gray November sky. A brown Dodge Aspen roars by.

INT. DODGE ASPEN -- DAY

Wipers in need of a blade change squeak. Norman is driving, Deirdre is smoking in the passenger seat and looking out at the passing world she desperately wants to be a part of.

NORMAN

Is he an M.D. doctor?

DEIRDRE

Yes. And as I've told you a hundred times, he earned his M.D. at Yale.

NORMAN

How'd you hear about this guy?

DEIRDRE

Dr. Nupal.

(off his blank look)

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

(a beat)

I smell manure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NORMAN

I don't smell anything.

DEIRDRE

I do. I smell manure.

(a beat)

It's coming out of your ears.

NORMAN

(under breath)

Fucking bitch.

The car turns off to a weathered redwood office structure.

INT. DR. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

Deirdre sits alone on a floral love seat. Dr. Finch sits across from her in a rattan swivel chair.

DEIRDRE

I'm unhappy.

INT. DR. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY (LATER)

Now Norman sits alone.

NORMAN

I'm unhappy.

INT. DR. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY (LATER)

Now Deirdre and Norman sit side by side, looking at Dr. Finch for answers. Silence except for a ticking clock. Then --

DR. FINCH

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

NORMAN

I don't know why. For my son I guess.

DR. FINCH

I don't think that's why you stay, Norman. 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've sought out the same female archetype.

DEIRDRE

(lighting up a cigarette)

Well, that's just brilliant. And very true.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Deirdre, smoking is a great privilege in my sanctuary. But for you, I will allow it.

DEIRDRE

(bows slightly, exhales)

Thank you.

Norman is very confused by their flirtatious chemistry.

NORMAN

Are you saying we should...split up?

DR. FINCH

In order to reach that conclusion Norman, I'll need to see both you and Deirdre on a regular and disciplined basis.

(a beat)

For five hours a day.

DEIRDRE

I'm available, Dr. Finch.

NORMAN

Five hours a day?! I can't commit to that, I have to work.

DEIRDRE

See Dr. Finch? It's like I told you, I'm married to a narcissist.

DR. FINCH

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 record albums.

NORMAN

This is bullshit.

Dr. Finch stares at him with hard cold eyes. He pauses, then clicks his Bic and begins to write imperiously in a notebook.

NORMAN (cont'd)

What are you writing?

DR. FINCH

(reading, confrontational)

"Norman Burroughs is homicidal. He is an unapologetic alcoholic.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

He is dangerous and he is a threat to himself and his wife and child."

DEIRDRE

Finally, somebody sees...

Deirdre begins to cry. Finch takes this in, silently moved by her and his own power. He grabs a box of Kleenex.

TIGHT ON THE Kleenex. Finch extends it across the coffee table to Deirdre, who is now wearing a different outfit and sitting next to a bored Augusten instead of Norman. It's --

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- A MONTH LATER

Augusten takes in the squalid office -- the ancient dusty copies of *The New England Journal of Medicine*; the Einstein poster that reads "boredom is an affliction of youth."

DR. FINCH

Deirdre, express yourself. Tell Augusten and I why you're crying.

DEIRDRE

Because I did love Norman once. Long ago. But I never should have married him.

AUGUSTEN

Then why did you?

DEIRDRE

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...

DR. FINCH

Yes, you have. But failing is reason to rejoice! Failure gives rise to pathos and it is pathos that fuels an artist.

DEIRDRE

You're right, Dr. Finch. Thank you. Thank you for reassuring me. That I'm making the right decision.

DR. FINCH

You can't stay with a man who doesn't see your gift, Deirdre. You're a brilliant brilliant poet.

PUSH IN on Deirdre, overwhelmed at this conclusion. It's the first time anyone has acknowledged her genius.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Augusten, do you have any questions for me? About the state of your parents marriage?

AUGUSTEN

I do have one question. What's behind that door?

He points at a secret chamber/closed panel. Finch smiles.

DR. FINCH

That? That leads to an adjacent room.
(a beat)
Where I masturbate.

Augusten and Deirdre are shocked into silence.

DEIRDRE

(with a nervous laugh)
Dr. Finch...

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.

AUGUSTEN

When do you use it? Between patients?

DR. FINCH

Between patients, after patients. Sometimes if a patient is particularly tedious, I will excuse myself to The Masturbatorium.

He picks up The New York Times from the coffee table.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

This morning I have been reading about Golda Meier. An incredible woman. Highly evolved. Spiritually, she is the woman who should be my wife.

His face flushes slightly as he adjusts his belt buckle.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

Just five minutes before you came in here, I was admiring her picture in the paper. As a result I will need to relieve myself after the two of you leave. Would you like a tour?

INT. MASTURBATORIUM -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

The door of this small antechamber squeaks open like an ancient tomb, revealing HOPE FINCH sleeping on a couch.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

What is this? Hope!

HOPE

Jesus, Dad. You scared the shit out of me.

DR. FINCH

Hope, you have no business being in here. This is my Masturbatorium and you're using my blanket.

Augusten notices that the tassels along the edge of a colorful crocheted throw are stuck together.

HOPE

Dad, I was just taking a nap.

DR. FINCH

This is not the place for naps.

DEIRDRE

I think I'll just get a fresh cup of Sanka...

DR. FINCH

Wait a minute, Deirdre. Don't you see how my daughter sneaking in here and invading my private space is wrong?

DEIRDRE

Well, I can understand not liking one's space invaded.

DR. FINCH

Then confront her! Deirdre, speak up! Tell Hope what you feel!

Deirdre looks at Hope as if to say "what can I do?" Then --

DEIRDRE

Hope, I don't think it's right for you to disturb your father's space without asking.

HOPE

This is none of your business, Deirdre.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Deirdre is vulnerable and quiet. She brushes imaginary lint off her black turtleneck.

DR. FINCH

Jesus Christ Deirdre, are you going to be Hope's docmat?!

DEIRDRE

I'm not getting involved in this.

DR. FINCH

Bullshit! That's just pure evasive bullshit!

HOPE

Dad, she's right. This is between --

DR. FINCH

You stay the hell out of this, Hope. What do you think, young man?

AUGUSTEN

I think you're all crazy.

A stunned beat from everyone in the room. Then --

DR. FINCH

That's the spirit! Deirdre, see? See how he's expressing his anger toward you and me? That's the healthy way, the only way to leech out the poison that kills us.

Deirdre gives herself a "I could have had a V-8" head conk.

DEIRDRE

You're so right. Damn it, I should have screamed at you or something.

DR. FINCH

We'll work on that. Hope, go mind the telephone, make fresh coffee. Do your job like a responsible woman.

HOPE

Come on, Augusten.

INT. OUTER OFFICE -- DAY

Hope ushers a shaken Augusten out.

AUGUSTEN

What was that all about?

(CONTINUED)

HOPE

Dad's not really angry with me. He's just trying to help your mom get in touch with her anger. Your mom represses her anger and it makes her very sick.

At her receptionist's station, Hope efficiently slides a form into a manual typewriter.

AUGUSTEN

How do you know my name?

HOPE

From your mother's case file, I type up all of dad's patient notes. Your mother brought you here today because she thinks the doctor will be a good influence. She's worried about your school troubles. Apparently, she feels powerless.

Hope happily hunts and pecks as Augusten sits on a sofa.

HOPE (cont'd)

We've got to stay on top of these insurance forms if we want to get paid. It's a lot of work running a doctor's office.

AUGUSTEN

I hate my life. It's stupid and pathetic.

HOPE

You're a teenager. You're supposed to feel your life is stupid and pathetic. Shoot.

Displeased at a typing error, Hope reaches for the Wite-Out.

HOPE (cont'd)

Since you don't go to school, what do you do with your days, Augusten?

AUGUSTEN

This. Stare out the window and dream I'm the host of my own variety show.

(off her smile)

Do you have a family?

HOPE

Sure. Wanna see?

She proudly gestures him over. Augusten wistfully examines a desktop Sears family portrait.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOPE (cont'd)

There's my Mom, there's Natalie, we're Dad and Agnes's biological children. Plus Dad's adopted son, Neil Bookman. There's always someone over at Sixty-Seven Perry Street. That's where we live.

Augusten lingers on NEIL BOOKMAN'S face. He's 33, very handsome and magnetic.

AUGUSTEN

You know Hope, when I asked if you had a family, I meant of your own. Aren't you married?

HOPE

No. Most guys are jerks. I haven't met one yet that's as emotionally and spiritually evolved as my father. I'm holding out.

AUGUSTEN

How old are you?

HOPE

(blowing on her Wite-Out)
Thirty.

Augusten finds this weird but is silent.

AUGUSTEN

He doesn't really use that room for... It's not really a Masturbatorium, is it? I just mean, it's so weird to have a room. A Masturbatorium or whatever.

HOPE

I don't think it's weird. I think it's thrillingly evolved.

AUGUSTEN

So you're not married because you're waiting for a guy with a Masturbatorium?

HOPE

(thinks, then --)
Yes.

Hope returns to her work. Augusten stares out the window.

EXT. BURROUGHS HOUSE -- DAY

Norman puts a suitcase in the trunk. He looks up and sadly waves at Augusten, watching from an upstairs window.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

CU: pill bottles, prescribed by DR. FINCH. RACK FOCUS through the amber-colored collection: an emotionless Deirdre lays on the bed, facing a wall. Augusten runs in.

AUGUSTEN

He's leaving.

DEIRDRE

Now I can focus on my writing.

Augusten watches out the window as his father drives away.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORTHAMPTON SUBURBAN STREET -- ONE MONTH LATER

Oak and maple leaves burn scarlet and gold. Deirdre and Augusten drive through the flutter of foliage.

INT. STATION WAGON -- DAY

A tense Deirdre lights a cigarette. Augusten stares out the window, thrilled at the shiny drive-by wealth. The street is lined with immaculate homes. Manicured hedges, double fireplace chimneys, front doors painted glossy black -- a protracted-jaw, New England money street.

AUGUSTEN

This is nice. Maybe I'll become a doctor.

DEIRDRE

It's just down here. On the right.

ANGLE: a seemingly abandoned rotting house. Instead of being white like all the others, this home is painted a shocking Pepto Bismol pink and appears to sag. An appalled Augusten stares at the haunted dowager and is shocked when his mother hits the right turn blinker and glides over to the curb.

AUGUSTEN

(utter disbelief)

That's not it, is it? It can't be.

DEIRDRE

That's it, Augusten. That's Dr. Finch's house.

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

Deirdre and Augusten approach. Augusten shields his eyes from the sun as he scans the house. All the windows lack shutters and are covered by thick plastic, making it impossible to see inside. The lawn is nothing more than firmly packed earth.

Deirdre rings the wires-exposed doorbell, which makes a sound reminiscent of a chain saw. No one answers. From inside comes the spooky tinkle of piano keys and then a crash.

AUGUSTEN

No doctor lives here.

DEIRDRE

Ssshhh.

Deirdre rings the buzzer again. A moment later the door opens revealing a LADY HUNCHBACK (55) with kinky, grayish almost violet hair. The hunchback closely resembles Edith Bunker with really bad posture and she is holding an electric can opener, the cord dangling to the ground.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Hello, Agnes.

AGNES

Hello, Deirdre. Come in.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

Deirdre and Augusten enter. Augusten is instantly appalled. The house is pure squalor. It's something out of an Edward Gorey cartoon -- Victorian and eccentrically shabby. If the board of health visited, it would instantly be condemned.

Newspapers and dishes are everywhere. There is a huge fireplace and a red velvet sofa that doubles as a cat's scratching post. Animal fur streaks across every surface.

AGNES

You must be Augusten. Uh Gus Ten, isn't that right?

(off his shy nod)

I'm Agnes, Dr. Finch's wife. You two make yourselves at home and I'll go get the doctor.

Agnes turns and walks up a creaky staircase that Augusten instantly notices is threatening to collapse.

AUGUSTEN

I'll wait in the car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

You will not wait in the car. It'll be hours. And it's rude. You stay here and get along with the Finch children.

DR. FINCH'S VOICE

Up here, Deirdre.

INT. STAIRWELL -- DAY

A look of anguish on her face, Deirdre climbs the stairs for her emergency appointment. Agnes passes but Deirdre doesn't even look at her. Agnes turns and notices Deirdre's sexy ass and long legs. Quietly shaken, Agnes continues her descent.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY (ONE HOUR LATER)

POV of the television set: Augusten and Agnes sit on the couch, watching a soap opera. Agnes is eating a snack. Augusten watches with horror as her hand digs in a bag of Purina Dog Chow and plops a brown nugget in her mouth.

AGNES

Would you like to try some?

AUGUSTEN

Uh, no thanks.

AGNES

Why does everybody make such a fuss? It's just a little kibble.

AUGUSTEN

That stuff's not clean. It's for dogs.

AGNES

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

She keeps eating. Her words land. He tentatively eats one.

AUGUSTEN

They're not awful.

AGNES

I told you. I wouldn't eat them if they didn't taste good.

Bored with the soap opera, Augusten looks around. ANGLE: a brown dead Christmas tree in the corner of the room.

AUGUSTEN

Isn't it a little early for Christmas?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGNES

You mean late. It's been up for two years.

AUGUSTEN

Well...why don't you take it down?

AGNES

Everybody in this house feels somebody other than themselves should remove it. And in everybody's mind, that somebody is me. Well, forget it. I'm not their slave.

Suddenly from the tree: eerie high-pitched giggles. The crispy branches move. Something is living in the tree.

Fascinated, scared, Augusten slowly approaches. The ornaments sway eerily. Augusten parts some of the branches, revealing --

A NAKED BOY (two) squatting in the corner. He has a ring of jam around his mouth and his eyes are closed. He is shitting. Augusten watches, frozen, as the boy pinches out a turd on the blue wall-to-wall carpeting.

BOY

Poo can poo!

FEMALE VOICE

Way to go, Poo.

Augusten turns, revealing a slightly overweight GIRL, 15. She is dragging on a cigarette and radiates toughness.

GIRL

Hi. I'm Natalie. The other daughter.

AUGUSTEN

Augusten.

NATALIE

Yeah, I know. What's with the clothes, choir boy? Going to church?

Augusten instantly feels badly that he wore his navy blazer.

POO

Poo can poo!

NATALIE

Poo's my sister Vicki's kid. We watch him sometimes. She doesn't live here, she shacks up with these god-awful vegetarians.

(CONTINUED)

Augusten is, again, rendered speechless.

NATALIE (cont'd)

Can you believe this tree? Personally, I don't give a fuck if it stays up, I'm used to it now. The needles are tracked all over the house, in our beds.

(exhales, thoughtful)

I hope it does stay up forever. It'll teach Agnes a lesson.

Augusten smiles, instantly won over by her disdain of adults.

NATALIE (cont'd)

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

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- HALLWAY CLOSET -- DAY

Darkness. A BARE LIGHTBULB'S chain is tugged, revealing Natalie and Augusten. Natalie pulls out a big brown box.

NATALIE

Whoa, look at this motherfucking thing.

AUGUSTEN

What is it?

NATALIE

(a sly smile)

An electroshock therapy machine.

Natalie opens the box and they peer in. It resembles a shortwave radio except it has wires sticking out of it.

NATALIE (cont'd)

My dad used to use it on patients all the time, until the police came. C'mon, it'll be a wicked blast. Help me lift it.

