

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

IN RE: PUSH BY SAPPHIRE

**FINAL ORDER AND
OPINION REGARDING
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL**

No. 2025-0006

SUMMARY OF ACTION REQUIRED

This Order of the South Carolina State Board of Education (“State Board”) is the final agency decision regarding the following Instructional Material (the “Subject Material”).

Title of Instructional Material:
Author:

Push
Sapphire

As explained more fully below, the Subject Material includes descriptions of “sexual conduct” as that term is defined in Regulation 43-170 and South Carolina Code Section 16-15-305(C)(1). Accordingly, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate and must be removed from all public-school classrooms, libraries, media centers, programs, reading lists, and school-controlled extracurricular activities in South Carolina. **All public schools, public school districts, public-school employees, and district boards in this State shall take immediate action to comply with this Order by removing the Subject Material. Additionally, public schools, public school districts, and district boards shall not acquire, obtain, or purchase the Subject Material, nor shall any public-school employee acquire, obtain, or purchase the Subject Material for use in or with any public-school program, classroom, activity, or instruction.**

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This matter was addressed in the first instance by the State Board’s Instructional Material Review Committee (“IMRC”) and later by the full State Board. The Subject Material was reviewed by the IMRC “of its own volition and on its own initiative” to “make determinations regarding the educational suitability or the Age or Developmental Appropriateness of specific Instructional Materials pursuant to the criteria and requirements of” Regulation 43-170(VI)(B). The IMRC took this step because a Complainant filed the Notice of Appeal Form with the State Board on December 16, 2024. (Exhibit A). Subsequently, the Chairman of the Beaufort School District Board of Education (“District”) submitted a letter requesting that the State Board take these materials up for consideration because the District’s board had previously reviewed this material in 2023, prior to the enactment of Regulation 43-170. (Exhibit B). Accordingly, the IMRC and, later, the State Board, exercised its authority to review the Subject Material in the first instance consistent with the District’s request and the State Board’s authority.

On January 3, 2025, the South Carolina Department of Education (Department) notified the public of its upcoming review of the Subject Material by posting the IMRC hearing information and hearing agenda on its website. Consistent with governing requirements, the public was invited to sign up in advance of the hearing to provide comment regarding the Subject Material. At 1:00 PM on January 9, 2025, the IMRC's hearing of this matter occurred via Microsoft Teams and was conducted in accordance with Procedures for Review of Instructional Material, State Board Rule of Governance IFC, last revised October 1, 2024, and the South Carolina Administrative Procedures Act, S.C. Code Sec. 1-23-310, et seq. During this hearing, the IMRC received public comment regarding the Subject Material and the Department provided analysis and recommended removing the Subject Material entirely from South Carolina's public schools.

The IMRC reviewed and considered the Subject Material, excerpts from same, all public comments (written and in-person), and all documentation and testimony provided by the Department. Based on that review and consideration, the IMRC unanimously found that the Subject Material includes descriptions of "sexual conduct" as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). Therefore, the IMRC found the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and recommended it be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina. On January 31, 2025, the IMRC issued a Report and Recommendation (attached as Exhibit C and incorporated by reference herein), which was provided to all members of the State Board and subsequently placed on State Board's website and made available to the public.

On January 28, 2025, the Department notified the public that this matter would come before the full State Board by posting the State Board's agenda and hearing information on its website. At 1:00 PM on February 4, 2025, the State Board held its regularly scheduled meeting, received public comment, and received reports from its various committees, including the IMRC. This matter is properly before the State Board pursuant to S.C. Code Reg. § 43-170.

Based on a review of all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Department and interested parties, the IMRC's written Report and Recommendation, the IMRC Chair's Report, and the Department's report, we make the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.¹

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Subject Material was challenged by a parent or legal guardian of a student in the District. The Chairman of the District board submitted a letter requesting that the State Board take these materials up for consideration.
2. The Subject Material is available to students in public schools in South Carolina.

¹ Excerpts from and an explanation of the applicable sections and definitions of Regulation 43-170 are found in the IMRC's Report and Recommendation, which is attached as Exhibit C, and, for the sake of space, will not be duplicated herein.

3. The Subject Material contains the content listed and described in Exhibit A of the IMRC's Report and Recommendation.²

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Constitution, South Carolina law, and precedent uniformly permit the State Board to review and determine the appropriateness of books and other instructional materials for use or availability in public schools. *See* SBE Final Order and Opinion No. 2024-0001 (In re: *Damsel* by Elena Arnold) at page 3 (collecting and citing statutes and cases). That authority arises, at least in part, from the fact that the selection, curation, purchase, use, and management of public-school curricula and library materials is government speech that the Free Speech Clause does not regulate. *See id.* at 3-4 (citing cases). The state's authority in this context is particularly robust when, as here, the state seeks to shield minors from access to or use of inappropriate sexual content. *See id.* at 3-4 (citing *United States v. Am. Library Ass'n*, 539 U.S. 194 (2003)).

Under Regulation 43-170, "Instructional Material is not 'Age and Developmentally Appropriate' for any age or age group of children if it includes descriptions or visual depictions of 'sexual conduct,' as that term is defined by Section 16-15-305(C)(1)." S.C. Code Reg. 43-170(I)(A).

The IMRC's Report and Recommendation includes passages from the Subject Material. The excerpts from the Subject Material, which are included in Exhibit C, constitute clear violations of Regulation 43-170 by presenting plainly before the reader express, detailed descriptions of "sexual conduct" as specifically defined in Code sections 16-15-305 (C)(1).

Having carefully considered the Subject Material, all public comments (in person and written), all documentation provided by the Department and interested parties, the IMRC's written Report and Recommendation, the IMRC Chair's Report, and the Department's report, we find that the Subject Material includes descriptions of "sexual conduct" as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). While our review of the Subject Material is not limited to the excerpts provided by the Department, those excerpts establish a clear violation of the regulation. Therefore, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and must be removed immediately from all public-school classrooms, libraries, media centers, programs, reading lists, and school-controlled extracurricular activities in South Carolina.

s/Rita Allison

Rita Allison
Chair
South Carolina State Board of Education
April 3, 2025

² Exhibit A to the Report and Recommendation, which is attached to this Final Order and Opinion for ease of reference, contains excerpts which are representative of questionable or violative material contained in the Subject Material. The State Board's review and Order is not limited to the excerpts contained therein.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL
REVIEW COMMITTEE

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

IN RE: PUSH BY SAPPHIRE

This is a matter in which Instructional Material is being addressed by the Instructional Material Review Committee (“IMRC”) of the S.C. State Board of Education (“State Board”) pursuant to S.C. Code Reg. 43-170. The hearing of this matter occurred via Microsoft Teams on January 9th, 2025 at 1:00 PM.

Title of Instructional Material:
Author:

Push
Sapphire

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The “Subject Material” listed above has been reviewed by the IMRC pursuant to the criteria established in Regulation 43-170. As further described below, this Regulation authorizes the STATE BOARD to take certain actions related to Instructional Material. The Complainant requested that the State Board remove the Subject Material entirely from South Carolina’s public schools.

The Department notified the public of this matter via posting hearing information and the hearing agenda on its website on January 3rd, 2025. Consistent with governing requirements, the public was invited to sign up in advance of the hearing in order to provide comment regarding the Subject Material. The Hearing was conducted in accordance with Procedures for Review of Instructional Material, State Board Rule of Governance IFC, last revised October 1, 2024, and the South Carolina Administrative Procedures Act, S. C. Code Section 1-23-310 et. seq. The State Board’s Rule of Governance was designed and adopted to provide a full and fair process for Instructional Material reviews under Reg. 43-170.

Based on a review of all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Complainant and interested parties, the IMRC makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.

APPEARANCES

Complainant providing testimony in favor of removing the Subject Material:
Elizabeth “Ivie” Szalai

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Push

Providing public comment in favor of removing the Subject Material:

David Cook

Providing public comment in favor of retaining the Subject Material:

Taylor Simon

Rebecca Ervin

On Behalf of South Carolina Department of Education:

Robert D. Cathcart, III, Esq., Policy and Legal Advisor

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Subject Material was challenged by the Complainant in the Beaufort County School District on August 26th, 2024.
2. On August 30th, 2024, Beaufort County School District Officials informed Complainant that the Board had previously considered the Subject Material and returned the material to its shelves. The Officials asked that the Complainant submit an appeal to the State Board of Education.
3. The Complainant reiterated her request that the Beaufort School Board hear her complaint pursuant to the standards outlined in Regulation 43-170. The Complainant continued to request additional information from the District, asking whether the statements given by the District constituted the Board's final decision. The Complainant did not receive the information until December 6th, after the 90-day period of review elapsed.
4. The Complainant submitted an appeal to the State Board of Education on November 24th, 2024, 90 days after the complaint was first submitted to the Beaufort County School District.
5. After the 90-day period of review elapsed, Complainant submitted an appeal to the State Board of Education on November 24th, 2024.
6. The Subject Material is available to students in the Beaufort County School District.
7. The Subject Material contains the content listed and described in Exhibit A¹.

APPLICABLE LAW

1. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to take certain actions related to Instructional Material. The State Board can (1) remove the Subject Material entirely, (2) discontinue use of the Subject Material for any grade level or age group for which such use is inappropriate or unsuitable, (3) limit the Subject Material's availability to a student where the school district has received the consent of the student's parent, or (4) permit the continued use of the Subject Material for all grade levels or age groups.

2. Regulation 43-170 defines "Instructional Material(s)":

"Instructional Material(s)" means materials used in a South Carolina K-12 public school classroom, made available in a public school library/media center, or included on a public school's reading list, whether adopted and/or purchased from the state-

¹ Exhibit A contains excerpts which are representative of questionable or violative material contained in the Subject Material. The IMRC's review, report, and recommendation is not limited to the excerpts listed on Exhibit A.

Report and Recommendation
Push

adopted instructional materials list, adopted and/or purchased through a district instructional materials program, or otherwise purchased, donated to the school, or made available to students through other means, including but not limited to digital platforms. See S.C. Code Ann. Section 59–19–10. The term “Instructional Materials” as used herein includes any collection of books or materials purchased, acquired, or kept on public school grounds by any teacher or other public-school employee and made available to students, regardless of how or by whom such materials are acquired or purchased.

Reg. 43-170(I)(A).

3. Regulation 43-170 defines “Age and Developmentally Appropriate”:

“Age and Developmentally Appropriate” means topics, messages, materials, and teaching methods suitable to particular ages or age groups of children and adolescents, based on developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group. Instructional Material is not “Age and Developmentally Appropriate” for any age or age group of children if it includes descriptions or visual depictions of “sexual conduct,” as that term is defined by Section 16–15–305(C)(1).

4. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to establish “a committee comprised of at least five of the State Board’s members... [and to] conduct a public meeting” consistent with the Regulation’s requirements. Reg. 43-170(IV)(E). Furthermore, it requires the committee to “provide a report and recommendation to the full State Board to be considered and either adopted or rejected by the State Board at its next regularly scheduled meeting.” *Id.*
5. Regulation 43-170 authorizes the State Board to review material “of its own volition and on its own initiative” in order to “make determinations regarding the educational suitability or the Age or Developmental Appropriateness of specific Instructional Materials pursuant to the criteria and requirements of” Reg. 43-170(VI)(B).

RECOMMENDATION

Having carefully considered all public comments (in person and written), the Subject Material and/or excerpts in question from the Subject Material, all documentation provided by the Department, and all comments made by those appearing before the IMRC, we unanimously find that the Subject Material includes descriptions of “sexual conduct” as that term is defined by S.C. Code § 16-15-305(C)(1). While the IMRC’s review of the Subject Material is not limited to Exhibit A, the excerpts contained therein establish a clear violation of the regulation. Therefore, the Subject Material is not Age and Developmentally Appropriate as defined by S.C. Code Reg. 43-170 and must be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina.