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY (MINUTES LATER)

Natalie peruses the instruction manual as --

AUGUSTEN

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

NATALIE

Well, you know how President Carter makes us drive forty miles out of our way to buy gas? Because we're in...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

An energy crisis?

NATALIE

Right. Well that means people don't have extra money for luxuries like mental health. So dad's lost a lot of patients. Plus, some insurance companies are after him for fraud and the IRS keeps threatening to take our house. So, he's downsizing. Ready?

AUGUSTEN

For what?

NATALIE

Are you retarded? To play doctor.

AUGUSTEN

Oh, okay. I'll be the doctor and you can be the nurse.

NATALIE

I'm not going to be some cunt-licking nurse. I'll be my father. And you be your mother.

AUGUSTEN

Okay, cool.

A beat as they get in character, then --

NATALIE (cont'd)

How are we feeling today, Deirdre?

INTERCUT:

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- SIMULTANEOUS

DEIRDRE

I'm blocked, Dr. Finch.

AUGUSTEN

(as Deirdre)

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.

DEIRDRE

(emotional)

I just want a bigger life...

(CONTINUED)

DR. FINCH

It's very clear to me now. There's only one treatment available to us that could resurrect your creative spirit, Deirdre.

NATALIE

Electroshock therapy.

(placing helmet on his head)

We'll start with 1,000 volts.

AUGUSTEN

Is this gonna hurt?

NATALIE

Maybe if you pass out, you won't have to go to school. Put in the mouth guard.

CROSS CUTS: Natalie's hand, inching the plug toward the socket; Augusten's eyes, wide and apprehensive, but excited; the plug, inches away from intercourse with the socket as --

HOPE

What are you guys doing?

NATALIE

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

HOPE

Awesome. But do it later. Dad wants to see Augusten in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Augusten slows as he sees Deirdre and Finch seated at a filthy table overloaded with unwashed crusty dishes. She will not make eye contact with him. As she lights a cigarette --

DR. FINCH

Take a seat, son.

Augusten moves a roasting pan off a chair and sits.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

Augusten, your mother is in a state of crisis.

DEIRDRE

(under her breath)

That's an understatement.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Your mother is in trouble with your father. Your father may want to murder your mother.

AUGUSTEN

Murder?

DR. FINCH

Your father is a very sick man, Augusten. Some people when they become angry, become depressed. That's what depression is, anger turned inward. Other times, they project that anger outside of themselves. And that's healthier for that person. But you have to be very careful dealing with somebody who is that angry. Your mother needs to be protected.

AUGUSTEN

What do we do?

DR. FINCH

Well, I'm going to take your mother to a motel. And you're going to stay here.

AUGUSTEN

But...I don't want to stay here.

DR. FINCH

Deirdre, talk to your son. When you're finished, I'll be in the car.

Finch pats him on the head and exits. Deirdre mashes her cigarette onto a dirty plate.

DEIRDRE

There's not much room on this table, is there?

AUGUSTEN

Mom, what's going on?

DEIRDRE

Without Dr. Finch, your father will kill us. Your father has a lot of anger at how his life turned out and he's projecting it onto me. Years and years of rage he's denied. Dr. Finch is spiritually evolved. We'll be safe with him.

Deirdre finally focuses on Augusten. He notices that her eyes are atomic and strangely dilated, always a bad sign.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUGUSTEN

Can I come to the motel to? I love those little soaps.

DEIRDRE

No. The doctor thinks that's best.

AUGUSTEN

For how long? You have to tell me.

DEIRDRE

Not long. Two days. Maybe a week.

AUGUSTEN

No, I won't stay here.

DEIRDRE

Augusten, don't argue with me, not now! I'll visit you in my dreams. Did you know I can do that? Once, I dreamt I went to Mexico. And when I woke up, there were pesos in my hand.

(stands, softly --)

I'm going to go now.

At the door, she turns, emotional.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

We'll be okay.

And she's gone. PULL OUT on Augusten, sitting alone at the table, dwarfed by the stacks of unclean dishes.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

A panicked Augusten dials a phone. He has to get out of here.

AUGUSTEN

Operator, I need to make a collect call.

INT. APARTMENT -- DAY

Norman sits alone in his small kitchen efficiency apartment, numbly drinking vodka. The phone rings and rings.

NORMAN

Hello?

OPERATOR'S VOICE

I have an emergency collect call from your son, Augusten.

Norman hesitates, then silently hangs up.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- HALLWAY -- NIGHT

A weary Agnes exits a room with a dinner tray. She hears soft muffled sobs from behind a closed bedroom door.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S NEW BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Agnes enters to see Augusten crying into a pillow. Heartbroken for him, she hesitates, then sits on the bed.

AUGUSTEN

Leave me alone!

Agnes pauses. But before she can stand, Augusten throws himself into her lap and clutches her apron. SLOW PAN OUT.

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Rain pounds against the window. Nearby highway traffic drones. Deirdre exits, scrubbed clean and wearing a nightgown. She sits on the bed next to Finch.

He places two pills in her palm, hands her a glass of water. She obediently swallows. Finch counts off pills for himself.

DR. FINCH

We're in this together, Deirdre.

A groggy Deirdre turns to Finch, smiling softly, safe. Her POV: Finch smiles, his features blurring SOFT-FOCUS as we...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- THE NEXT NIGHT

Strands of violet are pulled through a foil cap. Augusten is showing Natalie how to highlight Agnes' hair.

AUGUSTEN

That's right. Pull it through, like that.

AGNES

Ouch.

NATALIE

(purposefully yanking harder)
Stop complaining. You're the one who wants to look sexier.

From upstairs: a low howl. It sounds like a wolf.

SPOOKY OLD LADY VOICE

Agnes...Agnes!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOPE

Stop antagonizing me, Natalie. Just stop transferring all this anger onto me. Please make an appointment to see Dad.

NATALIE

(slamming the table)

Your avoidance tactics aren't going to work, Miss Hope. You're the one who hates me and you have to confront that.

HOPE

(with hatred)

I don't hate you!

NATALIE

Denial!

Augusten notices that Finch is gleeful.

HOPE (cont'd)

You're so oral, Natalie. You'll never make it to anal!

NATALIE

And you'll never get a dick in your dried out cunt you old maid!

DR. FINCH

Excellent, Natalie! Your hysteria is spectacular! You're leaving the anal and moving onto the phallic.

Natalie smiles, thrilled with any attention. She catches Augusten's eye. They stare at each other, sympathetic.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Oh, did I mention that Hope is an animal lover? She has a cat named Freud.

INT. NATALIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

That speaks to her.

Hope holds Freud tightly as Natalie and Augusten look on.

HOPE

She's dying. She told me.

NATALIE

Hope, Freud wasn't talking to you, okay? Because fucking cats can't talk.

(CONTINUED)

HOPE

Freud is dying, she told me through her purrs which I can translate. She'll be dead by the end of the week.

Hope leaves.

NATALIE

I need a cigarette.

AUGUSTEN

Me too.

Natalie gives Augusten his first cigarette.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

The next day, Hope went missing. We found her in the basement.

INT. BASEMENT -- DAY

Natalie takes pictures of Hope posed next to a laundry basket in which she's trapped Freud. The flashlight Natalie has aimed through the basket creates subtle slats across Hope's cheekbones. The cat growls in distress.

NATALIE

Tilt your head toward the lightbulb. Great. This is gonna be a fantastically morbid photograph, don't you think Augusten?

AUGUSTEN

This is animal abuse.

HOPE

Freud asked me to this, she contacted me during my REM sleep. She said she had hung on for as long as she could and she needs me to keep her company so she doesn't die alone.

Agnes appears at the top of the stairs.

AGNES

What are you all doing down there? You'd better not be engaging in pot or other activities. I won't allow that in my house.

NATALIE

Shut up, you hag. Leave us alone. How long are you gonna stay down here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOPE
Until Freud dies.

INT. GRAVE -- DAY

A dead Freud lies two feet under. Augusten and the Finches loom above the grave, all in funereal black. One by one they throw handfuls of dirt onto the stiff calico corpse.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
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.

DR. FINCH
Augusten, pay your respects.

Augusten extends his hand. In SLOW MOTION, particles of DIRT dreamily sift down onto Freud's body.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
Part of me felt bummed for the cat. But the thing that really made me sad was that probably because of the way my mom raised me, I have more in common with the Finches than with Fern's family.

ANGLE: a CAR pulls up. Augusten runs around the side of the house to see his mother's station wagon. No beep, nothing. Excited, Augusten runs to car to see Deirdre, staring straight ahead and not blinking, even when Augusten bangs on the window. He knocks harder. She opens the door.

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

Augusten gets in, jubilant and relieved.

AUGUSTEN
You're back!

DEIRDRE
(flatly, staring straight ahead)
Are you ready to go to Amherst? Do you have your things?

AUGUSTEN
Where'd you go?

Deirdre doesn't answer. She doesn't know. She silently drives away as the Finches watch on the lawn.

EXT. SMITH CAMPUS -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie take a Saturday stroll, trying to pass themselves off as sophisticated collegiates.

AUGUSTEN

You should let me bleach your bangs. It'd be really cool.

NATALIE

Is that what you want to be...a hairdresser?

AUGUSTEN

God. If I turn into one of those nelly faggots who give old ladies purple rinses, I'll kill myself, I really will.

(a beat)

What I really want is my own hair empire. My own product line, like Vidal Sassoon. What do you want to be?

Natalie pauses, then points wistfully at a PRETTY COED.

NATALIE (cont'd)

Her. A student at Smith, majoring in literature. Normal.

AUGUSTEN

(relating)

You should apply.

NATALIE

They'd never let me in.

AUGUSTEN

Why not? You're smart.

NATALIE

But I'm a Finch. I'm used goods. Can you imagine the background check...when they find out what goes on in that house? It'll be like in "Frankenstein." The villagers will surround the castle and burn it to the fucking ground.

They laugh, but Augusten sees in her eyes a great sadness. He has never felt closer to anyone. They link arms, then --

AUGUSTEN

I'm gay.

(CONTINUED)

NATALIE

Big deal. I know. My adopted brother Neil is gay too.

AUGUSTEN

Where does he live?

NATALIE

He used to live out back in the barn. But then he got mad that dad wouldn't give him a room in the house, so he moved to Easthampton, into some boarding house. But he still keeps his room in the barn. Kind of like a pied-a-terre.

They reach a TICKET BOOTH.

NATALIE (cont'd)

I'll call him, you two should get together. I think you'd really like each other. Two please.

They are given tickets and enter an aging MOVIE PALACE. The marquee reads "Lina Wertmuller Film Festival."

EXT. MOVIE PALACE -- THE NEXT SATURDAY -- DUSK

Augusten and NEIL BOOKMAN exit and walk through falling snow.

BOOKMAN

That director is, like, fucked up.

AUGUSTEN

God, I've seen it four times this week already! I just love French movies, where the first cousins fall in love and then stab each other as a weeping clown appears.

(pauses)

I don't really understand the clown part.

BOOKMAN

He represents the loss of innocence.

Augusten is wildly in awe of Bookman, with his dashing leather jacket and mustache. He's a guy's guy.

BOOKMAN

So Natalie said you wanted to meet me. I feel flattered. I feel famous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

(embarrassed)

Yeah, well, now that I'm staying at the Finches all the time, I wanted to know everybody.

BOOKMAN

Do you see your mom at all?

AUGUSTEN

Sometimes, on the weekends. Our new house only has one bedroom, so...

BOOKMAN

It's tough to have a sick mom, right? My mom couldn't handle me either. Neither could my dad.

AUGUSTEN

Yeah, mine too. He never wants to see me. And my mother, I guess she's been through some really bad things and she needs to focus on herself right now.

BOOKMAN

And where does that leave you? At the crazy house of the even crazier Finch.

AUGUSTEN

Do you think he's crazy?

BOOKMAN

In a good way. I think he's a genius. If he hadn't adopted me, shit, I don't know what I would have done.

AUGUSTEN

Couldn't you just be his patient? I don't understand why he had to adopt you.

BOOKMAN

Finch believes that a person becomes an adult at thirteen. At that age, no adult can tell them what to do. And they can chose their own parents. I did it, Natalie did it.

AUGUSTEN

Natalie's never mentioned that to me.

BOOKMAN

Oh really. Ask her about Terrence Maxwell. You're thirteen, right?

(CONTINUED)

Augusten nods. This lands for Bookman, he smiles. Then --

BOOKMAN (cont'd)
Yeah, old Finchey saved my life, that's
for sure. He was the first person I told
I was gay.

AUGUSTEN
I'm gay too.

Bookman stops under a streetlamp, pretending to be stunned.

BOOKMAN
Holy Mary mother of God. So that's what
this is about -- you're gay?

AUGUSTEN
Yeah, I thought Natalie had told you.

BOOKMAN
Small world, right? Smoke?

Bookman holds out his pack and Augusten takes one. Bookman
lights it for him. Augusten drags on the cigarette and looks
up at Bookman. He looks astonishingly handsome under the lamp
with the snow falling around him like a halo.

BOOKMAN
I just want you to know, I'm here for you
whenever you need to talk, little man. I
mean, night or day. You can talk to me
about anything, this or anything else.

They head off into the darkness.

BOOKMAN (cont'd)
And don't ever worry. I will never take
advantage of you.

INT. BOOKMAN'S ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

WATER in a bedside table BONG sloshes violently.

BOOKMAN'S VOICE
You fucker. Yes, fuck, yes. Jesus mother
fucking Christ!

There is a gagging sound and then the sloshing stops.
Augusten enters the frame, flushed. He lays his head down,
overwhelmed. Bookman joins him on the pillow.

AUGUSTEN
What just happened?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOOKMAN

That was called sex. You think you're gay? That's what gay men do.

Bookman gets up, revealing he's naked. He steps into jeans.

BOOKMAN (cont'd)

You swallowed. That was incredible, you have a hot mouth. Wanna beer?

AUGUSTEN

No thank you.

Augusten looks around the room, which is bare except for some black and white photographs. Augusten zeroes in at one of a BLACK BOY (13) who is naked from the waist up and staring at him with sad eyes as if to say "welcome to the club."

BOOKMAN

I took that one. It's not very good.
I'm not very good at anything.

(a beat)

Come on, get dressed. I have to drive you back to Finch's.

AUGUSTEN

I want to go to my Mom's.

INT. BOOKMAN'S TRANS-AM -- NIGHT

Bookman is driving, Augusten stares out the window at the passing lights. Music plays lowly on the eight-track.

BOOKMAN

You okay with what happened?

AUGUSTEN

Yeah. Sure.

BOOKMAN

Good. I hope I didn't hurt you. I just wanted to show you what you were in for.

Silence. The windows start to fog up, making Augusten feel like there is no one in the world outside of this car.

EXT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT (LATER)

Bookman's car pulls up and idles at the curb.

INT. BOOKMAN'S CAR -- NIGHT

AUGUSTEN

Well...thanks for everything.

Bookman's smiling eyes are warm and moist.

BOOKMAN

Thank you.

EXT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Augusten slowly heads up the walk. He wants to seem cool. But as soon as Bookman's Trans-Am roars away, Augusten runs up the steps. He's got to talk to his mom. He opens the door --

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

-- and freezes as he sees Fern, with her face buried between his mother's legs. Deirdre is sprawled on the sofa with her eyes squeezed shut. Fern moves her head from side to side like a dog gnawing on a rawhide bone. They are both naked.