The IMRC recommends that, considering all the circumstances, Push by Sapphire be removed entirely from all public schools in South Carolina, beginning on the date of the signing of the Suspension Order by the South Carolina State Board of Education.

Christian T. Hanley, Jr.

Report and Recommendation
Push

Chairman
Instructional Material Review Committee
January 31, 2025



**South Carolina Instructional Materials
Uniform Parent Complaint Form**

Your Name: Ivie Szalai
 Title & Author of Contested Material (one per form): PUSH by Sapphire
 School Where Contested Material is Located: Bluffton HS
 Location of Contested Material (library, classroom, etc...): Library / Possibly DISCUS
 Contested Material is (select one): ☒ Printed ☐ Audio/Visual ☐ Online Resource
 Other (please describe): _____

I request that this Contested Material be (choose one of the following):

- ☒ Removed from all schools/facilities in this District.
☐ Restricted to the following grade levels in this District: _____
☐ Restricted to a student whose parent/legal guardian provides consent and is enrolled in the following grade levels in this District: _____

Describe Your Reason for Contesting This Material (attach additional pages as needed):

This book is a clear violation of Regulation 43-170. This book contains descriptions of masturbation, oral, and vaginal sex, excretions, incest, and pedophilia. Most are defined in SC Code 16-15-305(c)(1). I will include pictures of the excerpts to include chapter and page number. I read excerpts from this book at the June 27, 2023 August Book 5 of 5 board meeting.

I, Ivie Szalai (insert your name), hereby certify that:

- I am a parent or legal guardian of a student who attends a school within this District.
- I have read, watched, or otherwise reviewed the material I am contesting.
- I have made a good faith effort to address my concerns with School or District staff.
- I have not filed more than five (5) instructional material complaints (including this complaint) in this calendar month.
- I believe that this Contested Material is not suitable for use, availability, and/or unrestricted access in this District, pursuant to the requirements and definitions in Regulation 43-170, which are summarized on the following instruction page.

Signature: _____

Date: 8/24/24

SC CODE OF LAWS

CHAPTER 15

Offenses Against Morality and Decency

ARTICLE 3

Obscenity, Material Harmful to Minors, Child Exploitation, and Child Prostitution

SECTION 16-15-305(C)(1)

(C) As used in this article:

(1) "sexual conduct" means:

(a) vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, whether actual or simulated, normal or perverted, whether between human beings, animals, or a combination thereof;

(b) masturbation, excretory functions, or lewd exhibition, actual or simulated, of the genitals, pubic hair, anus, vulva, or female breast nipples including male or female genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal or covered male genitals in a discernably turgid state;

(c) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated bestiality, sado-masochistic abuse, meaning flagellation or torture by or upon a person who is nude or clad in undergarments or in a costume which reveals the pubic hair, anus, vulva, genitals, or female breast nipples, or the condition of being fettered, bound, or otherwise physically restrained on the part of the one so clothed;

(d) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated touching, caressing, or fondling of, or other similar physical contact with, the covered or exposed genitals, pubic or anal regions, or female breast nipple, whether alone or between humans, animals, or a human and an animal, of the same or opposite sex, in an act of actual or apparent sexual stimulation or gratification; or

(e) an act or condition that depicts the insertion of any part of a person's body, other than the male sexual organ, or of any object into another person's anus or vagina, except when done as part of a recognized medical procedure.

25th
Anniversary
Edition

SAPPHIRE

With a New Preface
by TAYARI JONES and
a New Afterword
by the Author

A NOVEL



No man was never nice like that to me before. I ask at the hospital behind him, "Where that guy help me?" They say, "Hush girl you jus' had a baby."

But I can't hush 'cause they keep asking me questions. My name? Precious Jones. Claireece Precious Jones to be exact. Birth date? November 4, 1970. Where? "Here," I say, "right chere in Harlem Hospital." "Nineteen seventy?" the nurse say confuse quiet. Then she say, "How old are you?" I say, "Twelve." I was heavy at twelve too, nobody get I'm twelve 'less I tell them. I'm tall. I jus' know I'm over two hundred 'cause the needle on the scale in the bathroom stop there it don't can go no further. Last time they want to weigh me at school I say no. Why for, I know I'm fat. So what. Next topic for the day.

But this not school nurse now, this Harlem Hospital where I was borned, where me and my baby got tooked after it was borned on the kitchen floor at 444 Lenox Avenue. This nurse slim butter-color woman. She lighter than some Spanish womens but I know she black. I can tell. It's something about being a nigger ain't color. This nurse same as me. A lot of black people with nurse cap or big car or light skin same as me but don't know it. I'm so tired I jus' want to disappear. I wish Miss Butter would leave me alone but she jus' staring at me, her eyes getting bigger and bigger. She say she need to get some more information for the birth certificate.

It still tripping me out that I had a baby. I mean I knew I was pregnant, knew how I got pregnant. I been

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knowing a man put his dick in you, gush white stuff in your booty you could get pregnant. I'm twelve now, I been knowing about that since I was five or six, maybe I always known about pussy and dick. I can't remember not knowing. No, I can't remember a time I did not know. But thas all I knowed. I didn't know how long it take, what's happening inside, nothing, I didn't know nothing.

The nurse is saying something I don't hear. I hear kids at school. Boy say I'm laffing ugly. He say, "Claireece is so ugly she laffing ugly." His fren' say, "No, that fat bitch is crying ugly." Laff laff. Why I'm thinking about those stupid boys now I don't know.

"Mother," she say. "What's your mother's name?" I say, "Mary L Johnston" (L for Lee but my mother don't like Lee, soun' too country). "Where your mother born," she say. I say, "Greenwood, Mississippi." Nurse say, "You ever been there?" I say, "Naw, I never been nowhere." She say, "Reason I ask is I'm from Greenwood, Mississippi, myself." I say, "Oh," 'cause I know I'm spozed to say something.

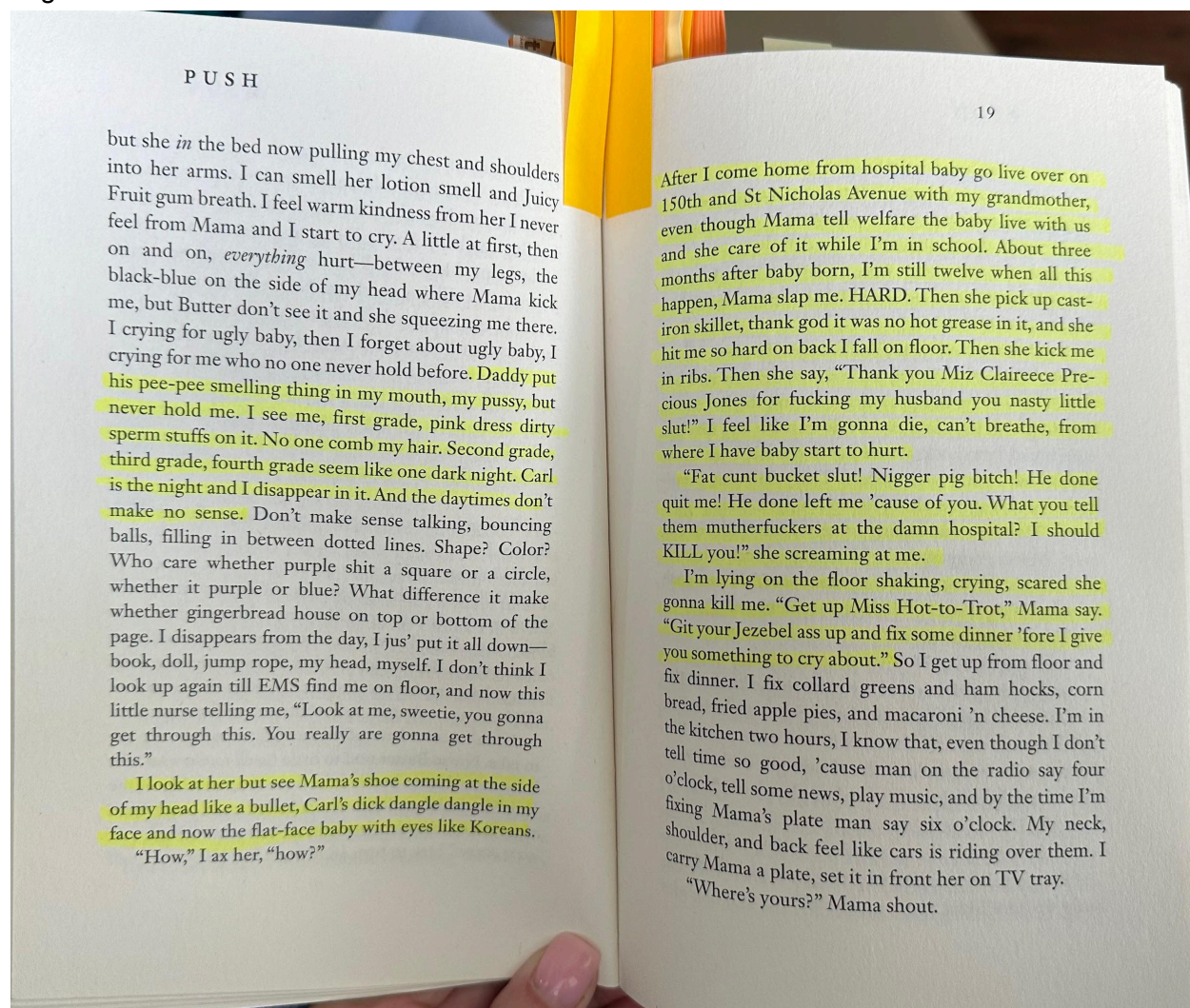
"Father," she say. "What's your daddy's name?"

"Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the Bronx."

She say, "What's the baby's father's name?"

I say, "Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the same Bronx."

She quiet quiet. Say, "Shame, thas a shame. Twelve years old, twelve years old," she say over 'n over like she crazy (or in some shock or something). She look at me,



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but she *in* the bed now pulling my chest and shoulders into her arms. I can smell her lotion smell and Juicy Fruit gum breath. I feel warm kindness from her I never feel from Mama and I start to cry. A little at first, then on and on, *everything* hurt—between my legs, the black-blue on the side of my head where Mama kick me, but Butter don't see it and she squeezing me there. I crying for ugly baby, then I forget about ugly baby, I crying for me who no one never hold before. Daddy put his pee-pee smelling thing in my mouth, my pussy, but never hold me. I see me, first grade, pink dress dirty sperm stuffs on it. No one comb my hair. Second grade, third grade, fourth grade seem like one dark night. Carl is the night and I disappear in it. And the daytimes don't make no sense. Don't make sense talking, bouncing balls, filling in between dotted lines. Shape? Color? Who care whether purple shit a square or a circle, whether it purple or blue? What difference it make whether gingerbread house on top or bottom of the page. I disappears from the day, I jus' put it all down—book, doll, jump rope, my head, myself. I don't think I look up again till EMS find me on floor, and now this little nurse telling me, "Look at me, sweetie, you gonna get through this. You really are gonna get through this."

I look at her but see Mama's shoe coming at the side of my head like a bullet, Carl's dick dangle dangle in my face and now the flat-face baby with eyes like Koreans.

"How," I ax her, "how?"

After I come home from hospital baby go live over on 150th and St Nicholas Avenue with my grandmother, even though Mama tell welfare the baby live with us and she care of it while I'm in school. About three months after baby born, I'm still twelve when all this happen, Mama slap me. HARD. Then she pick up cast-iron skillet, thank god it was no hot grease in it, and she hit me so hard on back I fall on floor. Then she kick me in ribs. Then she say, "Thank you Miz Claireece Precious Jones for fucking my husband you nasty little slut!" I feel like I'm gonna die, can't breathe, from where I have baby start to hurt.