Deirdre freezes. Fern sees Augusten. Her eyes register real terror. As Augusten flees, Fern howls like an animal.

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

Fern, Fern, it's okay.

EXT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A dazed Augusten simply stands there, unsure what to do. He hears the door open. Hands on shoulders spin him around. Fern is dressed but untucked, hair dented, crying. She tries to pull Augusten close, to comfort him, kiss him, but he pulls away. He doesn't want her sloppy still-wet mouth on him.

FERN

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

Augusten pushes her away. She runs down the steps and cuts across the lawn, head bowed in shame like she was ducking rain. Augusten pauses, then enters the house to see --

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

-- Deirdre, cross-legged on the couch, coolly smoking.

DEIRDRE

I wish you enjoyed school more. Although I guess it must be very dull compared to your life with me. Would you please hand me my nightgown?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His mother's breezy attitude makes him mad. He throws the nightgown, just missing her smoldering More.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

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.

AUGUSTEN

I just don't understand you. How could I not know? How long have you and Fern been together?

DEIRDRE

I've loved Fern for a very long time. Our relationship became physical a number of weeks ago. The intimate details are between Fern and me.

Deirdre tugs on her nightgown and heads for --

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

-- where Augusten watches as she spoons Sanka into a mug.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

I worry about you so. I worry about you and school. The law says you have to go.

AUGUSTEN

Well fuck that.

Augusten sits at a small table and lights a More.

DEIRDRE

Augusten. Please don't smoke my cigarettes. You have a pack of your own, though I wish you wouldn't smoke.

AUGUSTEN

Well, I do.

Deirdre sits down. Augusten looks at her, vulnerable.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

So it's genetic?

DEIRDRE

I don't know if you got my talent, Augusten. I've never read your writing.

Augusten is suddenly too weary to share what he really means.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

Does Fern's family know?

DEIRDRE

No. And it's important that her husband and her family not know what's going on between us.

Rattled, Deirdre lights another cigarette. Mother and son smoke in silence. Building up to something. Until --

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

All my life I have been oppressed, Augusten. And all my life I have worked hard to fight this 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. In those days, black people were called niggers. And I knew that word nigger was a dirty word. And it was a word filled with hatred and anger. I knew Elsa was no nigger. I knew it was wrong.

Tears of rage fill Deirdre's eyes but she won't cry.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

It has taken me all my life to find myself as an artist. And to find 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.

She takes a long drag, to steady herself.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

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 will not accept more oppression. I have spent my entire life fighting oppression. I hope I don't have to fight you, too.

Silence. Augusten feels as if he should clap. He doesn't.

AUGUSTEN

Can I have five dollars?

DEIRDRE

May I have five dollars. Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUGUSTEN

So I can skip school tomorrow and buy tickets to the movies.

DEIRDRE

(pauses, then with a sigh --)
Go get my pocketbook and I'll take a look.

Augusten exits. Alone now, Deirdre can let her emotions out with no front. A sob of shame and fear escapes from her throat, but she hears Augusten coming and composes herself. He hands her a big purse. As she searches through it --

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

So you've been spending a lot of time at the Finches house.

AUGUSTEN

Are there other options I'm not aware of?

DEIRDRE

I think it's good for you to be around people like that. I'm just so emotionally drained right now. Struggling in my own battle to find myself, once and for all. It's just very difficult for me to be the parent you need.

Deirdre extends an envelope to him with the \$5 on top of it.

AUGUSTEN

What's this?

DEIRDRE

Good news, you need to give it to the doctor.

AUGUSTEN

What is it?

DEIRDRE

Adoption papers. Dr. Finch has agreed to become your legal guardian.

AUGUSTEN

My what?!

DEIRDRE

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.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

You're giving me away to your shrink?

DEIRDRE

No. I'm doing what I think is best for you, best for us. I love you very, very much. And I will always be your parent. And you will always be my son.

Augusten races out. PULL OUT on Deirdre, alone at the small table, like a character in a Hopper painting.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- LATE AFTERNOON (DAYS LATER)

Augusten and Bookman lay on his bed, intimately face to face.

AUGUSTEN

My fucking father won't even give me money for food. He won't take my calls.

BOOKMAN

Yeah, he's basically worthless.

AUGUSTEN

Just like my mom.

BOOKMAN

Just like the fucking nuns who beat me.

AUGUSTEN

God, sometimes I feel like taking a butcher knife and stabbing them both!

BOOKMAN

I understand.

AUGUSTEN

You're the only one who does.

BOOKMAN

You're becoming my whole world, Augusten.
(matter-of-fact)
Wanna do it up the ass?

EXT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON (SIMULTANEOUS)

As a concerned Finch eavesdrops --

DR. FINCH'S VOICE

How close are you to Bookman, Augusten?

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

TIGHT on Dr. Finch's APPOINTMENT BOOK. Augusten is his 3 P.m.

AUGUSTEN

It started out as friends but now it's more than that. He's in love with me and I'm in love with him too.

DR. FINCH

This is a sexual relationship.

A defiant Augusten nods, welcoming correction. Instead --

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

I've got to tell you young man, while I don't believe it's wrong for a younger person to be intimately involved with someone older, I am concerned about your choice. Frankly, you could do better.

AUGUSTEN

You mean than a schizophrenic? He told me. He tells me everything.

DR. FINCH

Bookman isn't a stable man. His problems run very, very deep.

AUGUSTEN

He seems okay.

DR. FINCH

I'm not saying you can't see him. Like you said, you're already involved. But I would like you to keep me abreast of the situation. I want you to tell me if you sense that things are taking a turn for the worse.

AUGUSTEN

Fine.

Finch turns and reaches for a bottle on his bookshelf.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

Would you like a few of these?

AUGUSTEN

What are they?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Let me see here. I just got these in the mail, so I'm not sure...

(slides bifocals up his nose)

Oh, yes. Okay, these are just a mild anti-anxiety medication. They might make you feel a little calmer --

AUGUSTEN

I'm calm.

DR. FINCH

-- when I tell you you have to go to school.

AUGUSTEN

I go to school.

DR. FINCH

I'm onto your clever tricks, son. I know you stay until homeroom, when they do attendance. And then you skip out.

EXT. SCHOOL -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Finch watches in his car as Augusten races out of school and meets a waiting Bookman. Augusten joyously jumps on his back and Bookman carries him down the block, piggie-back style.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- SIMULTANEOUS (PRESENT)

AUGUSTEN

You're the one who says a person is free at thirteen. I'm thirteen.

DR. FINCH

The compulsory education laws are such that you have to attend until you're sixteen.

AUGUSTEN

I'm not going. I can't.

DR. FINCH

It can't be that bad, Augusten. You're in junior high for Chrissakes

INT. SCHOOL -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Augusten is roughly shoved against his locker.

COOL BOY

Fag.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

Finch is moved by the story. Then softly --

DR. FINCH

Where would we be without our painful
childhoods? We wouldn't exist.

(silence, then --)

Well...the only loophole, or way I can
see to get you out of school for any
length of time, would be for you to
commit suicide.

AUGUSTEN

You want me to kill myself?

DR. FINCH

If you tried to kill yourself, then I
could legally remove you from school.
I could explain to the school board that
you were psychologically unfit to attend,
that you needed intensive treatment.

AUGUSTEN

(confused)

Should I slit my wrists, or...

DR. FINCH

No, no, it would be a staged suicide
attempt. A ruse.

(excitement building)

Yes, this could work! And your poor
mother would have to find you, and be the
one to drive you to the hospital. And, of
course, you'd have to remain for three
weeks, maybe a month. For observation.

AUGUSTEN

I don't know...

DR. FINCH

Where's your spirit of adventure?

INT. DR. FINCH'S CAR -- DAY

Finch drives, Deirdre's in the front seat, a worried Augusten
is in the back, his forehead pressed against the window.

DEIRDRE

Would the men in my life like to hear
some of the poem I've been working on?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH
Certainly Deirdre.

DEIRDRE
May I smoke, Dr. Finch?

DR. FINCH
By all means.

DEIRDRE
Thank you.

Deirdre lights a More and begins to read.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)
"My Phantom Self." By Deirdre Burroughs.

Augusten doesn't react as Deirdre begins to read, enunciating perfectly, each inflection rehearsed.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)
"My uterus aches for the eggs I can no longer retrieve..."

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

The car speeds toward its destination.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- LATER

Surrounded by green pastures and cows. Finch's car pulls into a half-circle driveway and stops.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Finch looks at Augusten in the rearview mirror.

DR. FINCH
It's very important that you not ever tell anybody about this. I could lose my medical license.

The mystery is scary to Augusten. What are they going to do? Why are they at this farm house? He nods.

DR. FINCH
I'll be back momentarily. You both just sit right here and don't talk to anyone.

Finch exits. A long silence, then --

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

Well, you certainly have created quite an adventure for yourself.

(a beat)

The air is so clean out here, so fresh.
It reminds me of when I was a little girl in Georgia.

She promptly lights a More, inhales deeply and turns around in her seat to address Augusten.

DEIRDRE

The doctor told me about your relationship with Neil Bookman.

(smiles)

I am very very fond of that young man. He's always been very supportive of me and my writing.

AUGUSTEN

So you're not pissed?

DEIRDRE

Look, Augusten. I don't want you to suffer from the same sort of oppression that I suffered from as a girl. Because I know how difficult it is to reclaim one's self. I'll tell you, sometimes I wish I had been raised by a mother like me. You're very lucky that I've done so much work, emotionally. And it makes me so happy to be able to support you.

AUGUSTEN

Good. Because he's insane over me.

DEIRDRE

You have my full support in your relationship.

Augusten stares at the mooing cows.

AUGUSTEN

How's Fern?

DEIRDRE

(darkening)

I love her very much, but her sanctimonious crap just really gets on my nerves. Fern is a very controlling woman. Her husband isn't supportive of her relationship with me. And that just creates additional stress.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUGUSTEN

I hope it works out for you.

A long pause. Then, brightening --

DEIRDRE

My poem is already fifty pages long. I truly do believe it's going to make me a very famous woman. Let me read another --

AUGUSTEN

(erupting)

I don't care about your fucking poem! I am miserable! You have to do something!

Deirdre blinks from the shock of the outburst. Then --

DEIRDRE

Well, I care very much about this *fucking* poem as you call it. I am putting everything I have into this writing!

AUGUSTEN

What about me?!

DEIRDRE

You're an adult. You're thirteen. You've got a mind and a will of your own.

AUGUSTEN

He's 33-years-old! This morning he said he wished they could package my cum like icecream so he could eat it all day!

Silence. Then eyes blazing --

DEIRDRE

Goddamnit, Augusten. Why are you doing this to me? I need support right now. Not attacks from you.

Augusten looks back out the window.

AUGUSTEN

You're a fucking terrible mother.

DEIRDRE

And you're a goddamned ungrateful son.

Deirdre suddenly feels shaky. Quietly --

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

I can't deal with you when you're all wild like this.

Finch enters the car with a paper bag and immediately picks up on the tension.

DR. FINCH

What's going on here?

DEIRDRE

Are you sure this is such a good idea, Dr. Finch?

DR. FINCH

Deirdre, are you doubting my parental judgement?

Finch puts a hand on her knee, to comfort her. She stiffens, uncomfortable. He notices and removes the hand. He removes a pint of Jack Daniels and some pills from the bag, then turns to Augusten. Deirdre looks out the window and doesn't watch.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

Here. I want you to take three of these pills and wash them down with some bourbon.

Augusten swallows the pills. He sputters and coughs. It feels like fire burning his throat.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

The story is you tried to kill yourself. And your mother found you.

AUGUSTEN

And I don't have to go to school?

DR. FINCH

Not for a while, son.

In SLOW MOTION, a sleepy Augusten falls to his right --

INT. HOSPITAL -- EMERGENCY ROOM -- DAY (LATER)

-- onto a GURNEY, which is wheeled down a hall at warp speed.

FEMALE VOICE

Augusten. Augusten stay with us.

Augusten cracks his eyes to see a WOMAN IN WHITE and Deirdre. Deirdre is crying, hysterical. She's either acting per Finch's instructions or she's genuinely feeling guilty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

Who are you?

NURSE

I'm a nurse. You're in a hospital. We have to get these pills out of your stomach. You don't really want to die, do you?

DEIRDRE

Oh, God. Augusten, don't you die on me. Wake up. Augusten, wake up!

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM -- DAY

A sweaty semi-coherent Augusten gags and vomits as a tube is roughly shoved down his throat and his stomach is pumped.

Augusten has a distinct sensation. He FALLS THROUGH THE AIR in slow-motion, connected neither to earth or sky, until --

INT. WHITE ROOM -- DAY

Augusten's eyes spring open with a start. Was he dreaming?

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

Hello.

Augusten looks over to see a YOUNG MAN sitting on another twin bed in this white sterile room. This is CREEPY KEVIN.

More of the room comes into focus. The fluorescent overhead lights, the bars on the window and Creepy Kevin, who is completely naked except for a pointy green party hat. Augusten slowly sits up. The room spins.

CREEPY KEVIN

You want some water?

Augusten nods. Creepy Kevin walks to the door and yells.

CREEPY KEVIN (cont'd)

The new kid's awake and he wants some water!

Within seconds a NURSE appears with a tray.

NURSE

How are you feeling?

AUGUSTEN

Tired.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NURSE

No wonder. You can't take half a bottle of Valium and a quart of booze and not feel tired.

She hands him a cup of lukewarm water. He gulps it. She wraps a cuff around his arm and takes his blood pressure.

AUGUSTEN

Where am I?

NURSE

For starters, you're alive. Of course, that's the bad news I guess. Kevin, take off that hat and put on some clothes.

She exits. Kevin scratches his balls.

CREEPY KEVIN

The doctors and nurses? They're all crazy here.

AUGUSTEN

What is this place?

CREEPY KEVIN

The loony bin.

AUGUSTEN

(groggily concerned)

I thought I was going to a hospital...

CREEPY KEVIN

I'm in here because I tried to kill myself. My parents are pressuring me to go to a college I don't want to go to and marry a girl I don't want to marry. It's like my whole life is already mapped out for me, at nineteen. I'm so sick of it. So fuck it. I showed them.

He giggles darkly and extends his wrists. Grotesque purple gouges run in vertical lines.

CREEPY KEVIN (cont'd)

What are you in for?

AUGUSTEN

(quietly)

A vacation.

Augusten curls himself into a fetal position.

EXT. MEMORIAL HOSPITAL -- TWO WEEKS LATER

A YELLOW TAXI idles. A pale but well-groomed Augusten exits. He looks up to see CREEPY KEVIN in a third-story window. Kevin quietly waves goodbye.

INT. CAB -- DAY

Augusten gets in.

CAB DRIVER

Where to?

AUGUSTEN

Home.

CAB DRIVER

Where's home?

Augusten is silent. Sadly, he's not sure anymore.

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

The yellow cab pulls up. Augusten gets out with his suitcase. He looks up at the dilapidated pink monstrosity and sighs.

INT. FINCH LIVING ROOM -- DAY (LATER)

A withdrawn Augusten sits with Agnes on the couch, watching "Dark Shadows" and eating nuggets of Purina. Agnes looks over at him, then pulls out a WRAPPED OBJECT from between ratty cushions. She hands it over without looking away from the TV.

Augusten looks at it, suspicious. He opens the present revealing it's A BOOK -- THE HANDBOOK OF COSMETOLOGY.

AGNES (cont'd)

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

Augusten flips through the book revealing black and white line illustrations of perms, modern hair-cuts and --

AUGUSTEN

Cold waves. Those are really hard.

AGNES

Well, now you can learn how to do them.

Augusten gets really quiet and still.

(CONTINUED)

AGNES

It's good to have a dream. Dreams can get you through the hard times.

AUGUSTEN

What's your dream?

AGNES

Me? Oh, I was never fancy enough to have one of those. I was always too busy, working so the doctor could go to school. And then the kids came, and raising a family keeps you on the run, so...

Her voice just trails off.

AUGUSTEN

Maybe that was your dream. Having a family.

Agnes' eyes fill with emotional tears.

AGNES

Yes. That was a dream.

AUGUSTEN

It's a good one to have.

They turn back to the television and watch in silence.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Augusten sits on his bed, escaping into his journal.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Someday, I hope to meet Brooke Shields. I think we'd be excellent friends because I truly think she's a gifted actress. She just hasn't had the right role yet.

A soft knock at the door. Augusten stops writing.

AUGUSTEN

Come in.

BOOKMAN

(sitting on bed)

Hi, Jocko.

AUGUSTEN

No, dog. You sit at the bottom near my feet or you sit on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOOKMAN

Please don't be like that to me tonight.
Not tonight, I need you.

AUGUSTEN

Good, then that's exactly what you won't have. I was in the hospital for two weeks. Nobody visited me then. So you don't deserve to need me now.

Bookman winces, as if water has been flicked in his face.

BOOKMAN

Come on, man. I can't stop thinking about you. You've got this fucking power over me. It's like there's nothing else in my life. Like it's a stage, all blackened out with only one light in the center. You.

AUGUSTEN

Well, that's too bad for you because I think you're completely pathetic. You sicken me.

Bookman begins to cry. He hunches over and brings his hands up to his face.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

Good, you cry. You deserve to be miserable and suffer. You're a pathetic failure of a man. I know that I certainly don't love you anymore.

BOOKMAN

Please.

Bookman grabs Augusten's hand, tears streaming down his face.

AUGUSTEN

Fine. This one last time.

Bookman pulls a tub of Queen Helene's Cholesterol hair conditioner off a shelf.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

Augusten looks at the wall, feeling empty. Bookman, finished, lights up a cigarette.

BOOKMAN

Jesus fucking Christ you're tight. It's fantastic.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

Get out.

Bookman pauses, drained by their seesaw relationship. His eyes blaze with anger.

BOOKMAN

You are a monster. You are a fucking evil monster. You're no innocent 14-year-old. You're a fucking psychopath. The way you treat people is so fucking sick I can't even believe that you're allowed to live.

AUGUSTEN

That's good, Neil. Keep going. You poor, pathetic loser of a man. Express all that anger, let it out. And another thing? If you ever get out of line, I'll go straight to the police and you'll be arrested for statutory rape. You'll spend the rest of your life rotting behind bars. Now get the hell out of here.

A shaken Bookman exits. Augusten lies there. We SLOWLY PUSH IN as --

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

During my recent Bookman tirade I became immediately suspicious that I sounded like someone: my mother.

Augusten sits up and starts writing furiously, inspired.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

Journal, if I can talk like her, I can act like her. That's how I can get through this hideous phase of our lives. I just have to embrace...abandon. Like she is.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOME OFFICE -- THE NEXT NIGHT

Deirdre types feverishly, possessed. Augusten watches her.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

If she feels like writing poetry from the hours of three to five in the morning because...

DEIRDRE

This is good, my heart speaks to me the best in the wee hours.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

...she just does it, and has no problem having me pour her favorite iced-tea for her between stanzas.

Augusten pours a glass. She drinks and keeps typing. Augusten picks up his journal and writes.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Okay, so this is the plan.

INT. AMHERST MOVIE PALACE -- DAY

A transfixed Augusten eats popcorn as he gazes up at Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

If I want to live at the movies because I don't have to go to school anymore and watch a revival of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" over and over because it's the closest thing I have to home movies, I'm gonna do that.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Very neat and orderly, as usual. CLOSE on various polished items -- rings, coins, shelves covered with his beloved aluminum foil...etc.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

And I'm saying goodbye to shiny. Shiny is a discipline, it takes hours to remove the tarnish.

TIME LAPSE on the silver objects as they take on a dull cast.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

Tarnish runs wild at the filthy Finch house...it's like I'm the shiny and they're the tarnish. I can't keep up.

All the silver objects are blackened now. Augusten sighs and starts throwing them away in the trash.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

So I'm giving in.

Augusten looks at his neatly made bed and starts jumping on it. He then claws off the aluminum foil. He slowly approaches a mirror and examines himself -- neat, clean...very Brooks Brothers. Augusten raises a pair of scissors...

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

...and attacks a pair of Chess King jeans, ripping out holes, the crotch, fraying the edges. QUICK CUTS: Augusten rolls perm rods into his hair. TIME LAPSE...they begin to smoke. He unrolls the rods and turns...

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

...to look at himself in the mirror. It's a completely new boy...he looks wild, unkempt, bohemian and is sporting the loose spiral perm look that is all the 1979 rage.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Until my mother gets famous and takes me back, I'm going to live my life like she does --

PUSH IN on Augusten, convinced.

AUGUSTEN

No rules.

CUT TO:

INT. FERN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Fern is at the stove, making dinner for her family. RACK FOCUS, behind her: her husband Steve reads the newspaper as her well-mannered children set the table. The phone rings.

FERN

Hello?

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

I miss you. I miss the smell of you.

STEVE

Who is it?

A long emotional beat for Fern. Then, into the phone --

FERN

I'm not interested in what you're selling. Don't call here again.

Fern hangs up.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Soaking in the tub, Deirdre listens, numb, to her phone's dial tone.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOME OFFICE -- NIGHT (LATER)

Sobbing, Deirdre tears up the poem she's been working on.

DEIRDRE

It's shit, it's all shit!

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. DEIRDRE'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

Deirdre opens a cabinet containing dozens of Finch-prescribed pill bottles and just stares.

CUT TO:

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- THE NEXT DAY

Augusten and Natalie eat lunch. Natalie slurps her soup while looking at a mute Augusten. Rain begins to fall against the dirty window. There is a crackle of thunder, then --

NATALIE

How was the loony bin? Did you get to see any lobotomies?

(off his silence --)

I'm digging the new look. You look so much better.

Still no response. Natalie grabs a cigarette and heads to the stove. She flicks on a gas burner and leans down, to light it. Her hair CATCHES ON FIRE. She screams, slaps it out and then laughs.

NATALIE

My fucking hair, oh my God!

Augusten remains stone. Natalie sits down again.

NATALIE (cont'd)

That was funny. You should be laughing.

He doesn't. Silence as she drags on her cigarette.

NATALIE (cont'd)

You know, Augusten, I'm not going to throw you a pity party. So fucking just get over yourself.

AUGUSTEN

Fuck you, Natalie. You don't know what it's like to be sent away.

(CONTINUED)

NATALIE

You're right, I don't.

AUGUSTEN

You don't know what it's like to have a boyfriend that's just using you for sex.

NATALIE

Lucky me.

AUGUSTEN

Who's Terrance Maxwell, Natalie, huh?

She just stares. The name elicits an emotional response.

AUGUSTEN

Tell me who he fucking is, I know he's somebody and I know he hurt you, I can see it on your pinched little face.

Upset, she clears her soup bowl.

NATALIE

Never heard of him.

AUGUSTEN

Tell me so I don't feel so alone!

NATALIE

(whirls around, emotional)

He's the only person I've ever loved and he doesn't want me anymore! Feel better?!

Silence. More thunder.

NATALIE

He was 41 when I was thirteen.

(quietly)

He had a Bang & Olefson stereo.

AUGUSTEN

How'd you meet him?

NATALIE

Terrance started seeing my dad after his mother died. She was an alcoholic and burnt to death in her easy chair.

(a beat)

She was the only one who supported his tennis career. He had been fucking her since he was fifteen. She left him everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Natalie pauses, this is difficult for her.

NATALIE (cont'd)
When Dad found out he was loaded and
alone he put two and two together and
introduced us.

Thunder. Natalie smiles slightly, remembering her first love.

NATALIE (cont'd)
He told me I was pretty. He made me
believe it.

Natalie takes a hit off her cigarette and looks at the
burning ash for a second. Then --

NATALIE (cont'd)
After he legally adopted me, we drank
1965 Rothschild, he had a wine cellar. I
was such the sophisticate, right?

Augusten is very moved by her.

NATALIE (cont'd)
Terrance could never accept the fact that
he wasn't good enough to make it on the
pro tennis tournament. He'd come home
after being cut from first rounds and the
house would be a mess and he'd scream at
me. 'You're so filthy! Look at this
place! Look at your feet, they're
disgusting! My mother fucked me and kept
my house clean, why can't you?!'

Natalie looks down at the table and starts scrapping away
something congealed with her thumbnail.

NATALIE (cont'd)
One day he broke my collarbone. I had to
hitchhike to the emergency room. I passed
out on the road, someone found me.
(matter-of-factly)
Dad told him we'd press charges and he'd
go to jail unless he donated money to my
Smith college fund, so he did. \$75,000.

AUGUSTEN
That's so great, now you can --

NATALIE
My dad spent it. Every penny. So the IRS
wouldn't take this house.

(CONTINUED)

Thunder. Natalie looks him straight in the eye.

NATALIE (cont'd)

I do know what it's like, Augusten. To
love somebody who doesn't deserve it.
Because they're all you have.

Hot tears spill down her cheek. Ashamed, she wipes them away.

NATALIE (cont'd)

God I hate my life.

AUGUSTEN

I hate this kitchen. I need high
ceilings.

NATALIE

Me too.

AUGUSTEN

Let's get rid of it then.

PUSH IN on Augusten, dark and menacing.

AUGUSTEN

Let's take down the ceiling.

CUT TO:

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

Deirdre's car is at the curb as a curtain of rain pours down.

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

Deirdre looks straight ahead, emotionless. Through the
passenger window, we see a FIGURE, running through the
downpour. The door opens, and it's not Augusten, it's Agnes.
Drenched to the bone. She takes a beat, to muster courage.

AGNES

Deirdre, I need to talk to you.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

With a violent sweep of her hand, Natalie knocks all the
dishes on the table to the floor. Augusten and Natalie jump
up on the table and begin pounding the ceiling with rocks.

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

AGNES

Deirdre, did you hear me?

Deirdre slowly swivels her head and smiles slightly.

DEIRDRE

Hello, Agnes.

(a beat)

Why am I here?

AGNES

You have an appointment. Your regular two o'clock.

DEIRDRE

Yes. Why are you here?

AGNES

Because I want you to stop seeing my husband.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

Finch is in session with an enraged Bookman.

BOOKMAN

I'm a fuck-up. And it's your fault!

DR. FINCH

That's right Neil, blame your father for your inability to focus, direct all that rage at me if that makes you feel better.

BOOKMAN

I can't focus because of the voices! My parents have given you thousands of dollars and I'm still sick! You haven't helped me get better!

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie are now attacking the ceiling with iron skillets. Ancient white horsehair plaster rains down.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

DR. FINCH

That's right, Neil, I've done nothing. Apparently, I never pulled some strings and got you a scholarship to the University of Rochester so you could pursue your photographic interests.

BOOKMAN

You just wanted to get rid of me!

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

AGNES

I don't want to get rid of Augusten Deirdre, he's part of the family now. Just you, I just need you to go.

DEIRDRE

But then I'll miss my therapy. I need Dr. Finch.

AGNES

No, I need Dr. Finch! I'm not as pretty as you. I don't have your talent. All I have is this family. And this family doesn't work without him.

DEIRDRE

No, I can't leave Dr. Finch. I'm on the verge of finally breaking through to my creative unconscious. And I would never, with Dr. Finch I have never --

(wild-eyed)

I'm with Fern now. Even though she won't leave her fucking husband, I'm with Fern.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

More pounding. More chunks of plaster.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- HALLWAY -- DAY

BOOKMAN

Why won't you let me live in the house and be a part of this family?

DR. FINCH

Because I am the patriarch! And when the patriarch says jump you jump goddamnit! You don't cooperate Neil, and for that you are punished.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie claw out tufts of insulation.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

BOOKMAN

That's not why you won't let me live in this house.

Before Finch can react, Bookman bounds up from his chair and looms over the doctor, trapping him. Finch looks up. Thunder.

BOOKMAN

You won't let me because 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?

DR. FINCH

Our time is up, Neil. I believe we've made a breakthrough today.

Bookman pauses, then slowly raises up, somewhat pleased. It is only now that we see a flicker of fear in Finch's eyes.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

AUGUSTEN

We're breaking through!

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

DEIRDRE

I have to see the doctor now.

Deirdre exits. Agnes sits in quiet defeat.

EXT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- HALLWAY -- DAY

An exiting Bookman runs into an entering Deirdre. They are both crying slightly.

DEIRDRE

Hello, Neil.

BOOKMAN

Hello, Mrs. Burroughs. You look wonderful.

DEIRDRE

Thank you Neil, how's my son?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOOKMAN

He's just great.

DEIRDRE

You be kind to him.

BOOKMAN

I will.

They hug.

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- ROOF -- DAY

A HOLE suddenly opens and hands rip through. POV, looking down the hole: Augusten and Natalie lift their plaster-covered faces to the rain which washes them clean.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

DEIRDRE

That's why I'm blocked Dr. Finch, I'm sure of it.

DR. FINCH

You're not blocked because of Fern, Deirdre. You are constipated creatively because of rage you are not expressing. Scream, Deirdre. Express the pain!

Deirdre screams.

INT. DEIRDRE'S CAR -- DAY

Agnes screams.

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

A now soaking wet Bookman screams.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie scream.

INT. FINCH OFFICE -- DAY

Silence. Deirdre sits there for a long beat. Then --

DR. FINCH

Fern has ceased to be a suitable companion for you, Deirdre. You need someone who worships you, who'll feed your talent. I have a candidate.

EXT. FINCH OFFICE -- DAY

An AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN (20s) sits patiently in a chair. Finch and Deirdre exit. Deirdre and the woman smile shyly.

DR. FINCH

Deirdre, I'd like you to meet Dorothy Ambrose, my three o'clock. Dorothy's creative like you, she paints her fingernails to match her moods. What color are we today, Dorothy?

Dorothy extends a hand to show off her long vibrant talons.

DOROTHY

Shell pink. I've had a nice morning.

DR. FINCH

(lowly, in Deirdre's ear)
Dorothy has a trust fund. It was established by her father after he showed her his penis on a rowboat.

DEIRDRE

I've always wanted a daughter.

Sunlight streams through the window. The storm has passed.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY (LATER)

Finch enters. Augusten and Natalie sit in the middle of the kitchen under the hole, faces white with plaster.

AUGUSTEN

The ceiling was crushing us.

NATALIE

So we made a skylight.

DR. FINCH

I think it brings a much needed sense of humor to the kitchen.

Finch crunches silently over the debris, opens the fridge and pulls out a slice of comforting bologna. Augusten and Natalie look at each other. That's it? The doorbell rings.

INT. FINCH ENTRYWAY -- DAY

Finch opens the door revealing --

MAN

Dr. Finch?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Yes?

MAN

Michael Shephard, IRS.

Finch just stares.