"Fat cunt bucket slut! Nigger pig bitch! He done quit me! He done left me 'cause of you. What you tell them mutherfuckers at the damn hospital? I should KILL you!" she screaming at me.

I'm lying on the floor shaking, crying, scared she gonna kill me. "Get up Miss Hot-to-Trot," Mama say. "Git your Jezebel ass up and fix some dinner 'fore I give you something to cry about." So I get up from floor and fix dinner. I fix collard greens and ham hocks, corn bread, fried apple pies, and macaroni 'n cheese. I'm in the kitchen two hours, I know that, even though I don't tell time so good, 'cause man on the radio say four o'clock, tell some news, play music, and by the time I'm fixing Mama's plate man say six o'clock. My neck, shoulder, and back feel like cars is riding over them. I carry Mama a plate, set it in front her on TV tray.

"Where's yours?" Mama shout.

So *back* to the kitchen, git her pies, pile my own plate higher than the first time, know if I don't she just gonna make me go back again. I sit her pies down on the tray. Try not to look at her. Try to watch the white people on TV running on the beach sand. Try not to see grease running down Mama's chin, try not to see her grab whole ham hock wif her hand, try not to see myself doing the same thing. Eating, first 'cause she make me, beat me if I don't, then eating hoping pain in my neck back go away. I keep eating till the pain, the gray TV light, and Mama is a blur; and I just fall back on the couch so full it like I'm dyin' and I go to sleep, like I always do; almost. *Almost*, go to sleep; it's the pain in my shoulder keep me from totally conking out this time. I feel Mama's hand between my legs, moving up my thigh. Her hand stop, she getting ready to pinch me if I move. I just lay still still, keep my eyes close. I can tell Mama's other hand between her legs now 'cause the smell fill room. Mama can't fit into bathtub no more. Go sleep, go sleep, go to *sleep*, I tells myself. Mama's hand creepy spider, up my legs, in my pussy. God please! Thank you god I say as I fall asleep.

I'm twelve, no I *was* twelve, when that shit happen. I'm sixteen now. For past couple of weeks or so, ever since white bitch Lichenstein kick me outta school shit, 1983 and 1987, twelve years old and sixteen years old, first baby and this one coming, all been getting mixed up in

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This time I know Mama know. Umm hmmm, she know. She bring him to me. I ain' crazy, that stinky hoe give me to him. Probably thas' what he require to fuck her, some of me. Got to where he jus' come in my room any ole time, not jus' night. He climb on me. Shut up! he say. He slap my ass, You wide as the Mississippi, don't tell me a little bit of dick hurt you heifer. Git usta it, he laff, you *is* usta it. I fall back on bed, he fall right on top of me. Then I change stations, change *bodies*, I be dancing in videos! In movies! I be breaking, *fly*, jus' a dancing! Umm hmm heating up the stage at the Apollo for Doug E. Fresh or Al B. Shure. They love me! Say I'm one of the best dancers ain' no doubt of or about that!

"I'm gonna marry you," he be saying. Hurry up, nigger, shut up! He mess up dream talkin' 'n gruntin'. First he mess up my life fucking me, then he mess up the fucking talkin'. I wanna scream, Oh shut up! Nigger, how you gonna marry me and you is my daddy. I'm your daughter, fucking me illegal. But I keep my mouf shut so's the fucking don't turn into a beating. I start to feel good; stop being a video dancer and start coming. I try to go back to video but coming now, rocking under Carl now, my twat jumping juicy, it feel good. I feel shamed. "See, see," he slap my thigh like cowboys do horses on TV, then he squeeze my nipple, bite down on it. I come some more. "See, you LIKE it! You jus' like your mama—you die for it!" He pull his dick out, the white cum stuff pour out my hole wet up the sheets.

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look way above me, put me out of their eyes. My fahver don't see me really. If he did he would know I was like a white girl, a *real* person, inside. He would not climb on me from forever and stick his dick in me 'n get me inside on fire, bleed, I bleed then he slap me. Can't he see I am a girl for flowers and thin straw legs and a place in the picture. I been out the picture so long I am used to it. But that don't mean it don't hurt. Sometimes I pass by store window and somebody fat dark skin, old looking, someone look like my muver look back at me. But I know it can't be my muver 'cause my muver is at home. She have not left home since Little Mongo was born. Who I see? I stand in tub sometime, look my body, it stretch marks, ripples. I try to hide myself, then I try to show myself. I ax my muver for money to git my hair done, clothes. I know the money she got for me—from my baby. She usta give me money; now every time I ax for money she say I took her husband, her man. Her man? Please! Thas my mutherfuckin' fahver! I hear her tell someone on phone I am heifer, take her husband, I'm fast. What it take for my muver to see me? Sometimes I wish I was not alive. But I don't know how to die. Ain' no plug to pull out. 'N no matter how bad I feel my heart don't stop beating and my eyes open in the morning. I hardly have not seen my daughter since she was a little baby. I never stick my bresses in her mouth. My muver say what for? It's outta style. She say I never do you. What that child of yours need tittie for? She retarded. Mongoloid. Down Sinder.

Chapter 2

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II

First thing I see when I wake up is picture of Farrakhan's face on the wall. I love him. He is against crack addicts and crackers. Crackers is the cause of everything bad. It why my father ack like he do. He has forgot he is the Original Man! So he fuck me, fuck me, beat me, have a chile by me. When he see I'm pregnant the first time he disappear. I think for years, for a long time I know that much.

After my baby and me come out of the hospital my muver take us down to welfare; say I is mother but just a chile and she taking care of bofe us'es. So really all she did was add my baby to her budget. She already on the 'fare wit' me so she just add my daughter. I could be on the 'fare for myself now, I think. I'm old enuff. I'm 16. But I'm not sure I know how to be on my own. I have to say sometimes I hate my muver. She don't love me. I wonder how she could love Little Mongo (thas my daughter). Mongo sound Spanish don't it? Yeah, thas why I chose it, but what it is is short for Mongoloid Down Sinder, which is what she is; sometimes what I feel I is. I feel so stupid sometimes. So ugly, worth nuffin'. I

could just sit here wif my muver everyday wif the shades
 drawed, watching TV, eat, watch TV, eat. Carl come
 over fuck us'es. Go from room to room, slap me on my
 ass when he through, holler WHEEE WHEEE! Call
 me name Butter Ball Big Mama Two Ton of Fun. I hate
 hear him talk more than I hate fuck. Sometimes fuck feel
 good. That confuse me, everything get swimming for
 me, floating like for days sometimes. I just sit in back
 classroom, somebody say something I shout on 'em, hit
 'em; rest of the time I mine my bizness. I was on my way
 to graduate from I.S. 146 'n then fuckface Miz Lichen-
 stein mess shit up. I . . . , in my inside world, I am so
 pretty, like a advertisement girl on commercial, 'n some-
 one ride up here in car, someone look like the son of that
 guy that got kilt when he was president a long time ago
 or Tom Cruise—or anybody like that pull up here in a
 car and I be riding like on TV chile—JeeZUS! It's 8 a.m.
 o'clock! I know I woketed up at 6 a.m., lord where the
 time go! I got to get dress for school. I got to be at school
 by 9 a.m. Today is first day. I been tessed. I been incomed
 eligible. I got Medicaid card and proof of address. All
 that shit. I is ready. Ready for school. School something
 (this *nuthin'*!). School gonna help me get out dis house. I
 gotta throw some water on my ass and git up. What I'm
 gonna wear what I'm gonna wear? One thing I do got is
 clothes, thanks to my muver's charge at Lane Bryant 'n
 man sell hot shit. Come to building go from door to
 door, I got your size he call out in hallway I got your size.
 I got to get dress. I wear my pink stretch pants? I think

hot stinky down my thighs ssssss splatter splatter. I wanna die I hate myself HATE myself. Giggles giggles but I don't move I barely breathe I just sit. They giggle. I stare straight ahead. They talk me. I don't say nuffin'.

Seven, he on me almost every night. First it's just in my mouth. Then it's more more. He is intercourses me. Say I can take it. Look you don't even bleed, virgin girls bleed. You not virgin. I'm seven.

I don't realize I've gone from walking real real slow to standing perfectly still. I'm in the lobby of first day of school Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One just standing there. I realize this 'cause Miz Rain done peeked her head out last door on the left and said, "You alright?" I know who she is 'cause Miss Cornrow with the glasses had done pointed her out to me after I finish testing and show me my teacher and classroom.

I make my feet move. I don't say anything. Nothing in my mouth to say. I move my feet some more. Miz Rain ask me if I'm in the A.B.E. class. I say yes. She say this is it and go back inside door. The first thing I see when I step through door is the windows, where we is is high up, no other buildings in the way. Sky blue blue. I looks around the room now. Walls painted lite ugly green. Miz Rain at her desk, her back to me, her face to the class and the windows. "Class" only about five, six other people. Miz Teacher turn around say, Have a seat. I stays standing at door. I swallow hard, start to, I think I'm gonna cry. I look Miz Teacher's long dreadlocky hair, look kinda nice but look kinda nasty too. My knees is shaking, I'm

gonna get to talk to anybody. Welfare very crowded nowadays. "I go in the morning first thing."

Same thing in me when I try to hit Mrs Lichenstein 'n when I grabbed the knife in the dishwater—only deeper. I think my mind a TV set smell like between my muver's legs. I stupid. I ain' got no education even tho' I not miss days of school. I talks funny. The air floats like water wif pictures around me sometime. Sometimes I can't breathe. I'm a good girl. I don't fucks boyz but I'm pregnant. My fahver fuck me. And she know it. She kick me in my head when I'm pregnant. She take *my* money. Money for Little Mongo should be mine. A Day at the Beach Shore A Day A Day ABC Alphabetical order CD ABCD. I grab my notebook. I look at my muver.

"I go to welfare tomorrow—Tuesday. Wednesday I go to school. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I go to school."

I look Mama. This baby feel like a watermelon between my bones getting bigger and my ankles feelin' tight 'cause they swoled. I sigh. This gonna end, even if it end by me stop breathing. Thas what I want sometimes. Sometime I hurt so bad I want to not wake up, want breathing to stop in my sleep. Have me *don't* wake up. Other times I start to go a huh a huh ahuh ahuh A HUH A HUH and I grab my chess 'cause I can't breathe, then I *WANT* breathin' bad.

I try to forget I got baby in me. I hated borning the first one. No fun. Hurt. Now again. I think my daddy. He stink, the white shit drip off his dick. Lick it lick it. I

P U S H

HATE that. But then I feel the hot sauce hot cha cha feeling when he be fucking me. I get so confuse. I HATE him. But my pussy be popping. He say that, "Big Mama your pussy is popping!" I HATE myself when I feel good.

"How long you gonna stand there like you retarded."

I start to tell her don't, don't call me that, but all, everything, is out me. I jus' want to lay down, listen to radio, look at picture of Farrakhan, a *real* man, who don't fuck his daughter, fuck children. Everything feel like it is too big for my mind. Can't nuffin' fit when I think 'bout Daddy.

"I'm tired." Why I say that, she don't care.

"Fix us some lunch, it's way pas' lunch. You done ate?"

"I had some potato chips."

"Thas all?"

I remember ham 'n chicken, don't say nuffin', ax her, "What you want?"

"I don't know, see what's in there. If not nuffin' in there, get stamps out my purse and go to store 'n get us'es somethin' to eat."

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
PQRS. There are 26 letters in our alphabet. Each letter has a sound. A Day at the Beach Shore ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.