CUT TO:

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY (LATER)

Finch, Hope and Augusten and Natalie (with plaster still in their hair) watch from a window as the IRS AGENT drives away.

DR. FINCH

(devastated)

Where will I treat the people who need me? How will I provide for my family?

HOPE

You got an extension, Dad.

DR. FINCH

Only six weeks. After six weeks, they take the house.

HOPE

We'll pray, Dad. God will help us.

NATALIE

And when God turns a deaf ear, we can all live in the car, at least it's paid for.

Finch enters his office and quietly closes the door.

HOPE

You're a terrible daughter.

NATALIE

Fuck you, kiss-ass.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- NIGHT (LATER)

A lost Finch sits alone at the table in his wingtips and robe. It's raining again, and a DOZEN DINGED COPPER POTS have been artfully arranged to catch the drops dripping through the hole in the ceiling. Finch's black melancholia is accompanied by the sharp dissonant pings! the drops make hitting the pots. Kumb, Finch pulls out a bottle of pills. He dumps half the bottle in his mouth and chews them, like Pez.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

TIGHT ON FINGERS fumbling in hair. PULL OUT revealing Augusten standing over a seated Bookman, struggling with the Holy Grail of hairdressing: the cold wave.

AUGUSTEN

Damnit, something's not right. It's your hair, Bookman. It lacks proper body.

BOOKMAN

That's because you bleached it until it turned green.

AUGUSTEN

It's ash blond.

BOOKMAN

I'm not complaining. I love it. I love everything you touch.

AUGUSTEN

Natalie, let me try on you.

NATALIE'S VOICE

Fuck that. Forget it.

REVEAL Natalie sitting across from them at the table with a really terrible frizzy perm. She digs in her dry scalp.

NATALIE

I'm through being your guinea pig. Look, my hair's coming out in fistfuls!

AUGUSTEN

Stop scratching like that. You look like you have Down's Syndrome.

They laugh. Augusten bites his lip, then sing-song --

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

Hope...?

REVEAL Hope at the stove with a bad bi-level. She eyes Augusten as if to say "haven't you done enough damage?"

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

Look, one of you has to help me. I don't get into school unless I master the cold wave.

BOOKMAN

Guess you're stuck with me, Jocko.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Augusten sighs. Bookman watches Hope stir her simmering pot.

BOOKMAN

Being in love is fantastic, Hope. You should try it.

HOPE

I'd hardly call you an expert.

Bookman slams his fist on the table, scaring everyone.

BOOKMAN

Are you saying my relationship with Augusten isn't real love?!

HOPE

I'm saying your 'relationship' with Augusten, who is fourteen by the way, is not mature love, no.

BOOKMAN

Bullshit!

HOPE

If you're not man enough to face the truth Neil, you have no business being with a child.

AUGUSTEN

I'm not a child, Hope.

HOPE

I'm sorry, Augusten. I know you're not. You're very mature. I just meant it's different when you're older. Love is different. More mature.

BOOKMAN

And what do you, Miss Iceberg, know about mature love? When's the last time you had anything in your twat besides a tampon?

HOPE

That's enough, Bookman! I'm not going to listen to you when you're talking like a teenage boy...and screwing one!

Natalie gets up and smells the contents of the bubbling pot.

NATALIE

What's in this? I'm starving.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOPE
(a seductive smile)
Things. My secret ingredient.

Drawn by the subtle dare, Natalie tastes it. It's good.

NATALIE
What's the secret ingredient?

HOPE
Freud.

And the room stops.

BOOKMAN
Freud's dead, Hope. You buried her.

HOPE
She was calling for me. I heard her. So I dug her up. She wanted to be reincarnated as a stew.

Natalie spits, frantically trying to remove the taste of dead rotting cat from her tongue.

NATALIE
Oh my god, you fucking lunatic! I knew you were insane!

Disgusted and horrified, everyone leaves the room.

HOPE
I'm only kidding, jerks!

Her eyes fill with lonely tears. Quietly, to herself --

HOPE (cont'd)
Ha ha ha, got some of my anger out.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Deirdre soaks in her tub, contentedly working on a manuscript. Dorothy enters with a dustpan.

DOROTHY
I broke a glass.
(dumps the shards in the water)
I thought if you cut your foot while you were getting out of the tub, you could write about the pain.

Deirdre grabs Dorothy's cheeks with both hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE

Thank you for being supportive of my work. You're such a good pet.

They kiss. O.C. -- a knock at the door. Deirdre and Dorothy turn to see Augusten and Bookman holding overnight bags.

AUGUSTEN

Bookman and Hope aren't getting along, so I wanted to know if we could crash here.

DEIRDRE

What does the doctor say?

AUGUSTEN

Nobody's seen him for days. He's locked himself in his office and won't come out.

DEIRDRE

You can stay on one condition.

(flirtatiously)

Neil, you must sit at my feet while I read part of my new poem to you.

BOOKMAN

It would be an honor, Mrs. Burroughs.

DOROTHY

Wait a minute -- where do you think you're gonna sleep?

AUGUSTEN

We brought sleeping bags. What do you care?

Augusten and Bookman exit. Dorothy is not happy.

INT. DEIRDRE'S LIVING ROOM -- THE NEXT DAY

Deirdre passes Augusten a bowl. He takes out a BLADE OF GRASS and passes the bowl to Dorothy. She in turn passes the bowl to Bookman, who passes it to WOMEN in flannel. Deirdre has started a lesbian poetry group.

DEIRDRE

Today we're going to explore sense memory. I'd like everybody to take their blades of grass and stroke their cheeks with their eyes closed. Can you feel the coolness of the color green? It's soothing, isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dorothy sexily strokes Deirdre's cheek with her blade of grass. Augusten takes their love in. Deirdre turns to him.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Could you make me some iced tea? My new medicine makes my throat so dry.

DOROTHY

I'll get it.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Dorothy aggressively dunks several Celestial Seasonings teabags in a pitcher of water. Her nails are blood-red -- the color of anger. Augusten enters.

AUGUSTEN

I always get my mom something to drink when she works. That's our thing.

DOROTHY

Your mother is my thing now. She doesn't want your help and we don't need you around.

(digs in purse)

Here's fifty bucks. Now scram.

AUGUSTEN

You think this whole thing is funny, don't you? You look at my mother's craziness as something to look forward to, something to entertain you.

DOROTHY

You're so mundane. She's not crazy. She is a brilliant artist. If you want Hamburger Helper, go find some other mother.

Augusten takes this in for a moment, then storms back to --

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

-- where Deirdre is doing another sense memory.

DEIRDRE

What memory does the bone bring?

The lesbians all stare, uncomfortable with his anger.

AUGUSTEN

I don't like your new girlfriend.

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

(anxiety instantly rising)
Don't ask me to choose between you or
Dorothy just like your father tried to
make me choose between him and my career,
Augusten. I will not...I cannot be
victimized like that again.

KAT, A BUTCH LESBIAN

Feminism is about having choices
Augusten, not taking them away.

AUGUSTEN

Who the fuck are you?

DEIRDRE

Augusten!

Augusten pauses, then slams out of the house.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY (LATER)

Natalie and Poo forage in the crispy brown Christmas tree.

NATALIE

God, I am so fucking starving. Do you see
anything, Poo?

Poo triumphantly pulls out a CANDY CANE.

NATALIE (cont'd)

This is a fake one. Check the back.

Poo gets down on all fours and scurries under the tree.
Augusten storms through the room, home from Deirdre's.

NATALIE (cont'd)

(darkly)

I told you you'd never escape this place.

Augusten silently races up the stairs. Poo crawls out from
under the branch triumphantly holding a treasure.

POO

I found Dr. Finch!

He extends a moldy two-year-old chocolate SANTA HEAD. Natalie
pauses, then pops it in her mouth and viciously chews.

CUT TO:

INT. FINCH HALLWAY -- DAWN (THE NEXT DAY)

A manic Finch roars down the hallway, knocking on all the closed bedroom doors.

DR. FINCH

Everyone, come quickly! Wake up! A miracle has occurred!

Augusten, Natalie and Hope groggily open their doors.

INT. BATHROOM -- MINUTES LATER

Finch, Hope, Natalie and Augusten stare into a toilet bowl. A confused Agnes enters tying her frayed bathrobe.

AGNES

What's all the fuss about? What are you looking at?

NATALIE

Dad's morning shit.

Agnes looks in the bowl and sees a massive snake-like turd.

DR. FINCH

See? See the way the tip of the coil breaks out of the surface of the water? Holy father!

AGNES

(concerned)

Doctor, let's go back to bed.

DR. FINCH

Agnes, go get a spatula.

(off her resistance)

A spatula, Agnes!

Agnes scurries out of the room.

HOPE

What does it mean, dad?

DR. FINCH

It means our financial situation is turning around. It means things are looking up! The shit is pointing out of the pot and toward heaven, to God.

Hope screams, claps and kisses her father's cheek, as if she just won the Publisher's Clearinghouse. Augusten and Natalie bite the inside of their cheeks, so they don't laugh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
That's right, children, laugh -- God is!
He is the funniest man in the universe.

Agnes scurries in with the spatula. Finch hands it to Hope.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
Hope, I want you to carefully remove this
and take it outside to dry in the sun.

Augusten and Natalie stop laughing. It's gone from funny to
deeply fucked up. As Hope fishes in the toilet --

NATALIE
Now I'll never get into Smith.

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

A disturbed Augusten watches as Hope places Finch's turd on
the picnic table. At the mailbox, Finch opens a letter. ANGLE
on the letter: an insurance reimbursement check for --

DR. FINCH
One thousand dollars! Thank you, Heavenly
Father! Witness the glorious news,
children -- things are turning up! My
turd is indeed a direct communication
from God!

As Finch takes Hope in his arms and dances her around,
Augusten watches. There's something terribly sad about them.

INT. BATHROOM -- THE NEXT DAY

Finch sits on the toilet. He sprays Glade in the air, then --

DR. FINCH
You may come in now.

Hope and Augusten bound in. They peer in the bowl.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
Augusten, ask God a question.

HOPE
He doesn't believe, dad. He doesn't
deserve to ask first.

DR. FINCH
Is that true, Augusten?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

Maybe. But there's no one else I can talk to.

DR. FINCH

Then ask away!

AUGUSTEN

Will I get into beauty school?

Finch studies his nuggets of broken stool.

DR. FINCH

Look at that -- chop, chop chop. Like scissors. I'd say that's a yes.

Augusten smiles softly, somehow comforted.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY (LATER)

Augusten enters to find Agnes, her back to him at the sink, violently scrubbing a casserole dish.

AUGUSTEN

Agnes --

AGNES

Somebody's got to stay on top of things in this house. I'm just trying to hold it all together.

AUGUSTEN

Agnes, I need to ask you something.

AGNES

He's fine. The doctor will be fine. He's just overextended. I need this dish for dinner. I'm making a rice casserole. Rice binds, and if the doctor gets constipated, maybe he'll...

She's overcome by emotion and stops mid-sentence.

AUGUSTEN

That's not what I wanted to ask you.

AGNES

(whirling around)

What do you want, Augusten?!

AUGUSTEN

(emotional)

I want you to make me Hamburger Helper.

(CONTINUED)

Agnes just stares. We SLOW PUSH IN on Augusten as...

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

So there it was at last -- the awful truth.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY (LATER)

Agnes serves Augusten Hamburger Helper.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

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

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- DAY (LATER)

Augusten sits on his bed writing.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Journal, I feel doomed. I should be getting ready for college. Instead, I'm in my mother's psychiatrist's house laying 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?

INT. McDONALD'S -- THE NEXT DAY

Augusten chews and continues to write.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

I turn fifteen today. My parents used to bring me to McDonald's every year to celebrate.

He sadly looks over at a table. A circa 1973 nine-year-old Augusten sits eating the same meal with Deirdre and Norman.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

Nobody talked, but at least they made the effort. Nobody thought God was talking through shit. I want it to be like it used to be.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- DAY (LATER)

Augusten enters and slumps toward the kitchen.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)
I want rules, and boundaries. Because
what I've learned is that without them...

Bookman, Dorothy and Deirdre burst out at him.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE (cont'd)
All life is is a series of surprises.

BOOKMAN AND DOROTHY
Surprise!

DEIRDRE
(a haunting whisper)
Surprise.

Augusten notices instantly that something is wrong with his
mother. She's teetering on the edge. Augusten starts to cry.

BOOKMAN
Augusten, what's wrong?

DOROTHY
He's just overcome, that's all.
I'll get the cake.

INT. DEIRDRE'S KITCHEN -- DAY (LATER)

Two WAX BLOCK CANDLES blaze -- one and five, making 15.
Augusten closes his eyes --

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
I wish this was all a dream.

-- and blows out the candles. He opens his eyes to see --

DEIRDRE
This is good.

-- Deirdre chewing ONE OF THE WAX CANDLES. Everyone stares.

EXT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Dr. Finch knocks politely on the locked door.

DR. FINCH
Deirdre...come along now.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Deirdre cowers behind her desk.

DEIRDRE
I'm not going to any goddamn mental
hospital!

EXT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dr. Finch's calmness contrasts wildly with the pacing sweating behavior of Dorothy. Augusten watches, scared.

DR. FINCH

Now Deirdre, it's just for observation.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

DEIRDRE

I will not be observed!

EXT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

DOROTHY

Don't you hurt her, don't you --

DR. FINCH

Dorothy, calm down!

(back to the door)

Deirdre, I've made an arrangement with the Brattleboro retreat in Vermont. Come out now or we'll have to get the police.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Deirdre begins to cry, afraid. But just then A SNOWFLAKE drifts down from the ceiling.

Deirdre gasps quietly, amazed. She peers out from the desk to see that more snowflakes are falling from the ceiling...it's a lilting snowfall like out of a Russian fairy-tale.

Deirdre slowly stands. She begins to twirl under the gentle shower of flakes, slowly, then faster, faster as...

Finch and Bookman break in to see Deirdre spinning. They grab her by the arms and start pulling her out the door. She sees the snow has stopped and begins to scream.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BRATTLEBORO MENTAL HOSPITAL -- DAY

Deirdre, now in a thin cotton hospital gown, is led into a treatment room kicking and screaming. ORDERLIES strap her down and stick in a mouth guard. Electrodes are attached.

Deirdre receives shock therapy and stops struggling.

EXT. SMITH CAMPUS -- DAY

A glorious sunny day that seems tailor-made to show off bucolic brick and ivy and rolling green hills. Augusten and Natalie sit high on a manicured hill looking down on it all.

NATALIE

God, it's so beautiful here. Sometimes, you just need a little Smith.

A long beat, followed by a worried sigh.

NATALIE

Do you think I'll ever get in? Or am I too fucked up at this point?

AUGUSTEN

I think you can still be fucked up and get into Smith. I mean, think of all the privileged girls that must be suicidal when they first get here. You know, from living this really sheltered, traditional life. All the secret shit that goes on in families.

Silence. Augusten notices how lost Natalie seems as she gazes out into the horizon. To brighten the mood --

AUGUSTEN

When you get into Smith, what are you going to be?

NATALIE

Maybe a psychologist like my dad. Or a singer.

AUGUSTEN

A psychologist or a singer, how similar.

NATALIE

(laughing)

Shut up. If you get to be a writer and be all those different people, then I get to be at least two things.

AUGUSTEN

I don't want to be a writer. Look at my mother.