That night I dream I am not in me but am awake listening to myself choking, going a huh a huh A HUH A HUH A HUH. I am walking around trying to find

where I am, where the sound is coming from. I know I will choke to death I don't find myself. I walk to my muver's room but it look different, she look different. I look like little baby almost. She is talkin' sweet to me like sometimes Daddy talks. I am choking between her legs A HUH A HUH. She is smelling big woman smell. She say suck it, lick me Precious. Her hand is like a mountain pushing my head down. I squeeze my eyes shut but choking don't stop, it get worse. Then I open my eyes and look. I look at little Precious and big Mama and feel hit feeling, feel like killing Mama. But I don't, instead I call little Precious and say, Come to Mama but I means me. Come to *me* little Precious. Little Precious look at me, smile, and start to sing: ABCDEFG ...

Wednesday morning Jo Ann back. She not like G.E.D. I guess. Say she need a little brush up before she go to G.E.D. Miz Rain don't say nuffin' till she hear the brush up stuff, then Miz Rain say, "Are you in the right class Jo Ann? This is a class to learn reading and writing, this is not a brush up for G.E.D." Jo Ann look hate at Miz Rain. I like Miz Rain. I see what she doing, I think. Jo Ann tryin' to act like she ain' one of us. Miz Rain tryin' to git her to 'cept herself for where she at. She ain' no G.E.D. girl, leas' not yet.

Miz Rain call roll: Jermaine Hicks, Rhonda Johnson, Precious Jones, Consuelo Montenegro, Jo Ann Rogers, Rita Romero. Everybody here. Miz Rain ax, "Who

Chapter 4

Page 111

that's how it feels. But I'm probably the only one get it from they daddy. Counselor, Ms Weiss, say she try to find out as much about Daddy for me as she can.

How much I want to know? And for what? I tell counselor I can't talk about Daddy now. My clit swell up I think Daddy. Daddy sick me, *disgust* me, but still he sex me up. I nawshus in my stomach but hot tight in my twat and I think I want it back, the smell of the bedroom, the hurt—he slap my face till it sting and my ears sing separate songs from each other, call me names, pump my pussy in out in out in out awww I come. He bite me *hard*. A hump! He slam his hips into me *HARD*. I scream pain he come. He slap my thighs like cowboys do horses on TV. Shiver. Orgasm in me, his body shaking, grab me, call me Fat Mama, Big Hole! You *LOVE* it! Say you love it! I wanna say I *DON'T*. I wanna say I'm a chile. But my pussy popping like grease in frying pan. He slam in me again. His dick soft. He start sucking my tittie.

I wait for him get off me. Lay there stare at wall till wall is a movie, *Wizard of Oz*, I can make that one play anytime. Michael Jackson, scarecrow. Then my body take me over again, like shocks after earthquake, shiver me, I come again. My body not mine, I hate it coming.

Afterward I go bafroom. I smear shit on my face. Feel good. Don't know why but it do. I never tell nobody about that before. But I would do that. If I go to insect support group what will I hear from other girls. I bite my fingernails till they look like disease, pull

so young and feel so old. So young like I don't know nuffin', so old like I know everything. A girl have her father's dick in her mouth know things the other girls don't know but it's not what you want to know.

It's all kinda girls here! They sitting in circle faces like clocks, no bombs. Bombs with hair and titties and dresses. After I sit here five minutes I know I am a bomb too. Only sitting here doing whatever they gonna do will keep me from blowing up. Thank you Rita for git me here on time.

"Hello." She look like a movie star! Slim, long hair, eyes like stars, red lips. "My name is Irene. I am an incest survivor."

My mouth fall open. Someone like that.

"It started when I was, oh, about four or five years old with him fondling me" (feeling her up). "By the time I was twelve he was having intercourse with me three or four times a week."

Everything is floating around me now. Like geeses from the lake. I see the wings beating beating hear geeses. It's more birds than geeses. Where so many birds come from. I see flying. Feel flying. *Am* flying. Far up, but my body down in circle. Precious is bird.

Someone is holding my hand. It's Rita. She is massage my hand. I come back from being a bird to hear beautiful girl crying. Smell Mama. Carl, the way his knees on either side of my neck.

Girl say, "Thank you for letting me share." She say, "This is a Tuesday night beginner's meeting. To share

P U S H

raise your hand." I raise my hand. My hand is going up through the smell of Mama, my hand is pushing Daddy's dick out my face.

"I was rape by my father. And beat." No one is talking except me. "Mama push my head down in her . . ." I can't talk no more. Beautiful girl whisper to me, "Are you through?" I say yes. She say, "Pick the next person." I look up from my shoes, Nikes; girls got they hand up. I pick girl in overalls with blue eyes. Grab Rita's hand, listen. Listen to girl rape by brother, listen to old woman rape by her father; don't remember till he die when she is 65 years old. Girls, old women, white women, lotta white women. Girl's younger sister murdered by the cult? Jewish girl, we had money on Long Island (like Westchester), my father was a prominent child psychiatrist. It started when I was about nine years old. Girls like Jermaine is, I am a proud lesbian. But it's the only thing I'm proud of; I was confine to a mental institution for fourteen years, diagnosed as a schizophrenia—

What am I hearing!

One hour and a half women talk. Can this be done happen to so many people? I know I am not lying! But is they? I thought cult was in movie. What kinda world this babies raped. A father break a girl's arm. Sweet talk you suck his dick. All kinda women here. Princess girls, some fat girls, old women, young women. One thing we got in common, no *the* thing, is we was rape.

Afterwards we go out for coffee. I have never been "out for coffee" before. Rita put her arm around my

day that's what make me remember. that smell. he
 put his ball in my face. years like wash machine
 aroun and around. mama jaw open like evil wolf.
 the smell deeper than toilet. her fingers pick
 apart my pussy. night. poisoned rat. don't have
 dreams.

I close my book.

"Well Mary, you want to begin by talking a little bit
 about the abuse?" Ms Weiss say to Mama.

"What 'buse?"

"Well according to Precious' files she has had two
 children by your boyfriend, the late Carl Kenwood Jones,
 who is also *her father*? You've been calling here saying you
 want to be reunited with your daughter and grandson,
 that you want them to come home. Well I think you'd
 better explain just what happened in that home."

Oh Mama, please don't go for this!

"Well, I, Precious, b'long at home."

Mama please be quiet.

"When did the abuse happen, how often, where?
 When were you first aware of what was going on Ms
 Johnston?"

"I guess, he come over you know. I wake up at night,
 morning he not wif me, I know he in there wif her.
 When it first start? I don' know. I'm a good mother. She
 had everything. I done tole her that. Pink 'n white baby

... husband, I call him—loves to
 out wheeling in the...
 I dream of day we gonna you know
 house wif grass, color TVs in all the
 he born about the same time as Ma
 kilt. You remember him don't you
 'bout!
 time 'bout same time as you."
 "I say. Least that what I always
 t. My little Scorpio chile! Scor-
 they lie, jus' you can't always
 ecious 'bout the same age as
 t, give or take a few months!
 fast! She walkin' talkin'—
 son. Her teef, everything.
 ny or something! She can
 hardly walking. I put on
 r Precious, you remem-
 g and you disco to that?
 n all, Carl jus' a high-
 on't she jus' shut up

"When? I don't know when it start. When I remem-
 ber it? She still little. Yeah, around three maybe. I give
 her a bottle. I still got milk in my bresses but not for her
 but from Carl sucking. I give him tittie, Precious bottle.
 Hygiene, you know?"

"Huh?" Ms Weiss go.

"Huh?" go Mama back.

"You mentioned something about hygiene in con-
 nection with . . . with . . ." Ms Weiss can't finish.

"I bottle her, tittie him. Bottle more better for kidz.
 Sanitary. But I never git dried up 'cause Carl always on
 me. It's like that you know. Chile, man—a woman got
 bofe. What you gonna do? So we in bed. I put her on
 one side of me on pillow, Carl on other side me."

Ms Weiss look like she done stopped breathing.

"Carl got my tittie in his mouf. Nuffin' wrong wif
 that, it's natural. But I think thas the day IT start. I
 don't never remember nothing before that. I hot. He
 sucking my tittie. My eyes closed. I know he getting
 hard I can see wifout my eyes, I love him so much."

Umm hmm, I was raised by a psycho maniac fool.

"He climb on me, you know. You unnerstand?"

No, tell us some more stupid bitch.

"So he on me. Then he reach over to Precious! Start
 wif his finger between her legs. I say Carl what you
 doing! He say shut your big ass up! This is good for her.
 Then he git off me, take off her Pampers and try to
 stick his thing in Precious. You know what trip me out

P U S H

is it almost can go in Precious! I think she some kinda freak baby then. I say stop Carl stop! I want him on *me*! I never wanted him to hurt her. I didn't want him doing *anything* to her. I wanted my man for myself. Sex me up, not my chile. So you cain't blame all that shit happen to Precious on *me*. I love Carl, I love him. He her daddy, but he was my man!"

Ms Weiss look at me now. "Precious, you've been writing in your journal about this."

"This and other stuff."

"She write poems too, lady at Each One Teach One say." This from Mama. Mama one hundred, not ninety nine, percent crazy.

"Would you like to share some of that in this session?" Ms Weiss ask.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Ms Rain say journal completely confidential. Share if you want. If you don't want to, don't. I don't want to."

I'm gone. It's 4:45 p.m. Up! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight steps. I hate Mama, she ain' shit. I feel like nothing around her, like *minus* nothing. I gotta get outta here.

I go down to kitchen where house mother is. "Miz Mom!"

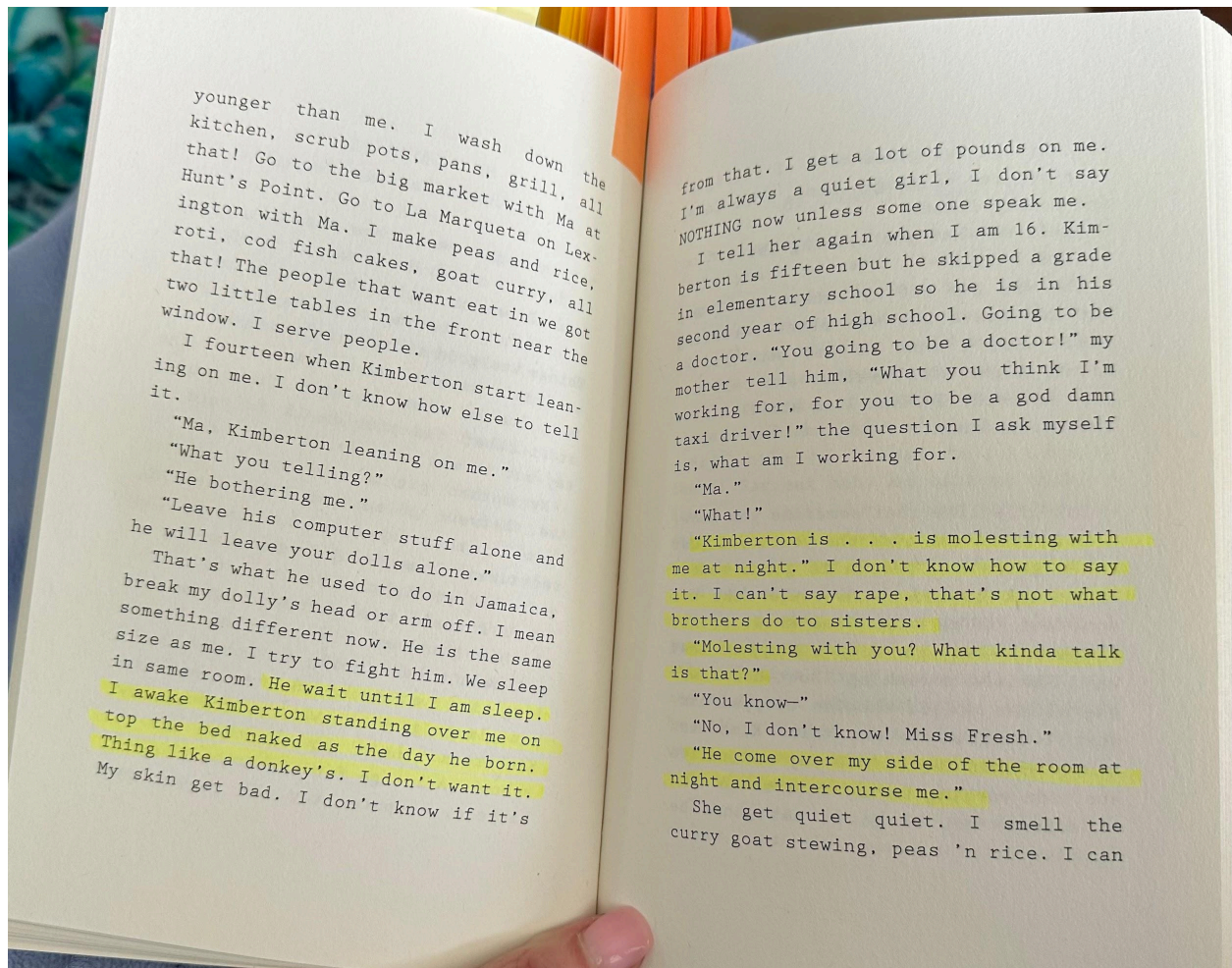
"Stop screaming!" she say. "What's wrong with you?"

"You could get Abdul from nursery, feed him, and

LIFE STORIES

No page references

My Younger Years



Part 2

My Grown Up Years

glass door of refrigerator.
ginger beer, 7UP, Cokes
ou talking about."

my house now. I say
she start screaming
to her son. Filthy
walker she call me.
I am still in that

ometime you know.
he years you just
is gonna react.
would make her
ou know, mother
t happen that
bout how I was
stopped him.
ink Kimberton
ay and retire
r seven. An'
ot gonna be

part two

MY GROWN UP YEARS

I'm twenty-four years old it's been eight years since I "left" (I put it like that cause you know how I left) my mother's house. Kimberton, he is dentist. Was a dentist, maybe he is, maybe he beat the case—he get charged by young girl's parents of trying to stick his finger (and who knows what else) up her pussy while he spozed to be fixing teeth! Far out huh? Ma tell me this. I don't go visit but I see her out on street when she doing her shopping. We talk like I'm her daughter that got married and move out or go away to nurse school or some such. I don't know, I just go along with the program. Ma say it's all lies, girl's parents just trying to extort him. But what I think is he pull his shit on the wrong one. You can't get away with everything all the time with everybody.

The first couple of years on the street was the worst. From working

erfucker die.
hard again. I
ay or quit my
I'm a person
re. Just sit
sure. I get
gs and start
ash can col-
ill the bags
competition
these bot-
ng and des-
ettle bug or
two huge
k. I'm on
ch I usu-
ere Ma's
out or Eat
, I don't
happen
m it. I

is also
et mov-
toward
look up

and see a FOR RENT sign in the window,
and next to sign is Kimberton. Our eyes
meet. His is shock, mine is like a kiss,
my brother! Always my first thought of
him is before he rape me then the mem-
ory roll in like fog. I see Kimberton's
mouth fall open at the horror of me bent
over, hands gripped around the black
bags. I remember my hands grating
coconut, washing rice, stirring peas,
scrubbing pots in cold greasy water,
pulling the catheter out the old man's
penis, scraping shit from old Mrs
Feld's age spot ass. I look back at him.
I am not ashamed. I could be dead all
these years. Rage hot fill me. Kimber-
ton's eyes glowing like radioactive in
my mind, his fly eyes, his hands push-
ing me down on the bed, years. Years.
Kimberton comes to the door. He has on
some clothes that cost a lot and should
look great but he just look foreign and
skinny and dark. He don't look like
American man like he want to. I stare.
This a man fuck his sister and say so
what. This a man go to dental school,

Harlem Butch

makes rivers

go, run?
now. I never
e. I mean, I
vity, the
absorption;

wrong?

ed,

id.

ved

."

oin

me!

est

will mean I will have to leave the
class.)

I'm still 7:

a boy holds me down

under the stairwell

that smells like urine

(pee I woulda said at seven)

tries to push his dick

into me.

I am 8:

when I put my tongue

in Mary-Mae's mouth

for the first time

(under the same steps)

9:

my fingers

10:

my tongue but this time

I put it in her

where he tried to put

it in me

13:

I am pressed close to her

against the wall

in her room

we will fall on the

still pink in some places

chenille bedspread
My fingers A trains howling thru her
dark tunnel
We will-
DADDY! DADDY!
Come LOOK what Mary-Mae and Jermaine
is doing!
BULLDAGGERBULLDAGGERBULLDYKE
DYKEBULLDYKEBULLDYKEDYKEDYKE
the voices become like the pro-
grammed messages in the subway time
unpredictable loud irritating
expected
but it is Mary-Mae's father who
catches me one night to show me
what a MAN is, what a woman is
when I get up from my new knowledge
one of my front teeth is gone
The doctor will tell my mother
damage is done
I won't tell her by who

I never told that part of my story
before because I hate to see their
square eyes light up with, "Oh that's
why! I understand now! I see-"

No! You don't see! Before I was
snatched out the air like a butterfly.
wings torn off me. BEFORE any all that
I had slid my fingers up the sweet stink
of another child and knelt down to lick
her thighs. Men did not make me this
way. Nothing happened to make me this
way. I was born butch!

I was 14:
my mother is a religious movement. I
don't know how else to describe it, a
walking church. A wake up, go to sleep,
jack off, shouting ass Christian. It
make me sick. JESUS this, JESUS that.
fuck that shit.

We are nuclear but poor
four of us

mother father sister brother sitting
around the white formica covered table.
little flecks of gold embedded like sun-
shine in the white plastic. We are eat-
ing breakfast, which is sardines out a
can emptied onto our plates and some
cold biscuits left over from last night.
He went to take a sip of coffee and she



**South Carolina Instructional Materials
Uniform Parent Complaint Form**

Your Name: Ivie Szalai
 Title & Author of Contested Material (one per form): PUSH by Sapphire
 School Where Contested Material is Located: Bluffton HS
 Location of Contested Material (library, classroom, etc...): Library / Possibly DISCUS
 Contested Material is (select one): ☒ Printed ☐ Audio/Visual ☐ Online Resource
 Other (please describe): _____

I request that this Contested Material be (choose one of the following):

- ☒ Removed from all schools/facilities in this District.
☐ Restricted to the following grade levels in this District: _____
☐ Restricted to a student whose parent/legal guardian provides consent and is enrolled in the following grade levels in this District: _____

Describe Your Reason for Contesting This Material (attach additional pages as needed):

This book is a clear violation of Regulation 43-170. This book contains descriptions of masturbation, oral, and vaginal sex, excretions, incest, and pedophilia. Most are defined in SC Code 16-15-305(c)(1). I will include pictures of the excerpts to include chapter and page number. I read excerpts from this book at the June 27, 2023 August Book 5 of 5 board meeting.

I, Ivie Szalai (insert your name), hereby certify that:

- I am a parent or legal guardian of a student who attends a school within this District.
- I have read, watched, or otherwise reviewed the material I am contesting.
- I have made a good faith effort to address my concerns with School or District staff.
- I have not filed more than five (5) instructional material complaints (including this complaint) in this calendar month.
- I believe that this Contested Material is not suitable for use, availability, and/or unrestricted access in this District, pursuant to the requirements and definitions in Regulation 43-170, which are summarized on the following instruction page.

Signature: _____

Date: 8/24/24

SC CODE OF LAWS

CHAPTER 15

Offenses Against Morality and Decency

ARTICLE 3

Obscenity, Material Harmful to Minors, Child Exploitation, and Child Prostitution

SECTION 16-15-305(C)(1)

(C) As used in this article:

(1) "sexual conduct" means:

(a) vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, whether actual or simulated, normal or perverted, whether between human beings, animals, or a combination thereof;

(b) masturbation, excretory functions, or lewd exhibition, actual or simulated, of the genitals, pubic hair, anus, vulva, or female breast nipples including male or female genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal or covered male genitals in a discernably turgid state;

(c) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated bestiality, sado-masochistic abuse, meaning flagellation or torture by or upon a person who is nude or clad in undergarments or in a costume which reveals the pubic hair, anus, vulva, genitals, or female breast nipples, or the condition of being fettered, bound, or otherwise physically restrained on the part of the one so clothed;

(d) an act or condition that depicts actual or simulated touching, caressing, or fondling of, or other similar physical contact with, the covered or exposed genitals, pubic or anal regions, or female breast nipple, whether alone or between humans, animals, or a human and an animal, of the same or opposite sex, in an act of actual or apparent sexual stimulation or gratification; or

(e) an act or condition that depicts the insertion of any part of a person's body, other than the male sexual organ, or of any object into another person's anus or vagina, except when done as part of a recognized medical procedure.

25th
Anniversary
Edition

SAPPHIRE

With a New Preface
by TAYARI JONES and
a New Afterword
by the Author

A NOVEL



Chapter 1

Page 11

No man was never nice like that to me before. I ask at the hospital behind him, "Where that guy help me?" They say, "Hush girl you jus' had a baby."

But I can't hush 'cause they keep asking me questions. My name? Precious Jones. Claireece Precious Jones to be exact. Birth date? November 4, 1970. Where? "Here," I say, "right chere in Harlem Hospital." "Nineteen seventy?" the nurse say confuse quiet. Then she say, "How old are you?" I say, "Twelve." I was heavy at twelve too, nobody get I'm twelve 'less I tell them. I'm tall. I jus' know I'm over two hundred 'cause the needle on the scale in the bathroom stop there it don't can go no further. Last time they want to weigh me at school I say no. Why for, I know I'm fat. So what. Next topic for the day.

But this not school nurse now, this Harlem Hospital where I was borned, where me and my baby got tooked after it was borned on the kitchen floor at 444 Lenox Avenue. This nurse slim butter-color woman. She lighter than some Spanish womens but I know she black. I can tell. It's something about being a nigger ain't color. This nurse same as me. A lot of black people with nurse cap or big car or light skin same as me but don't know it. I'm so tired I jus' want to disappear. I wish Miss Butter would leave me alone but she jus' staring at me, her eyes getting bigger and bigger. She say she need to get some more information for the birth certificate.

It still tripping me out that I had a baby. I mean I knew I was pregnant, knew how I got pregnant. I been

P U S H

knowing a man put his dick in you, gush white stuff in your booty you could get pregnant. I'm twelve now, I been knowing about that since I was five or six, maybe I always known about pussy and dick. I can't remember not knowing. No, I can't remember a time I did not know. But thas all I knowed. I didn't know how long it take, what's happening inside, nothing, I didn't know nothing.

The nurse is saying something I don't hear. I hear kids at school. Boy say I'm laffing ugly. He say, "Claireece is so ugly she laffing ugly." His fren' say, "No, that fat bitch is crying ugly." Laff laff. Why I'm thinking about those stupid boys now I don't know.

"Mother," she say. "What's your mother's name?" I say, "Mary L Johnston" (L for Lee but my mother don't like Lee, soun' too country). "Where your mother born," she say. I say, "Greenwood, Mississippi." Nurse say, "You ever been there?" I say, "Naw, I never been nowhere." She say, "Reason I ask is I'm from Greenwood, Mississippi, myself." I say, "Oh," 'cause I know I'm spozed to say something.