NATALIE

Not all writers are crazy like your mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

If I inherited her gene to write, I'm sure I got her crazy genes, too.

NATALIE

Well I just don't think you're going to be happy cutting hair. Standing around all day sticking your fingers in people's greasy dirty scalps -- yuck. And besides, you need to face reality, Augusten -- you suck at the cold wave. And because you can't do that, you won't get into beauty school.

The gravity and truth of this hits him hard.

NATALIE

So a writer you will be. One day I entirely believe you will run off to New York City and become a writer. Writing will be your salvation. Just like going to Smith will be mine.

AUGUSTEN

I'll probably just end up as a male prostitute.

NATALIE

You can't do that. Your ass is too skinny.

AUGUSTEN

Ha, ha. If only I had your ass.

NATALIE

If you had my ass you could rule the world.

AUGUSTEN

You know Natalie, Smith would be lucky to have you.

NATALIE

It's not that easy.

AUGUSTEN

That's why you have to do it.

NATALIE

That's why you have to do it, too.

(a beat)

We need to get jobs and get the fuck out of that crazy house.

INT. GROUND ROUND -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie fill out applications. Natalie is so desperate that under "experience" she writes "proficient in salad bar maintenance." Augusten reads this and laughs.

INT. HARLOW LUGGAGE -- DAY

Augusten and Natalie again fill out applications. As soon as they exit, the MANAGER tosses them in the trash.

EXT. SMITH CAMPUS -- DAY (LATER)

TIGHT on Augusten and Natalie's faces. A MIST OF WATER caresses them as they stare straight ahead.

NATALIE

No one wants to hire us.

AUGUSTEN

Listen to that roar...

NATALIE

They think we're freaks.

AUGUSTEN

My mom took me into Manhattan once, to see the museums? The city makes this exact sound.

REVEAL Augusten and Natalie standing next to the Smith campus WATERFALL...a curtain of dramatic, falling water.

NATALIE (cont'd)

I wish we could just vanish into that sound.

Augusten looks over at her and smiles softly.

AUGUSTEN

We could.

Natalie looks at the waterfall's powerful force. She is terrified. But then Augusten sticks out his hand. She hesitates, then grabs it.

NATALIE

Don't let go.

AUGUSTEN

Never.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Holding hands now, the two of them slowly walk through the torrent of rushing water. It beats down on them with an astonishingly cold and powerful force. The sound is deafening. Natalie and Augusten utter primal guttural screams of hysterical laughter until --

They reach a LEDGE behind the waterfall. Drenched to the bone, they sit on the ledge and stare at the sheet of water falling down. It's the most intimate moment of their lives.

NATALIE

Let's never leave here.

Augusten nods as we SLOW PAN OUT.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

SLOW PUSH IN on VARIOUS PATIENTS, who address us directly.

STAN, A BIPOLAR

This is very hard for me. Challenging your authority.

SUE-ANN, A MANIC-DEPRESSIVE

But I was very upset when I got your recent newsletter. I don't think it's normal...that you believe God is talking to you through your feces.

MICHAEL, JUST DEPRESSED

(reading from the newsletter)

"My wife Agnes gave me an enema after a week of constipation. I'm afraid the sudden freezing of the bowels signals that God has chosen to no longer communicate with me."

(looks up)

This is a joke...right?

JORANN

My son says what you've done is illegal. Making me pay you fifteen percent from my social security checks. I need money to eat.

SUE-ANN, A MANIC-DEPRESSIVE

I was, um, also very disturbed in our last session, when you asked me to sit on Santa's lap and then tell you what I wanted for Christmas.

(a deep breath, for courage)

I feel I have no choice but to stop treatment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL, JUST DEPRESSED
I'm leaving.

JORANN
I want my money back.

STAN, A BIPOLAR
I'm leaving.

REVEAL a numb Dr. Finch, who silently sits across from his patients. He is wearing a Santa hat.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- DAY (SIMULTANEOUS)

A sobbing Deirdre reaches out in desperation to Dorothy, who pushes her away. Dorothy is holding a suitcase.

DEIRDRE
Dorothy, baby, please. Please.

DOROTHY
Ever since you got back from the hospital, all you do is write. You care more about your goddamn poetry than me.

TWO of the BUTCH LESBIANS from the poetry group pass them carrying a couch.

DEIRDRE
Please don't leave me now, Dorothy. I need you, please.

DOROTHY
(shoving her against a wall)
I have too much money to be bored!

Dorothy exits. Deirdre slowly sinks to the floor.

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY (SIMULTANEOUS)

Michael Shepard from the IRS addresses the camera.

MICHAEL SHEPARD
No more extensions, Dr. Finch. Unless we receive all back taxes owed by Friday, the Internal Revenue Service will have no choice but to take possession of this house and sell it at auction.

REVEAL Finch. Suddenly lucid, a plan in action.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. FINCH

Mr. Shepard, are you adored? Worshipped
as a man should be?

MICHAEL SHEPARD

I'm sorry?

DR. FINCH

I feel great tension and sadness from
you. Do you have a sexual outlet, as all
patriarchs are entitled?

MICHAEL SHEPARD

(a beat, then)

My girlfriend broke up with me a year
ago.

Finch nods, pleased he's effectively cut to the core of his
patient's problem. A beat, then --

DR. FINCH

Mr. Shepard, I'd like to arrange an
introduction...

EXT. FINCH OFFICE -- DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Natalie sits patiently in a chair. Finch and Shepard exit.

DR. FINCH

Michael Shepard, Natalie Finch...my
youngest daughter.

Natalie smiles coquettishly at an instantly smitten Shepard.

CUT TO:

INT. AMHERST COFFEE SHOP -- NIGHT

Bookman and Augusten walk by the glass windows, deep in
conversation. PULL BACK TO reveal an equally oblivious
Deirdre, at the counter, working on her masterpiece
"I Dreamed I Saw The Number Five In Gold."

A WAITRESS stares at her, somewhat shocked: this is the
seventh pack of Sweet 'n Lo she has poured into her coffee.
Deirdre isn't at her glamorous best here. Upset from her
break-up with Dorothy and writer's block, her eyes are red
from crying and her hair needs a good brushing. Her hand
shakes as she slashes a red pen through her poem.

DEIRDRE

(to herself, shaky)

Not good enough, boring.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As she keeps viciously red-penning her poem --

WAITRESS (O.C.)

Can I interest you in a cocktail?

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)

I'll just have icewater, thank you.
She'll have a Brandy Alexander.

Deirdre abruptly stops writing. She knows this voice. She slowly swivels, revealing Norman, sitting at a booth barely six feet from her, with a PRETTY WOMAN (20s). Deirdre stares as Norman, now fit and clear-eyed, takes the woman's hand.

DEIRDRE

Watch out, that's how he gets you to fall
in love with him.

Norman and the woman turn their heads and see her. Norman is shocked at her appearance.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Our first date was at the movies. "My Fair Lady." I was so nervous, my palms were sweaty. But Norman's hand was so dry. I found out later that was from the psoriasis. He reached for my hand in the dark, and that was it. Hard to believe that such a simple gesture could lead to fourteen years together, and a child.

She smiles at him.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Hello Norman.

NORMAN

Hello Deirdre.
(lying)
You look well.

A long uncomfortable silence.

NORMAN

I'm sorry, Suzanne, this is Deirdre. My ex-wife. Deirdre, this is my fiancée Suzanne.

Suzanne takes a measured beat, then --

SUZANNE

Nice to meet you. I've heard so much about you.

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

Is that right. Well I've heard nothing about you. I open up my mailbox every day hoping to get a child support check from this deadbeat, and all I get is my own voice echoing back at me.

Her voice is a little too loud. People begin to stare.

DEIRDRE

You drank our family's money away.

NORMAN

I don't drink anymore, Deirdre. I haven't for three years.

Deirdre turns to the waitress.

DEIRDRE

Excuse me, could you get him a medal?

(back to Norman)

I want my money.

NORMAN

I send your money to your goddamn Svengali. His lawyer sent me a paper you signed giving him power of attorney.

DEIRDRE

(thrown)

I didn't approve that. Dr. Finch wouldn't do that.

As the betrayal dawns --

NORMAN

(to Suzanne)

Did I tell you?

DEIRDRE

Did you tell her what? What did he tell you about me, Suzi 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.

MANAGER

Maam, I'm gonna have to ask you to quiet down or leave.

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE

What else did he tell you about me? That I was crazy? He's the crazy one. And he's a goddamn sonofabitch!

MANAGER

Maam --

DEIRDRE

He doesn't even see his own son!

SUZANNE

He's tried.

NORMAN

Suzanne --

SUZANNE

And from what I hear, neither do you, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

Shut up you cunt! Did he start fucking you when you were a student? That's his sick little thrill.

MANAGER

All right, you're out of here.

He roughly grabs her arm, she pulls away.

DEIRDRE

Get your hands off of me! I'm leaving here, I need a peaceful environment to do my writing in!

She grabs the pages of her manuscript and exits.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP -- NIGHT

Deirdre stumbles out, trying to button her coat and organize her things. She trips and falls to the ground.

The pages of her poetry manuscript go flying. We PULL BACK as Deirdre's masterpiece flutters away into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. FINCH AND AGNES' BEDROOM -- NIGHT

A panicked Finch explodes into the room, claws under the bed and pulls out his suitcase. He begins frantically packing, as if the house were on fire and he has only moments to escape.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- SEVERAL DAYS LATER

A worried, waiting Agnes sits on a blue vinyl chair by a telephone hung on the wall. The phone rings, startling her.

AGNES

Hello?

DR. FINCH'S VOICE

Is the kitchen door locked Agnes?

AGNES

Doctor, where have you been?

INTERCUT:

INT. SEEDY MOTEL -- DAY

DR. FINCH

Agnes, secure the door!

A wild-eyed Finch huddles in a dark filthy room, overrun with take-out containers and empty pill bottles. The drapes are closed and static hums lowly on an ancient television. A concerned Agnes locks it.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)

Are you there?

AGNES

Yes, now where are --

DR. FINCH

Tomorrow, have the children go to a lumberyard and borrow enough wood to board up all the windows. Demand Madagascar redwood from South Africa, it holds up the best to termite infestation. Tell them I am a doctor, a highly esteemed psychiatric genius, and I will pay them back.

AGNES

Doctor, I am doing nothing until you tell me where you are.

DR. FINCH

I'm in seclusion.

AGNES

You ran off with her. I knew it. I tried to change my hair. I wore new perfume. You didn't even notice.

(CONTINUED)

DR. FINCH
They're going to kill me..

AGNES
Who?

DR. FINCH
The government.
(suddenly weak)
We can't stay on this phone too long,
it's bugged.

AGNES
Doctor, you come home to me. I'll make a
lovely soup and you'll sleep in our bed
and you'll feel better.

DR. FINCH
Agnes, immediately, prepare a vinegar
douche and flush your vagina. They've
planted tracking devices everywhere.
(lost, a whisper)
Everywhere.

AGNES
(fighting tears)
Doctor, you're scaring me.

DR. FINCH
If they find me they will kill me, all
revolutionaries get the guillotine. But
you must save the house, Agnes. You must.

AGNES
I don't know how. Should I get a job to
pay the IRS? I don't have any skills.

DR. FINCH
Your daughter does. Leave Shepard to her.
If he asks for payment again, sic Natalie
on him. I keep the contraceptives under
the third sofa cushion in the living
room.

He hangs up. PUSH IN ON Agnes, suddenly illuminated.

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Augusten, Natalie and Poo are bible-dipping.

NATALIE
Will the Christmas tree remain up another
year or will I burn it to the ground?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And just as Natalie points to a word in the bible, Agnes is suddenly on her, slapping her, in a fury.

NATALIE

What the hell!

AGNES

I didn't raise my daughter to be a slut!

Poo runs from the room, terrified. Agnes keeps slapping and Natalie is surprisingly unable to fight her off.

AUGUSTEN

Agnes, stop it!

Augusten tries to pull her off, but can't. Natalie begins to cry.

NATALIE

What did I do?!

AGNES

You fucked the IRS!

NATALIE

It was the only way to save this house!

Those words are like a slap to Agnes. Suddenly she stops.

NATALIE (cont'd)

You always knew, mother! You knew!

AGNES

I didn't Natalie. I swear to you, I didn't.

Natalie dissolves in her mother's arms. Augusten silently watches as they hold each other, crying.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- THAT NIGHT

A FULL MOON hangs ripe and heavy in the sky as Augusten approaches. As he reaches the front lawn, he stops, spooked.

Every light in the house is ON and the blinds are all UP, illuminating him and the street with a high noon-like glare. Leonard Cohen drones sinister on the stereo.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Augusten slowly moves through the rooms and is confused. Almost everything is gone. Deirdre suddenly passes through, fresh from the bath and wearing a red silk robe.

DEIRDRE

(flatly)

Dorothy's gone, she took everything. I don't want to be alone. So you're moving back in with me.

She heads into the kitchen. Augusten is stunned and overjoyed. He follows his mother into --

INT. THE KITCHEN -- NIGHT

-- where Deirdre lights a cigarette off the stove.

AUGUSTEN

(on shaky ground)

She's gone...really?

DEIRDRE

It's just you and me, baby. Come here.

He apprehensively approaches. She gently pulls him near and wraps her arms around him. He just stands there, unsure.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Augusten, hug back.

He doesn't. Anguish washes across her face -- she's lost him. But then a sense of childlike security floods through him and he hugs her tightly. The embrace seems to last forever as he breathes in her familiar perfume and in the course of seconds, forgives her for everything. She fights emotion.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Could you make me some tea, sweetheart?

AUGUSTEN

(excited at their old ritual)

Sure.

As he heads for the cabinets --

DEIRDRE

Did I tell you I had a poem accepted by Yankee magazine?

Augusten opens one cabinet -- it's bare. He moves to another.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

Mom, why did you mix Dorothy's pills with your medicine? Dr. Finch says that what made you sick.

DEIRDRE

I'd rather not talk about that right now. This whole episode has been very intense for me.

Augusten opens another cabinet. It's bare, too.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

But I do believe that may have been my last psychotic episode. I think I finally broke through to my creative unconscious.

Another cabinet is also empty. Augusten turns to her.

AUGUSTEN

Did Dorothy take all the cups, too? What a bitch.

DEIRDRE

Oh, no. I put them out in back. On the lawn.

Augusten looks at her -- that's strange. He opens the back door. What he sees terrifies him.

ANGLE: we slowly move through the back yard, which has become a DEBRIS FIELD. Dishes, forks, spoons, books, chairs, the television -- everything has been spread out end-to-end on the lawn and glistens in the moonlight.

AUGUSTEN

(whirling around, betrayed)
What the fuck have you been up to?!

DEIRDRE

I'm giving my worldly possessions a moon bath. The goddess moon emits a healing, creative light. Anything Dr. Finch has touched, anything he's looked at, needs an exorcism.

AUGUSTEN

(softly)
I can't believe I just trusted you.

CONTINUED: (2)

DEIRDRE

You have to trust me, I'm your mother.
And honestly, Augusten, I'm worried about
you. I disapprove of your choices.

AUGUSTEN

(anger growing)

I haven't had a choice.

DEIRDRE

You did when you wrote this, didn't you?

She pulls something out of her robe pocket: one of his
DIARIES. Shocked and betrayed, he snatches it away from her.

DEIRDRE

I don't know why you're so protective,
it's not any good.