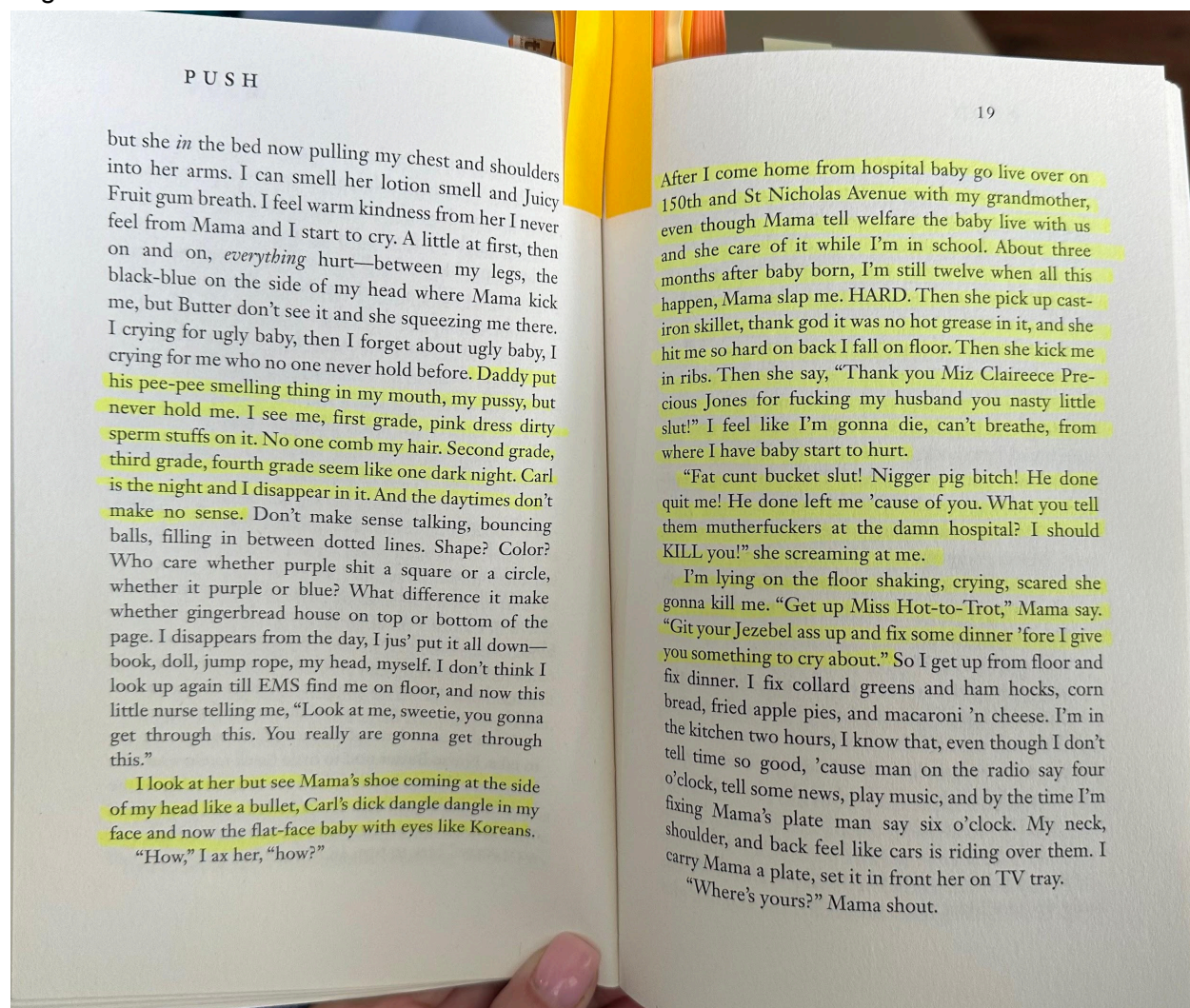
"Father," she say. "What's your daddy's name?"

"Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the Bronx."

She say, "What's the baby's father's name?"

I say, "Carl Kenwood Jones, born in the same Bronx."

She quiet quiet. Say, "Shame, thas a shame. Twelve years old, twelve years old," she say over 'n over like she crazy (or in some shock or something). She look at me,



P U S H

but she *in* the bed now pulling my chest and shoulders into her arms. I can smell her lotion smell and Juicy Fruit gum breath. I feel warm kindness from her I never feel from Mama and I start to cry. A little at first, then on and on, *everything* hurt—between my legs, the black-blue on the side of my head where Mama kick me, but Butter don't see it and she squeezing me there. I crying for ugly baby, then I forget about ugly baby, I crying for me who no one never hold before. Daddy put his pee-pee smelling thing in my mouth, my pussy, but never hold me. I see me, first grade, pink dress dirty sperm stuffs on it. No one comb my hair. Second grade, third grade, fourth grade seem like one dark night. Carl is the night and I disappear in it. And the daytimes don't make no sense. Don't make sense talking, bouncing balls, filling in between dotted lines. Shape? Color? Who care whether purple shit a square or a circle, whether it purple or blue? What difference it make whether gingerbread house on top or bottom of the page. I disappears from the day, I jus' put it all down—book, doll, jump rope, my head, myself. I don't think I look up again till EMS find me on floor, and now this little nurse telling me, "Look at me, sweetie, you gonna get through this. You really are gonna get through this."

I look at her but see Mama's shoe coming at the side of my head like a bullet, Carl's dick dangle dangle in my face and now the flat-face baby with eyes like Koreans.

"How," I ax her, "how?"

After I come home from hospital baby go live over on 150th and St Nicholas Avenue with my grandmother, even though Mama tell welfare the baby live with us and she care of it while I'm in school. About three months after baby born, I'm still twelve when all this happen, Mama slap me. HARD. Then she pick up cast-iron skillet, thank god it was no hot grease in it, and she hit me so hard on back I fall on floor. Then she kick me in ribs. Then she say, "Thank you Miz Claireece Precious Jones for fucking my husband you nasty little slut!" I feel like I'm gonna die, can't breathe, from where I have baby start to hurt.

"Fat cunt bucket slut! Nigger pig bitch! He done quit me! He done left me 'cause of you. What you tell them mutherfuckers at the damn hospital? I should KILL you!" she screaming at me.

I'm lying on the floor shaking, crying, scared she gonna kill me. "Get up Miss Hot-to-Trot," Mama say. "Git your Jezebel ass up and fix some dinner 'fore I give you something to cry about." So I get up from floor and fix dinner. I fix collard greens and ham hocks, corn bread, fried apple pies, and macaroni 'n cheese. I'm in the kitchen two hours, I know that, even though I don't tell time so good, 'cause man on the radio say four o'clock, tell some news, play music, and by the time I'm fixing Mama's plate man say six o'clock. My neck, shoulder, and back feel like cars is riding over them. I carry Mama a plate, set it in front her on TV tray.

"Where's yours?" Mama shout.

So *back* to the kitchen, git her pies, pile my own plate higher than the first time, know if I don't she just gonna make me go back again. I sit her pies down on the tray. Try not to look at her. Try to watch the white people on TV running on the beach sand. Try not to see grease running down Mama's chin, try not to see her grab whole ham hock wif her hand, try not to see myself doing the same thing. Eating, first 'cause she make me, beat me if I don't, then eating hoping pain in my neck back go away. I keep eating till the pain, the gray TV light, and Mama is a blur; and I just fall back on the couch so full it like I'm dyin' and I go to sleep, like I always do; almost. *Almost*, go to sleep; it's the pain in my shoulder keep me from totally conking out this time. I feel Mama's hand between my legs, moving up my thigh. Her hand stop, she getting ready to pinch me if I move. I just lay still still, keep my eyes close. I can tell Mama's other hand between her legs now 'cause the smell fill room. Mama can't fit into bathtub no more. Go sleep, go sleep, go to *sleep*, I tells myself. Mama's hand creepy spider, up my legs, in my pussy. God please! Thank you god I say as I fall asleep.

I'm twelve, no I *was* twelve, when that shit happen. I'm sixteen now. For past couple of weeks or so, ever since white bitch Lichenstein kick me outta school shit, 1983 and 1987, twelve years old and sixteen years old, first baby and this one coming, all been getting mixed up in

P U S H

This time I know Mama know. Umm hmmm, she know. She bring him to me. I ain' crazy, that stinky hoe give me to him. Probably thas' what he require to fuck her, some of me. Got to where he jus' come in my room any ole time, not jus' night. He climb on me. Shut up! he say. He slap my ass, You wide as the Mississippi, don't tell me a little bit of dick hurt you heifer. Git usta it, he laff, you *is* usta it. I fall back on bed, he fall right on top of me. Then I change stations, change *bodies*, I be dancing in videos! In movies! I be breaking, *fly*, jus' a dancing! Umm hmm heating up the stage at the Apollo for Doug E. Fresh or Al B. Shure. They love me! Say I'm one of the best dancers ain' no doubt of or about that!

"I'm gonna marry you," he be saying. Hurry up, nigger, shut up! He mess up dream talkin' 'n gruntin'. First he mess up my life fucking me, then he mess up the fucking talkin'. I wanna scream, Oh shut up! Nigger, how you gonna marry me and you *is* my daddy. I'm your daughter, fucking me illegal. But I keep my mouf shut so's the fucking don't turn into a beating. I start to feel good; stop being a video dancer and start coming. I try to go back to video but coming now, rocking under Carl now, my twat jumping juicy, it feel good. I feel shamed. "*See, see,*" he slap my thigh like cowboys do horses on TV, then he squeeze my nipple, bite down on it. I come some more. "*See, you LIKE it!*" You jus' like your mama—you die for it!" He pull his dick out, the white cum stuff pour out my hole wet up the sheets.

P U S H

look way above me, put me out of their eyes. My fahver don't see me really. If he did he would know I was like a white girl, a *real* person, inside. He would not climb on me from forever and stick his dick in me 'n get me inside on fire, bleed, I bleed then he slap me. Can't he see I am a girl for flowers and thin straw legs and a place in the picture. I been out the picture so long I am used to it. But that don't mean it don't hurt. Sometimes I pass by store window and somebody fat dark skin, old looking, someone look like my muver look back at me. But I know it can't be my muver 'cause my muver is at home. She have not left home since Little Mongo was born. Who I see? I stand in tub sometime, look my body, it stretch marks, ripples. I try to hide myself, then I try to show myself. I ax my muver for money to git my hair done, clothes. I know the money she got for me—from my baby. She usta give me money; now every time I ax for money she say I took her husband, her man. Her man? Please! Thas my mutherfuckin' fahver! I hear her tell someone on phone I am heifer, take her husband, I'm fast. What it take for my muver to see me? Sometimes I wish I was not alive. But I don't know how to die. Ain' no plug to pull out. 'N no matter how bad I feel my heart don't stop beating and my eyes open in the morning. I hardly have not seen my daughter since she was a little baby. I never stick my bresses in her mouth. My muver say what for? It's outta style. She say I never do you. What that child of yours need tittie for? She retarded. Mongoloid. Down Sinder.

Chapter 2

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II

First thing I see when I wake up is picture of Farrakhan's face on the wall. I love him. He is against crack addicts and crackers. Crackers is the cause of everything bad. It why my father ack like he do. He has forgot he is the Original Man! So he fuck me, fuck me, beat me, have a chile by me. When he see I'm pregnant the first time he disappear. I think for years, for a long time I know that much.