AUGUSTEN

You read my writing?

DEIRDRE

Don't try and compete with me, Augusten,
If you move in with me again, I won't
allow that. You'll only get hurt. When I
become a very famous woman, they'll write
that I have a son who's a writer too, who
doesn't compare to my brilliance, and
you'll be a laughingstock. I want more
for you than that.

AUGUSTEN

Did you mix your drugs again?

DEIRDRE

Don't you dare judge me.

Augusten slowly starts out, but she roughly grabs his arm.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Where are you going? To call the doctor?
That bastard took my money. And I will
NOT be taken advantage of again, is that
clear?

Augusten nods, she lets go of him. Augusten calmly walks
backwards out of the door --

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

-- races in, grabs the phone and shakily dials. WE INTERCUT:

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- NIGHT

Hope is twirling her hair while reading "The Bell Jar." The phone rings and she answers it.

HOPE

Dad?

AUGUSTEN

(breathless)

Hope, it's Augusten. My mom's gone crazy again and I need help.

HOPE

(suddenly take-charge)

I'll be right there. Keep her safe.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT (LATER)

A NEEDLE is placed on a record. Edith Piaf's "La Vie En Rose" begins. Augusten sits on the couch, stalling for time, as Deirdre sits down in a chair across from him.

Behind her head is a wall of African masks, their teeth bared and yellow. Augusten notices the frightening connection to his mother and the masks. Not only does she look stark raving mad, but she looks smug in her madness...like she's pleased to take a mental vacation.

AUGUSTEN

You don't seem normal.

DEIRDRE

And have I ever seemed normal to you?
Have I ever been the mother you wanted?
You are so fucking judgemental, Augusten!
It's people like you that are the reason
I've had to fight so hard!

Suddenly, the door opens and Hope enters, winded. She sits down next to Augusten and eases her PBS tote to the floor, as if she were just in the neighborhood. Because of her years of experience working as a paramedic for the psychologically collapsed, Hope is calm and professional.

HOPE

What's up?

DEIRDRE

(glares at Augusten)

Well, what a surprise. Welcome, Hope.

She pauses, then picks a small basket off the coffee table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Do you know what's in this basket, Hope?

HOPE

No Deirdre, what?

DEIRDRE

(menacing)

Augusten, would you come over and get this basket and hand it to Hope?

Augusten and Hope exchange a nervous subtle glance. What the hell's in the box? Augusten gets up, shakily takes it out of his mother's hand and hands it to Hope. She opens the box and screams. ANGLE: inside are dozens of dead grasshoppers.

HOPE

OhmyGod, what are those?!

Deirdre roars with sinister laughter, then --

DEIRDRE

Those are dried locusts husks. My friend Sonja sent them to me from Texas. You don't like them?

HOPE

Deirdre, are you feeling okay?

DEIRDRE

Of course. How are you, Hope?

And with that, Deirdre is suddenly up with lightening speed. She grabs an African mask off the wall and hurls it at Augusten. It just barely misses his head. Augusten ducks, Hope shrieks and both bolt off the sofa.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

You are the goddamned Devil! I didn't give birth to you! You are a Nazi!

Augusten and Hope race up the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Hope dials 911 as Augusten paces and Deirdre pounds the door.

HOPE

Operator, we need help. I'm a psychiatrist's daughter and we have a psychiatric emergency.

EXT. BEDROOM -- MINUTES LATER

DEIRDRE
(continuing to pound)
Are you calling the doctor? I won't have
him in this house!

O.C. -- the wail of sirens as cop cars pull up.

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

TWO DONUT-EATERS in blue wait patiently. They ring the bell
and suddenly Deirdre flings back the door.

OFFICER ONE
Good evening maam, we have a report of --

DEIRDRE
Fuck you. Get off my property. Don't you
dare tell me what to do! Not ever. Do you
understand me? I will not be stifled by
you in my own home!

She tries to shut the door on them, they push their way in.
Deirdre runs for the stairs. They tackle her.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- UPPERSTORY -- NIGHT

Augusten and Hope watch out the window as the cops drag a
screaming, spitting Deirdre into the waiting cruiser. Her
heels bounce off the steps as they pull her toward the curb.

Augusten is overcome by a horrific sadness as he watches his
mother stripped of her dignity and her will. A pause, then --

HOPE
We need dad.

AUGUSTEN
No, we need an adult who isn't as crazy
as she is.

HOPE
He's her psvchiatrist, legally he can
sign her out of jail.
(pointedly)
Or do you want your own mother to rot
behind bars?

Off Augusten, torn with no options --

EXT. MOTEL BREEZEWAY -- NIGHT

Augusten and Hope walk down the corridor.

HOPE

I hope you know I wouldn't interrupt
dad's sabbatical for just anyone. He's
left strict orders -- I'm only to come
once a week, to drop off his
correspondence and his prescriptions.
Here it is -- room 214.

She takes out a key but realizes the door is slightly
cracked. Something is horribly wrong.

Hope slowly pushes back the door. She and Augusten enter the
filthy unkempt room. The TELEVISION instantly captures their
attention: the conclusion of "Miracle on 34th Street" is
playing. Their eyes slowly move from the TV to a sniffling
MAN sitting on the bed. It takes them a moment to realize the
figure is FINCH, dressed head to toe in a Santa suit.

DR. FINCH

(emotional)

They believe in him...see? The people
believe...

Hope and Augusten just stare, shocked.

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

Augusten sits on Dr. Finch's red velvet knee.

DR. FINCH

Tell me what you want for Christmas,
little boy.

AUGUSTEN

I want my mother to get better.

DR. FINCH

Who's your mother?

Augusten flashes a raised eyebrow look at Hope.

AUGUSTEN

I told you this wouldn't work, he's lost
it.

A slightly panicked Hope gestures for him to get off. She
climbs on.

(CONTINUED)

HOPE

Dad...it's me. It's Hope, your favorite daughter.

DR. FINCH

Have you been a good girl?

Hope's eyes fill with emotional tears.

HOPE

Dad...you're not Santa Claus, okay?
You're Dr. Finch...and you're a brilliant psychiatrist. You've been published.

His eyes slowly fill with tears too. He looks up at her.

DR. FINCH

And do you believe in Dr. Finch, Hope?

HOPE

Yes. I do. You're just tired, dad. A lifetime of giving has caught up to you.

He pauses, lucidity slowly dawning.

DR. FINCH

(softly)

They've left me. All the people I've invested years in. They stopped believing.

HOPE

There's one patient who really needs you, dad.

DR. FINCH

Who?

AUGUSTEN

My mother. She's in jail. You're the only one who can get her out.

DR. FINCH

(quietly)

I can't help her.

He crosses to the dresser, opens his doctor's bag and starts counting out some pills. Augusten wearily heads for the door.

AUGUSTEN

I'm gonna go see my dad, although I don't think he'll help me. Last month I sent him a 12-inch black dildo in the mail.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOPE

My father is your dad, Augusten. He adopted you. Where's your fucking loyalty?!

Her passion is so strong that Augusten stops. Her world crumbling, Hope marches up to Finch, spins him around and sits him down hard on the bed.

HOPE (cont'd)

Now you listen to me, Dr. Finch. There are people who have given up their whole lives to believe in you. And you're not going to let them down.

He looks up at her, sobered.

HOPE (cont'd)

This is what you're going to do. You're going to go down to that jail and bail out Deirdre. And then you're going to bring her back here to this room and you're going to work through this episode with her while I go home and cold-call all your ex-patients and drum up some business.

Augusten is riveted by her.

HOPE (cont'd)

If you cure her, the word will get out and your patients will return, don't you see that?

DR. FINCH

(as hope dawns)

Yes.

HOPE

You save her, she saves you and everything goes back to the way it was.

Off Finch, the fire of his old ambition flickering in his eyes, we CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Finch pushes Deirdre back on the bed. He is on top of her and struggling to pin her arms. Augusten watches as Deirdre flails and screams.

DEIRDRE

Get your fucking hands off me!

(CONTINUED)

DR. FINCH
Augusten, secure a limb.

QUICK CUTS: Augusten and Dr. Finch tie her arms to the headboard. As she struggles --

AUGUSTEN
(emotional)
Why is this happening again?

DR. FINCH
Your mother has become psychotic because she's in love with me and she's afraid to admit it. Her repressed emotions for me make her sick.

DEIRDRE
You're a fucking liar!

He reaches for an amber bottle.

AUGUSTEN
(worried)
Hasn't she taken enough pills?

DR. FINCH
We need to regulate her body chemistry until she stabilizes, that's how we'll work through this episode.

As Deirdre screams in protest, Finch violently holds her jaws apart. Augusten drops the pills in her open mouth, like a mother bird feeding her young. Enjoying his control, Finch pinches her nostrils and slams shut her mouth.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
Swallow or you'll suffocate.

Tears streaming out her eyes, Deirdre swallows. As soon as Finch lets go, she screams and struggles some more. Scared now, Augusten slowly backs up.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
Now now, Deirdre, calm down. We're going to clean you up a bit.

Finch reaches for some Johnson's baby powder.

Sobbing, she yanks one arm restraint with such violence that it comes free. Deirdre LUNGES at him. The baby powder explodes, covering Finch and Deirdre in a cloud of white.

A beat, as the dust literally settles. Then Finch grabs her arm hard and starts to retie it to the headboard.

DR. FINCH (cont'd)
Help me tie her feet, Augusten.

DEIRDRE
No, goddamnit! I want a grilled cheese
and tomato sandwich!

DR. FINCH
You're not well enough to go out in
public.

Deirdre looks at Augusten pleadingly.

AUGUSTEN
Maybe she'll be calmer if she eats
something.

INT. CORNER DINER -- NIGHT (LATER)

Deirdre enters with her head held high, even though her face and hair are still white with baby powder. She is trailed by Finch and Augusten, who notices that everyone is staring at them and whispering.

Deirdre heads for the end of the counter, Finch right behind her. Augusten has stopped at the opposite end of the counter, so he won't be linked with them.

WINNIE (early 50s), a tall tan leathery blond wearing bright pink lipstick and gold heart earrings the size of onion rings, approaches and licks the end of her pencil.

WINNIE
Can I take your order?

DEIRDRE
(wild-eyed, a whisper)
I'm being held hostage in a motel by this
crazy man.

WINNIE
Are you now, honey. You two love birds
have a little fun with the baby powder?

She winks at them. Deirdre leans in, intense and hushed.

DEIRDRE
You don't understand. He's the crazy one,
not me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WINNIE

Hey, sugar. I don't make no judgements
about no one. Now, what can I getcha?

Augusten sits at the end, watching it all. Winnie approaches.

WINNIE

Can I get 'ya something, honey?

AUGUSTEN

Just water.

(a beat)

I'm with them.

WINNIE

(leans in)

What's the matter, sourpuss, you don't
like your momma's new friend?

AUGUSTEN

He's her shrink.

WINNIE

Her shrink? She's shacked up with her
shrink?

(frowning)

That don't make no sense. Why would a
shrink take his patient to a motel?

AUGUSTEN

Well, he's sort of an unusual shrink.

WINNIE

Unusual my ass. I better go have a look.

Augusten's POV: Winnie approaches Deirdre and Finch; she puts her hand on the doctor's shoulder and says something that causes him to blush and laugh; she points to the restrooms and Finch gets up to go; with Finch gone, Winnie comes around the counter and sits on the stool next to Deirdre.

Deirdre is very impassioned and emotional as she tells Winnie her side of the story. Finch comes back, sits down and begins sipping his water. Winnie gives him a suspicious look, then ambles back down to Augusten.

WINNIE

Sugar, somethin' funny's goin' on.

Winnie leans forward, to whisper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WINNIE

I seen a lot of crazy people come in here. Folks madder than hatters. But your momma's different. She says that doctor of hers, he's trying to get himself a little action, if you know what I mean.

AUGUSTEN

Don't listen to her. She doesn't know what she's saying. An hour ago she said her dead grandfather was standing next to her holding out a basket of pecans.

WINNIE

Hey, we got some good pecan pie. Want a slice?

AUGUSTEN

No thanks.

Augusten glances over and notices that Finch is gripping Deirdre's arm, tightly.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

Great, now she's gonna have a fit in public, right here in the restaurant.

WINNIE

Your momma could use a friend. That shrink of hers...

(shakes head)

I don't know. He may be a shrink, but he's still a man. I'm gonna put these orders in.

Winnie ambles away as Augusten notices that the hissed argument between Finch and Deirdre has become almost unbearably intense. He grabs her arm and starts to pull her out of the restaurant. She roughly grabs her arm away and leaves on her own accord. Finch follows.

PUSH IN on Winnie, silently watching and suspicious.

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT (LATER)

Finch is on top of Deirdre, trying to tie her again to the bed. She is screaming and sobbing. Suddenly, the sound of the DOOR squeaking open. Deirdre stops struggling and turns. So does Finch. There's Winnie and Augusten in the doorway.

WINNIE

What the hell is going on in this room?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Deirdre runs to Winnie's side.

WINNIE (cont'd)
You ain't like no doctor I ever seen
before. You're the one that looks crazy.

DEIRDRE
He is, Winnie. He's the crazy one.

WINNIE
(turning, to Deirdre)
We've got to get you all cleaned up,
sugar. What's that man gone and done to
you?

Deirdre begins to sob. Take charge Winnie turns to Augusten.

WINNIE
Sweetums, you go and get yourself a Coke
from the vending machine. You got
quarters? Reach in my bag over there and
pull out my wallet.

Augusten takes the money plus a ten he secretly pockets and
exits. Winnie holds Deirdre tight to her, then fiercely --

WINNIE
Get out and leave us be.

DR. FINCH
Look, miss. You do not understand this
situation. This woman is in a state of
crisis and she needs --

Winnie releases Deirdre and walks slowly up to Finch. In her
high-heeled red boots she is at least four inches taller than
him. She lowers her voice and looks him straight in the eye.

WINNIE
You notice all those rigs in the parkin'
lot? Those are my boys. I know every one
of 'em. There's Fred from Alabama, he's
up here makin' a peanut delivery. And
Stew? He's out here all the way from
Nevada. Now, I don't think my boys would
take too kindly if I was to tell 'em that
some shrink was in this here motel room
holding a lady in crisis down on the bed
like I seen when I walked in. As a matter
of fact, I think that just might ruffle
their feathers.

Finch is silent. He simply turns and walks out of the room.

EXT. MOTEL BREEZEWAY -- NIGHT

Augusten is at the Coke machine. Finch walks by him, in a daze. Augusten watches as he exits down the dark hallway and disappears into the foggy shadows...much in the same manner as he arrived in their lives.

INT. DEIRDRE'S BEDROOM -- SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER

Deirdre and Winnie lie in bed holding hands, illuminated by candlelight. Both are sleeping. REVEAL Augusten and Bookman standing by the bedside, looking down at them.

BOOKMAN

Who's the big-haired chick?

AUGUSTEN

Her new girlfriend. She saved her from Finch.

BOOKMAN

For now.

AUGUSTEN

You don't have to whisper. They drink every night until they pass out. Winnie's an alcoholic. She has been since her little kid drowned or something.

Augusten looks at his mother and smiles softly.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

I like watching her sleep. She looks like she's dead...like she's finally at peace.

BOOKMAN

She's not. Because when she wakes up and Winnie eventually leaves her, Finch will be there, pumping her full of drugs again that don't work.

AUGUSTEN

I'm tired. Let's go to bed.

Augusten blows out the candles.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT (LATER)

Trying to get comfortable, Augusten rolls over in his sleeping bag and finds Bookman staring at him with wild emotional eyes.

(CONTINUED)

BOOKMAN

You just don't get it, do you? None of us will ever be at peace until Finch and every bad seed spawned from Finch is dead.

AUGUSTEN

You sound crazy, go to sleep.

Augusten rolls over, irritated. Bookman stares at the ceiling, an idea forming.

CUT TO:

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- NIGHT

Bookman smokes silently in the shadows, waiting to make his move. The last LIGHT in the house goes OUT.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- NIGHT

A FIST smashes through the backdoor's glass and unlocks the door. Bookman enters. He begins rifling through a drawer, looking for something. A hammer, no. A knife, no.

Bookman finds what he's looking for: SCISSORS.

INT. NATALIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Natalie sleeps. Bookman creeps toward her with the gleaming scissors. She senses something and opens her eyes, but Bookman covers her mouth so she can't scream. With the other hand he STABS her, over and over again. Natalie dies.

INT. HOPE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Bookman approaches Hope. Just as he raises the knife over her body, her eyes pop open and she whispers her last word.

HOPE

Anger.

Bookman plunges the scissors into her, over and over.

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

A yawning Agnes pads down the hall. She enters the bathroom and closes the door just as Bookman rounds the corner. He is covered in blood. Bookman heads down the hall in SLOW MOTION with great purpose.

He's heading for Finch.

INT. FINCH'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Finch sleeps. REVEAL Bookman standing over him with the bloody weapon, raw and emotional. Just as he raises the scissors to plunge them into Finch's heart --

FEMALE VOICE
(sharply, at the door)
Neil!

Bookman turns and sees Agnes. Her voice wakes Finch, who opens his eyes, sees Bookman and the menacing gleam of the scissors and slowly starts to sit up.

DR. FINCH
(calmly, doctor mode)
Neil...what are you doing, son?

BOOKMAN
(crying)
SHUT UP! I'm not your son!

DR. FINCH
Neil...put down the scissors, it's all right.

Suddenly, Natalie and Hope enter the room, groggy. Bookman gasps.

NATALIE
What in the hell is going on?

Bookman looks down at the scissors and then at his clothes -- no blood. He realizes that he didn't kill them -- it was all in his head. Natalie and Hope realize the danger of the situation and become eerily silent. Bookman just stares at them. He drops the scissors. Quietly --

BOOKMAN
I'm going to go now.

He exits. Everyone just stares for a minute, until a sharp sob emits from Finch.

DR. FINCH
I just wanted to help him. I just wanted to help them all...

He breaks down. Agnes, Hope and Natalie fold into him. As the Finch women comfort their patriarch and years of regret pour out, we SLOW PAN OUT.

INT. DEIRDRE'S HOUSE -- THE NEXT MORNING

Augusten wakes from a bad dream. He turns over and sees the empty sleeping bag where Bookman should be. As he stares --

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Where'd he go?

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- LAUNDRY ROOM -- MORNING

Natalie is rummaging through the never-used dryer for some condiments. She pulls out an empty bottle of relish.

NATALIE

Away.

(a beat)

We never have any relish in this house.

AUGUSTEN

What happened?

NATALIE

A family situation. It was handled. Who's eating all the relish?

AUGUSTEN

Natalie, you have to tell me, okay? Where did Bookman go?

Off Natalie, torn --

INT. FINCH'S OFFICE -- DAY

Augusten has locked himself in and is on the phone. He is frantic, fighting time.

AUGUSTEN

Yes, hello, Amtrack? I'm a psychiatrist and I'm looking for a patient of mine. I believe he may have a bomb.

(a beat)

Neil Bookman.

EXT. AMTRACK TRAIN PLATFORM -- DAY

Augusten races down the platform, trying to catch the 10:05, which is already leaving the station. He pumps his thin legs hard, desperate to see if Bookman is on the train.

Up ahead in the train, looking out the window and oblivious to the fact that someone indeed does love him is Bookman. He is silently crying, afraid and alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The race finally concludes: Augusten loses. He stands on the platform and watches, his heart breaking. As the train roars into the horizon --

DEIRDRE'S VOICE

I am no longer going to have anything to do with Dr. Finch or any member of the Finch family.

INT. DEIRDRE'S ASPEN STATION WAGON -- DAY

Rain pours down outside. Augusten and Deirdre sit in the cocoon-like front seat, both smoking. Augusten takes her in for a beat, now very wary of her. But Deirdre looks calm, almost flat. And she doesn't seem crazy.

AUGUSTEN

What are you talking about?

DEIRDRE

This has been building, Augusten. There's much you don't know or understand about my relationship with Dr. Finch. But for years he has been medicating me in a way that I have come to see as unhealthy, and very wrong.

Deirdre exhales, quietly tortured about something.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

He raped me.

AUGUSTEN

What?!

DEIRDRE

In the motel room, where he'd take me to work through episodes. The doctor has been controlling me, manipulating me emotionally, and with drugs. He's a very sick man, and I'm just now seeing this.

Augusten feels his default emotion: numbness.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

I need to go away now, to do some thinking.

(a beat)

And I want you to come with me.

Deirdre's eyes are wet with emotion. She reaches for his hand.

(CONTINUED)

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

We'll get a new place and be a family again, just you and me, baby...like you've always wanted. We can start over.

AUGUSTEN

I have to go back inside. I don't know what to make of any of this.

He opens the door. Deirdre reaches out to him, desperate.

DEIRDRE

Please. Wait. I'm sorry, this must be extremely upsetting to you. It is to me. But I'm right about this, Augusten. He's a very dangerous man and I don't know why it's taken me so long to see that. I wish you'd --

Augusten angrily pulls away and slams the door on her --

EXT. FINCH HOUSE -- DAY

-- and walks slowly through the rain toward the only home he's known for years. PAN UP to reveal Natalie in an upstairs window, quietly watching.

NATALIE'S VOICE

Bullshit.

INT. FINCH KITCHEN -- DAY

A still wet Augusten sits at the kitchen table with Natalie, who is trying to calm him down.

NATALIE

Augusten, your mother is a complete mental case. She abandoned you when you were twelve and sent you to live with my family. And you're going to believe her?!

(a beat)

Believe me, I know my dad. I know he's a little weird. Okay, a lot weird. But he'd never rape your mother, he could lose his license for that. That's absolute fucking bullshit.

Augusten pauses. Thunder. He slowly looks up at Natalie.

AUGUSTEN

I believe her.

(CONTINUED)

NATALIE

Don't let her warp your mind.

AUGUSTEN

Wake up, Natalie! He's been feeding us pills for years like candy corn! Valium, Librium, Thorazine --

NATALIE

(growing tearful)

We had headaches! He's a doctor!

AUGUSTEN

Why are you defending him?!

NATALIE

Because your mother's trying to break this family apart!

AUGUSTEN

He's only being nice to you now because he has to, Natalie, don't you see that? If you turn against him, the whole wobbly house of cards comes tumbling down!

NATALIE

(emotional, eyes fierce)

My father loves me.

Natalie gathers her composure.

NATALIE (cont'd)

It's going to be difficult for us, Augusten. We're caught in the middle of this. It's going to be very hard to remain friends.

(standing)

This is big, Augusten. You're going to have to decide who's your family.

She exits. As Augusten just sits there in silence --

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE

Ultimately, it came down to a very simple choice.

INT. AUGUSTEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Augusten hurriedly packs everything into his backbag.

INT. MOTEL SIX CHECK-IN -- NIGHT

Augusten rings a rusty desk bell, alerting a NIGHT MANAGER.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
Was I a turd-reading Finch?

EXT. MOTEL SIX -- DAY

Augusten floats in the urine-tainted pool.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
Or was I my crazy mother's son?

INT. MOTEL SIX -- NIGHT

Augusten writes in his journal.

AUGUSTEN'S VOICE
In the end, I decided I was neither.

CUT TO:

INT. FINCH HOUSE -- SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER

Natalie waits nervously by the phone. It rings.

NATALIE
Hello? Where the fuck are you?

WE INTERCUT:

INT. MOTEL SIX HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

AUGUSTEN
I needed to get away.

NATALIE
My father is very upset with you.

SLOW PAN out from Natalie to reveal Hope and Agnes, eavesdropping behind her, a combined powerful force.

NATALIE (cont'd)
He feels that 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUGUSTEN

(spooked, after a beat)

I don't think she needs to be committed
to a hospital.

Natalie pauses, she doesn't know what to say. Hope furiously
scrawls something on a piece of paper and hands it to her.

NATALIE

(reading it, verbatim)

Where are you? We'll come and get you.

AUGUSTEN

Natalie, listen to me. Are they standing
there trying to control you?

Natalie pauses, torn, then --

NATALIE

No.

AUGUSTEN

Good. Do you have a pen?

NATALIE

Yes.

(grabs it from Hope)

Okay, tell me where you are.

AUGUSTEN

I'll tell you where I'll be tomorrow at
noon -- the Amtrack station. I'm going to
New York.

(a beat)

And you're coming with me.

Natalie's hand freezes over the paper.

AUGUSTEN

We've got to get away from them, Natalie.
Your family, my mother. It's the only way
we can have a normal life.

Agnes hisses "what's going on?"

NATALIE

What are we going to do in New York,
Augusten? Our only skills are restraining
psychotics and giving blow-jobs.

ANGLE ON Agnes...this comment landing -- and quietly
devastating her.

(CONTINUED)

AUGUSTEN

I'll do what you said I should do --
write. And I'll get a job, so you can go
to school there. I'll support us.

Natalie walks with the phone, the long twisted cord traveling
behind her, and gets some privacy in the laundry room.

NATALIE

(emotional, fighting tears)
I'm afraid, Augusten.

AUGUSTEN

Me too. But we can do this.
We have to.

He hangs up. Natalie pauses, genuinely overcome. A beat, then
the door opens revealing Hope and Agnes, coldly staring.

AGNES

Where is he?

Natalie just stares, confused.

CUT TO:

EXT. AMTRACK STATION -- THE NEXT DAY

Augusten sits on a bench. He checks his watch -- it's ten
past noon. Finally, he sees a bus approaching. It pulls up,
blocking Augusten and the bench from our view. When it pulls
away, we see Augusten, sitting with...

Agnes.

AGNES

Natalie's not coming. Neither is Hope.
I told them I'd deal with you.

AUGUSTEN

Don't try and stop me, Agnes. I'm going.

He looks over at her, full of unexpected emotion.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

I'll miss you.

AGNES

I'll miss you too. You're the best son a
mom could ever want.

(direct)

You need to know that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Moved, fighting tears, Augusten nods. Then Agnes slips something into his hands: an envelope. Confused, Augusten opens it revealing a stash of money. He's stunned.

AUGUSTEN

Agnes, there's over five hundred dollars here.

AGNES

A penny here, a dime there. It adds up. The doctor doesn't know I have it, of course. No one does.

She pauses, fighting emotion.

AGNES (cont'd)

This morning, the IRS came again. I almost gave this to them, but then I thought, no. For once in my life I'm going to invest wisely.

(softly)

When you write a book, send me a copy.

Another bus arrives. Agnes stands to go. Crying, she kisses his head.

AGNES (cont'd)

Goodbye my sweet boy.

Augusten begins to cry too. Just as she boards the bus --

AUGUSTEN

Agnes! What are you going to do now?

AGNES

I don't know.

(a soft smile)

Maybe I'll take down the Christmas tree.

And with that, she's gone. The bus drives away.

INT. DINER -- DAY

Deirdre looks into her compact, nervously applying a slash of lipstick. She's taken great pains today to look presentable.

Through the window, Deirdre sees Augusten walking in with his suitcase. She smiles, relieved: he's coming home with her. Augusten slides into the booth. Strained silence, then --

DEIRDRE

I like your hair that way. You look like a very important newscaster.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He doesn't smile. A WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS
Can I take your order?

DEIRDRE
Hello, yes. I'd like a slice of Key Lime
pie and a Tab.

AUGUSTEN
Nothing for me, thanks.

Deirdre is quietly suspicious as the waitress leaves.

DEIRDRE
Aren't you hungry, honey? You look so
skinny. You should really eat some --

AUGUSTEN
Don't pull that maternal crap with me now
Mom, okay? It's too late for that.

DEIRDRE
It's not too late. We can find a new
house together where we can both write.
We can start over.

AUGUSTEN
I am starting over.
(a beat)
In New York.

Deirdre pauses. Then with passion tinged with fear --

DEIRDRE
Really. And how are you going to make
that work, Augusten? You're seventeen.
You have no formal education, no money,
no furniture. No friends.

Augusten just stares at her.

DEIRDRE
(anger growing)
Why'd you come here then?

AUGUSTEN
To finally say goodbye to you.

As he starts to leave, she grabs his arm, to stop him.

(CONTINUED)

-- CONTINUED: (2)

DEIRDRE

Wait, there's something you need to know.

(emotional)

I just wanted to be somebody.

AUGUSTEN

(softly)

You could have been somebody to me.

He exits. As Deirdre sits there, left with nothing but regret, we TRACK Augusten as he heads to the door. He walks slowly at first, trepidatious. But gradually, he picks up speed as his spirit swells with hope. Augusten talks directly to us -- we are now the journal.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

As I left that day, my mother's warnings played over and over in my head. Maybe I couldn't make it alone. Maybe I was doomed -- again.

Augusten smiles.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

But then it hit me. And for the first time in a long time, I wasn't afraid.

A buoyant Augusten PUSHES BACK the diner doors as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK CITY -- DAY

...the doors of GRAND CENTRAL STATION opening as Augusten greets his new life. As he walks down the streets pulsing with opportunity --

AUGUSTEN

Of course I could make it in New York City. There's no way New York could be any crazier than my life had been at the Finches' house.

Augusten drops a quarter in a HOMELESS MAN'S HAT.

AUGUSTEN (cont'd)

If I could survive that, I could survive anything. So what if I didn't have any friends yet, or a job? It could be worse.

(grins)

I could be going to a prom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We follow a hopeful Augusten as he moves through the teeming exciting streets of New York, until he is swallowed up by the masses and disappears into the roar.

END TITLES FLOAT UP.

DR. FINCH lost his license to practice medicine after the American Medical Association found him guilty on charges of insurance fraud. He died from heart disease in 2000.

AGNES lives in a nursing home.

NATALIE graduated magna cum laude from Smith with a double major: psychology and voice. She works in the field of public health.

HOPE continued to work for her father until his death. She lives in her childhood home as a squatter -- it was condemned by the public board of health in 2002.

FERN divorced her husband and now lives in Sonoma, California, where she runs a bookstore geared toward the recovery community.

DOROTHY is married and has children. Her husband does not know of her past relationship with Deirdre Burroughs.

POO sells RV's in Western Massachusetts. He is married and has four children.

DEIRDRE BURROUGHS lives alone in a small apartment on a river near the Massachusetts/New Hampshire border. Because of a major stroke, she is paralyzed on one side of her body and is dependent on aides. She continues to write poetry and has been published in a number of small disability journals. She is estranged from Augusten.

"RUNNING WITH SCISSORS," Augusten's childhood memoir, has been published in over 25 countries and has sold over one million copies worldwide to date. He lives in New York City.

NEIL BOOKMAN was never seen nor heard from again.

THE END