After my baby and me come out of the hospital my muver take us down to welfare; say I is mother but just a chile and she taking care of bofe us'es. So really all she did was add my baby to her budget. She already on the 'fare wit' me so she just add my daughter. I could be on the 'fare for myself now, I think. I'm old enuff. I'm 16. But I'm not sure I know how to be on my own. I have to say sometimes I hate my muver. She don't love me. I wonder how she could love Little Mongo (thas my daughter). Mongo sound Spanish don't it? Yeah, thas why I chose it, but what it is is short for Mongoloid Down Sinder, which is what she is; sometimes what I feel I is. I feel so stupid sometimes. So ugly, worth nuffin'. I

could just sit here wif my muver everyday wif the shades
 drawed, watching TV, eat, watch TV, eat. Carl come
 over fuck us'es. Go from room to room, slap me on my
 ass when he through, holler WHEEE WHEEE! Call
 me name Butter Ball Big Mama Two Ton of Fun. I hate
 hear him talk more than I hate fuck. Sometimes fuck feel
 good. That confuse me, everything get swimming for
 me, floating like for days sometimes. I just sit in back
 classroom, somebody say something I shout on 'em, hit
 'em; rest of the time I mine my bizness. I was on my way
 to graduate from I.S. 146 'n then fuckface Miz Lichen-
 stein mess shit up. I . . . , in my inside world, I am so
 pretty, like a advertisement girl on commercial, 'n some-
 one ride up here in car, someone look like the son of that
 guy that got kilt when he was president a long time ago
 or Tom Cruise—or anybody like that pull up here in a
 car and I be riding like on TV chile—JeeZUS! It's 8 a.m.
 o'clock! I know I woketed up at 6 a.m., lord where the
 time go! I got to get dress for school. I got to be at school
 by 9 a.m. Today is first day. I been tessed. I been incomed
 eligible. I got Medicaid card and proof of address. All
 that shit. I is ready. Ready for school. School something
 (this *nuthin'*!). School gonna help me get out dis house. I
 gotta throw some water on my ass and git up. What I'm
 gonna wear what I'm gonna wear? One thing I do got is
 clothes, thanks to my muver's charge at Lane Bryant 'n
 man sell hot shit. Come to building go from door to
 door, I got your size he call out in hallway I got your size.
 I got to get dress. I wear my pink stretch pants? I think

hot stinky down my thighs ssssss splatter splatter. I wanna die I hate myself HATE myself. Giggles giggles but I don't move I barely breathe I just sit. They giggle. I stare straight ahead. They talk me. I don't say nuffin'.

Seven, he on me almost every night. First it's just in my mouth. Then it's more more. He is intercourses me. Say I can take it. Look you don't even bleed, virgin girls bleed. You not virgin. I'm seven.

I don't realize I've gone from walking real real slow to standing perfectly still. I'm in the lobby of first day of school Higher Education Alternative/Each One Teach One just standing there. I realize this 'cause Miz Rain done peeked her head out last door on the left and said, "You alright?" I know who she is 'cause Miss Cornrow with the glasses had done pointed her out to me after I finish testing and show me my teacher and classroom.

I make my feet move. I don't say anything. Nothing in my mouth to say. I move my feet some more. Miz Rain ask me if I'm in the A.B.E. class. I say yes. She say this is it and go back inside door. The first thing I see when I step through door is the windows, where we is is high up, no other buildings in the way. Sky blue blue. I looks around the room now. Walls painted lite ugly green. Miz Rain at her desk, her back to me, her face to the class and the windows. "Class" only about five, six other people. Miz Teacher turn around say, Have a seat. I stays standing at door. I swallow hard, start to, I think I'm gonna cry. I look Miz Teacher's long dreadlocky hair, look kinda nice but look kinda nasty too. My knees is shaking, I'm

gonna get to talk to anybody. Welfare very crowded nowadays. "I go in the morning first thing."

Same thing in me when I try to hit Mrs Lichenstein 'n when I grabbed the knife in the dishwater—only deeper. I think my mind a TV set smell like between my muver's legs. I stupid. I ain' got no education even tho' I not miss days of school. I talks funny. The air floats like water wif pictures around me sometime. Sometimes I can't breathe. I'm a good girl. I don't fucks boyz but I'm pregnant. My fahver fuck me. And she know it. She kick me in my head when I'm pregnant. She take *my* money. Money for Little Mongo should be mine. A Day at the Beach Shore A Day A Day ABC Alphabetical order CD ABCD. I grab my notebook. I look at my muver.

"I go to welfare tomorrow—Tuesday. Wednesday I go to school. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I go to school."

I look Mama. This baby feel like a watermelon between my bones getting bigger and my ankles feelin' tight 'cause they swoled. I sigh. This gonna end, even if it end by me stop breathing. Thas what I want sometimes. Sometime I hurt so bad I want to not wake up, want breathing to stop in my sleep. Have me *don't* wake up. Other times I start to go a huh a huh ahuh ahuh A HUH A HUH and I grab my chess 'cause I can't breathe, then I *WANT* breathin' bad.

I try to forget I got baby in me. I hated borning the first one. No fun. Hurt. Now again. I think my daddy. He stink, the white shit drip off his dick. Lick it lick it. I

P U S H

HATE that. But then I feel the hot sauce hot cha cha feeling when he be fucking me. I get so confuse. I HATE him. But my pussy be popping. He say that, "Big Mama your pussy is popping!" I HATE myself when I feel good.

"How long you gonna stand there like you retarded."

I start to tell her don't, don't call me that, but all, everything, is out me. I jus' want to lay down, listen to radio, look at picture of Farrakhan, a *real* man, who don't fuck his daughter, fuck children. Everything feel like it is too big for my mind. Can't nuffin' fit when I think 'bout Daddy.

"I'm tired." Why I say that, she don't care.

"Fix us some lunch, it's way pas' lunch. You done ate?"

"I had some potato chips."

"Thas all?"

I remember ham 'n chicken, don't say nuffin', ax her, "What you want?"

"I don't know, see what's in there. If not nuffin' in there, get stamps out my purse and go to store 'n get us'es somethin' to eat."

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
PQRS. There are 26 letters in our alphabet. Each letter has a sound. A Day at the Beach Shore ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.

That night I dream I am not in me but am awake listening to myself choking, going a huh a huh A HUH A HUH A HUH. I am walking around trying to find

where I am, where the sound is coming from. I know I will choke to death I don't find myself. I walk to my muver's room but it look different, she look different. I look like little baby almost. She is talkin' sweet to me like sometimes Daddy talks. I am choking between her legs A HUH A HUH. She is smelling big woman smell. She say suck it, lick me Precious. Her hand is like a mountain pushing my head down. I squeeze my eyes shut but choking don't stop, it get worse. Then I open my eyes and look. I look at little Precious and big Mama and feel hit feeling, feel like killing Mama. But I don't, instead I call little Precious and say, Come to Mama but I means me. Come to *me* little Precious. Little Precious look at me, smile, and start to sing: ABCDEFG ...

Wednesday morning Jo Ann back. She not like G.E.D. I guess. Say she need a little brush up before she go to G.E.D. Miz Rain don't say nuffin' till she hear the brush up stuff, then Miz Rain say, "Are you in the right class Jo Ann? This is a class to learn reading and writing, this is not a brush up for G.E.D." Jo Ann look hate at Miz Rain. I like Miz Rain. I see what she doing, I think. Jo Ann tryin' to act like she ain' one of us. Miz Rain tryin' to git her to 'cept herself for where she at. She ain' no G.E.D. girl, leas' not yet.

Miz Rain call roll: Jermaine Hicks, Rhonda Johnson, Precious Jones, Consuelo Montenegro, Jo Ann Rogers, Rita Romero. Everybody here. Miz Rain ax, "Who

Chapter 4

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that's how it feels. But I'm probably the only one get it from they daddy. Counselor, Ms Weiss, say she try to find out as much about Daddy for me as she can.

How much I want to know? And for what? I tell counselor I can't talk about Daddy now. My clit swell up I think Daddy. Daddy sick me, *disgust* me, but still he sex me up. I nawshus in my stomach but hot tight in my twat and I think I want it back, the smell of the bedroom, the hurt—he slap my face till it sting and my ears sing separate songs from each other, call me names, pump my pussy in out in out in out awww I come. He bite me *hard*. A hump! He slam his hips into me *HARD*. I scream pain he come. He slap my thighs like cowboys do horses on TV. Shiver. Orgasm in me, his body shaking, grab me, call me Fat Mama, Big Hole! You *LOVE* it! Say you love it! I wanna say I *DON'T*. I wanna say I'm a chile. But my pussy popping like grease in frying pan. He slam in me again. His dick soft. He start sucking my tittie.

I wait for him get off me. Lay there stare at wall till wall is a movie, *Wizard of Oz*, I can make that one play anytime. Michael Jackson, scarecrow. Then my body take me over again, like shocks after earthquake, shiver me, I come again. My body not mine, I hate it coming.

Afterward I go bafroom. I smear shit on my face. Feel good. Don't know why but it do. I never tell nobody about that before. But I would do that. If I go to insect support group what will I hear from other girls. I bite my fingernails till they look like disease, pull

so young and feel so old. So young like I don't know nuffin', so old like I know everything. A girl have her father's dick in her mouth know things the other girls don't know but it's not what you want to know.

It's all kinda girls here! They sitting in circle faces like clocks, no bombs. Bombs with hair and titties and dresses. After I sit here five minutes I know I am a bomb too. Only sitting here doing whatever they gonna do will keep me from blowing up. Thank you Rita for git me here on time.

"Hello." She look like a movie star! Slim, long hair, eyes like stars, red lips. "My name is Irene. I am an incest survivor."

My mouth fall open. Someone like that.

"It started when I was, oh, about four or five years old with him fondling me" (feeling her up). "By the time I was twelve he was having intercourse with me three or four times a week."

Everything is floating around me now. Like geeses from the lake. I see the wings beating beating hear geeses. It's more birds than geeses. Where so many birds come from. I see flying. Feel flying. *Am* flying. Far up, but my body down in circle. Precious is bird.

Someone is holding my hand. It's Rita. She is massage my hand. I come back from being a bird to hear beautiful girl crying. Smell Mama. Carl, the way his knees on either side of my neck.

Girl say, "Thank you for letting me share." She say, "This is a Tuesday night beginner's meeting. To share

P U S H

raise your hand." I raise my hand. My hand is going up through the smell of Mama, my hand is pushing Daddy's dick out my face.

"I was rape by my father. And beat." No one is talking except me. "Mama push my head down in her . . ." I can't talk no more. Beautiful girl whisper to me, "Are you through?" I say yes. She say, "Pick the next person." I look up from my shoes, Nikes; girls got they hand up. I pick girl in overalls with blue eyes. Grab Rita's hand, listen. Listen to girl rape by brother, listen to old woman rape by her father; don't remember till he die when she is 65 years old. Girls, old women, white women, lotta white women. Girl's younger sister murdered by the cult? Jewish girl, we had money on Long Island (like Westchester), my father was a prominent child psychiatrist. It started when I was about nine years old. Girls like Jermaine is, I am a proud lesbian. But it's the only thing I'm proud of; I was confine to a mental institution for fourteen years, diagnosed as a schizophrenia—

What am I hearing!

One hour and a half women talk. Can this be done happen to so many people? I know I am not lying! But is they? I thought cult was in movie. What kinda world this babies raped. A father break a girl's arm. Sweet talk you suck his dick. All kinda women here. Princess girls, some fat girls, old women, young women. One thing we got in common, no *the* thing, is we was rape.

Afterwards we go out for coffee. I have never been "out for coffee" before. Rita put her arm around my

day that's what make me remember. that smell. he
 put his ball in my face. years like wash machine
 aroun and around. mama jaw open like evil wolf.
 the smell deeper than toilet. her fingers pick
 apart my pussy. night. poisoned rat. don't have
 dreams.

I close my book.

"Well Mary, you want to begin by talking a little bit
 about the abuse?" Ms Weiss say to Mama.

"What 'buse?"

"Well according to Precious' files she has had two
 children by your boyfriend, the late Carl Kenwood Jones,
 who is also *her father*? You've been calling here saying you
 want to be reunited with your daughter and grandson,
 that you want them to come home. Well I think you'd
 better explain just what happened in that home."

Oh Mama, please don't go for this!

"Well, I, Precious, b'long at home."

Mama please be quiet.

"When did the abuse happen, how often, where?
 When were you first aware of what was going on Ms
 Johnston?"

"I guess, he come over you know. I wake up at night,
 morning he not wif me, I know he in there wif her.
 When it first start? I don' know. I'm a good mother. She
 had everything. I done tole her that. Pink 'n white baby

... husband, I call him—loves to
 out wheeling in the...
 I dream of day we gonna you know
 house wif grass, color TVs in all the
 he born about the same time as Ma
 kilt. You remember him don't you
 'bout!
 time 'bout same time as you."
 "I say. Least that what I always
 t. My little Scorpio chile! Scor-
 they lie, jus' you can't always
 ecious 'bout the same age as
 t, give or take a few months!
 fast! She walkin' talkin'—
 son. Her teef, everything.
 ny or something! She can
 hardly walking. I put on
 r Precious, you remem-
 g and you disco to that?
 n all, Carl jus' a high-
 on't she jus' shut up

"When? I don't know when it start. When I remem-
 ber it? She still little. Yeah, around three maybe. I give
 her a bottle. I still got milk in my bresses but not for her
 but from Carl sucking. I give him tittie, Precious bottle.
 Hygiene, you know?"

"Huh?" Ms Weiss go.

"Huh?" go Mama back.

"You mentioned something about hygiene in con-
 nection with . . . with . . ." Ms Weiss can't finish.

"I bottle her, tittie him. Bottle more better for kidz.
 Sanitary. But I never git dried up 'cause Carl always on
 me. It's like that you know. Chile, man—a woman got
 bofe. What you gonna do? So we in bed. I put her on
 one side of me on pillow, Carl on other side me."

Ms Weiss look like she done stopped breathing.

"Carl got my tittie in his mouf. Nuffin' wrong wif
 that, it's natural. But I think thas the day IT start. I
 don't never remember nothing before that. I hot. He
 sucking my tittie. My eyes closed. I know he getting
 hard I can see wifout my eyes, I love him so much."

Umm hmm, I was raised by a psycho maniac fool.

"He climb on me, you know. You unnerstand?"

No, tell us some more stupid bitch.

"So he on me. Then he reach over to Precious! Start
 wif his finger between her legs. I say Carl what you
 doing! He say shut your big ass up! This is good for her.
 Then he git off me, take off her Pampers and try to
 stick his thing in Precious. You know what trip me out

P U S H

is it almost can go in Precious! I think she some kinda freak baby then. I say stop Carl stop! I want him on *me*! I never wanted him to hurt her. I didn't want him doing *anything* to her. I wanted my man for myself. Sex me up, not my chile. So you cain't blame all that shit happen to Precious on *me*. I love Carl, I love him. He her daddy, but he was my man!"

Ms Weiss look at me now. "Precious, you've been writing in your journal about this."

"This and other stuff."

"She write poems too, lady at Each One Teach One say." This from Mama. Mama one hundred, not ninety nine, percent crazy.

"Would you like to share some of that in this session?" Ms Weiss ask.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Ms Rain say journal completely confidential. Share if you want. If you don't want to, don't. I don't want to."

I'm gone. It's 4:45 p.m. Up! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight steps. I hate Mama, she ain' shit. I feel like nothing around her, like *minus* nothing. I gotta get outta here.

I go down to kitchen where house mother is. "Miz Mom!"

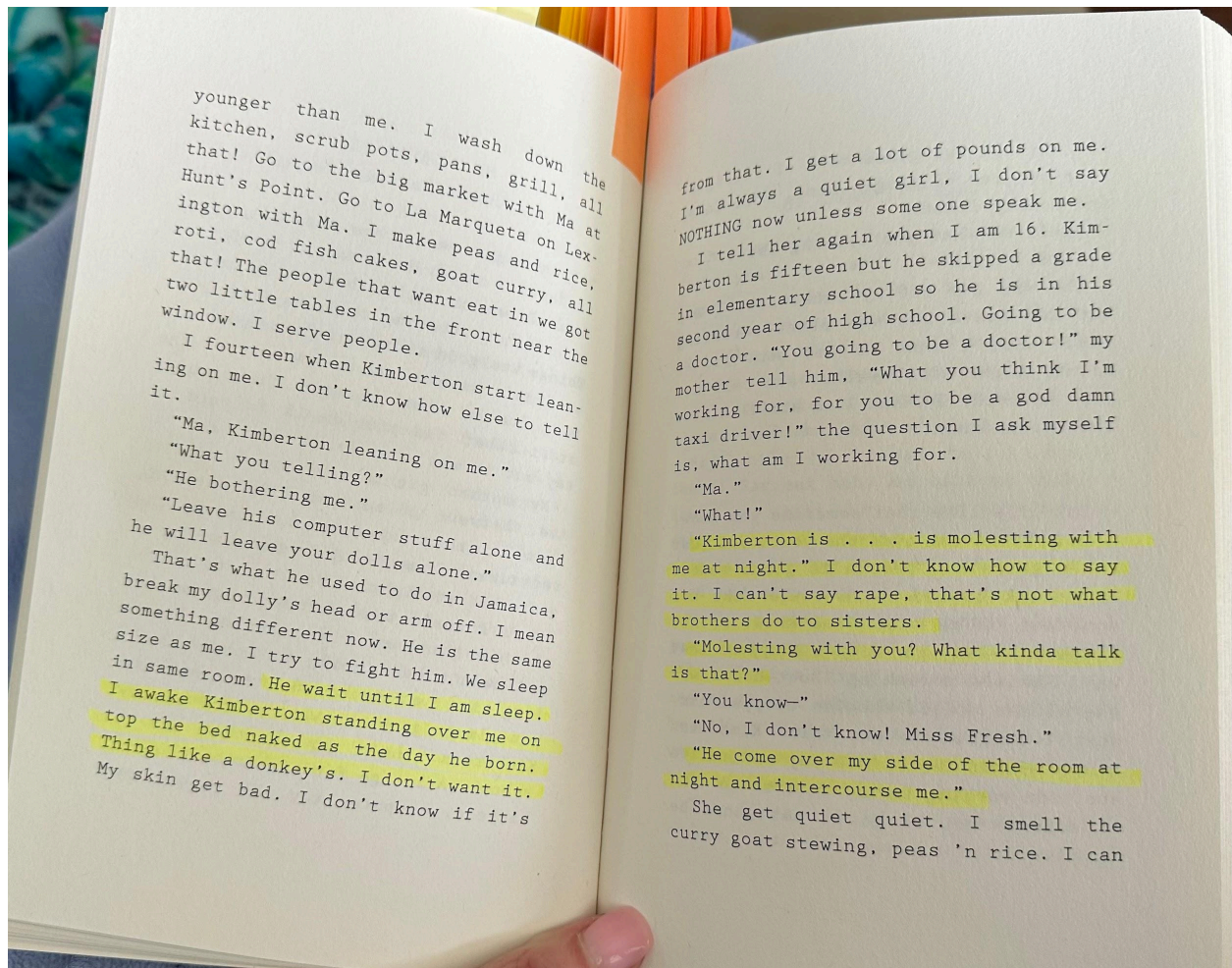
"Stop screaming!" she say. "What's wrong with you?"

"You could get Abdul from nursery, feed him, and

LIFE STORIES

No page references

My Younger Years



Part 2

My Grown Up Years

glass door of refrigerator.
ginger beer, 7UP, Cokes
ou talking about."

my house now. I say
she start screaming
to her son. Filthy
walker she call me.
I am still in that

ometime you know.
he years you just
is gonna react.
would make her
ou know, mother
t happen that
bout how I was
stopped him.
ink Kimberton
ay and retire
r seven. An'
ot gonna be

part two

MY GROWN UP YEARS

I'm twenty-four years old it's been eight years since I "left" (I put it like that cause you know how I left) my mother's house. Kimberton, he is dentist. Was a dentist, maybe he is, maybe he beat the case—he get charged by young girl's parents of trying to stick his finger (and who knows what else) up her pussy while he spozed to be fixing teeth! Far out huh? Ma tell me this. I don't go visit but I see her out on street when she doing her shopping. We talk like I'm her daughter that got married and move out or go away to nurse school or some such. I don't know, I just go along with the program. Ma say it's all lies, girl's parents just trying to extort him. But what I think is he pull his shit on the wrong one. You can't get away with everything all the time with everybody.

The first couple of years on the street was the worst. From working

erfucker die.
hard again. I
ay or quit my
I'm a person
re. Just sit
sure. I get
gs and start
ash can col-
ill the bags
competition
these bot-
ng and des-
ettle bug or
two huge
k. I'm on
ch I usu-
ere Ma's
out or Eat
, I don't
- happen
m it. I

is also
et mov-
toward
look up

and see a FOR RENT sign in the window,
and next to sign is Kimberton. Our eyes
meet. His is shock, mine is like a kiss,
my brother! Always my first thought of
him is before he rape me then the mem-
ory roll in like fog. I see Kimberton's
mouth fall open at the horror of me bent
over, hands gripped around the black
bags. I remember my hands grating
coconut, washing rice, stirring peas,
scrubbing pots in cold greasy water,
pulling the catheter out the old man's
penis, scraping shit from old Mrs
Feld's age spot ass. I look back at him.
I am not ashamed. I could be dead all
these years. Rage hot fill me. Kimber-
ton's eyes glowing like radioactive in
my mind, his fly eyes, his hands push-
ing me down on the bed, years. Years.
Kimberton comes to the door. He has on
some clothes that cost a lot and should
look great but he just look foreign and
skinny and dark. He don't look like
American man like he want to. I stare.
This a man fuck his sister and say so
what. This a man go to dental school,

Harlem Butch

makes rivers

go, run?
now. I never
e. I mean, I
vity, the
absorption;

wrong?

ed,

id.

ved

."

oin

me!

est

will mean I will have to leave the
class.)

I'm still 7:

a boy holds me down

under the stairwell

that smells like urine

(pee I woulda said at seven)

tries to push his dick

into me.

I am 8:

when I put my tongue

in Mary-Mae's mouth

for the first time

(under the same steps)

9:

my fingers

10:

my tongue but this time

I put it in her

where he tried to put

it in me

13:

I am pressed close to her

against the wall

in her room

we will fall on the

still pink in some places

chenille bedspread
My fingers A trains howling thru her
dark tunnel

We will-

DADDY! DADDY!

Come LOOK what Mary-Mae and Jermaine
is doing!

BULLDAGGERBULLDAGGERBULLDYKE
DYKEBULLDYKEBULLDYKEDYKEDYKE
the voices become like the pro-
grammed messages in the subway time
unpredictable loud irritating
expected

but it is Mary-Mae's father who
catches me one night to show me
what a MAN is, what a woman is
when I get up from my new knowledge
one of my front teeth is gone
The doctor will tell my mother
damage is done
I won't tell her by who

I never told that part of my story
before because I hate to see their
square eyes light up with, "Oh that's
why! I understand now! I see-"

No! You don't see! Before I was
snatched out the air like a butterfly.
wings torn off me. BEFORE any all that
I had slid my fingers up the sweet stink
of another child and knelt down to lick
her thighs. Men did not make me this
way. Nothing happened to make me this
way. I was born butch!

I was 14:

my mother is a religious movement. I
don't know how else to describe it, a
walking church. A wake up, go to sleep,
jack off, shouting ass Christian. It
make me sick. JESUS this, JESUS that.
fuck that shit.

We are nuclear but poor
four of us

mother father sister brother sitting
around the white formica covered table.
little flecks of gold embedded like sun-
shine in the white plastic. We are eat-
ing breakfast, which is sardines out a
can emptied onto our plates and some
cold biscuits left over from last night.
He went to take a sip of coffee and she