

Catharsis

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Scaffold is a digital collection of first-year writing curated by the Vanderbilt [Writing Studio](#). By pairing each piece in the collection with a recorded reflection from the author, *Scaffold* aims to highlight the developing writing processes and learning experiences so central to the growth of undergraduate writers. We hope it acts as a future learning resource for students and instructors alike. Visit [Scaffold's website](#) to listen to the authors reflect and learn more about our review process.

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Mom: run-of-the-mill middle-age sitcom-like mom, horrifyingly chipper, has cracks in her happy demeanor. Personality is darker than what it seems.

Dad: run-of-the-mill middle-age, sitcom-like dad, horrifyingly chipper, rarely falters from his happy demeanor.

Brad: 16-year-old boy, seemingly regular angsty, sarcastic teen. Generally flippant.

Setting: Around a kitchen table

Link to Example Chanting: <https://tinyurl.com/k3ppexo>

MOM is setting up dinner on the table. DAD sits in a chair looking blankly ahead with a smile on his face.

MOM

Brad, would you come down here? Dinner is ready! It's almost time for the Daily Talk.

DAD

This looks positively delicious, hon. Everything you do for this family is just great! You know I'm a bit of a goof in the kitchen,

DAD does a big shrug and oops face towards the audience.

DAD (CONT.)

and I still don't know how to do my own laundry! We couldn't make it without ya!

MOM

Oh you! It's more than an honor to be able to do all of this for my guys. You both mean the world to me.

DAD

Speaking of your guys, where's the other one? I've missed the lil scamp all day!

MOM

I called him down a few minutes ago! BRAD! DINNER'S READY, SWEETIE!

DAD

What a nut! He better hurry, or I'm just gonna have to eat this all up myself!

MOM

Haha! You never stop being funny, do you?

BRAD walks in, letting his appendages move however they wish, like they're limp noodles. He sits in a chair at the end of the table, not next to either of his parents.

MOM

Oh, there he is, we've been waiting for you, my little man. I can't wait to hear about how your day went.

BRAD

Yeah, sure whatever. Can we just eat?

DAD

Oh Brad. I'm sure excited to eat, too, your mother has made a wonderful meal for tonight.

MOM

Let's dig in then, everyone!

DAD

Wow, honey it's just as good as it looks.

MOM

Well, thanks dear I just—

DAD

Maybe it could've used some more salt though? I'm just spitballing here, you know I can't cook of course hahaha. Something is just missing.

MOM

Oh . . . well . . . I'll make sure to keep that in mind next time. Thank you so much for the input.

A chorus of screams is heard off one side of the stage, and then another from the other side.

MOM

Well would you look at that! It seems like people are starting their talk!

DAD

Golly gee I'm so excited, we better get started soon! Aren't you happy Brad? Aren't you excited to release?

BRAD

Yeah, sure I guess. I don't know. It's like whatever.

MOM's eyes start to twitch, and she does other little motions to indicate she's struggling to keep her cool.

MOM

Bradley, how about you look at your dad when you speak to him?

BRAD

SURE, MOM. I am SO excited for the talk, DAD. It's gonna be so totally fuckin cool. There is literally nothing I care about more. I am STOKED.

MOM loosens up, and goes back to being chipper. DAD seems oblivious to the tension.

MOM

So are we ready then?

DAD

Honey, aren't you forgetting something?

MOM

Silly me! How could I forget the music!?

MOM walks over to a stereo.

DAD

You're my little airhead sometimes, aren't you, hon?

MOM does some fiddling with the stereo and some sort of Gregorian chant starts to play. DAD dances along a little bit in his chair, moving his head from side to side. MOM looks slightly upset but is trying to hide it.

MOM

I guess I am a bit of an airhead, haha.

DAD dances his way over to MOM and they do some cheesy parent slow dancing together thing.

DAD

Great chant choice for today! You really know how to pick a song.

MOM stops looking upset.

MOM

Stop it, you! You make me feel like we're still teenagers in love when you talk like that!

DAD

What about when I dance like this?

DAD does some cheesy dad dancing. MOM is amused, BRAD is not.

BRAD

Can you guys please come sit down so we can get this over with? Jesus.

MOM and DAD mozy their way back to the table and resume eating activities.

MOM

Woo! Sometimes you just have to dance out the goofs! I was almost worked up.

DAD is staring off into space, having not listened to anything MOM said.

DAD

Ahhh, we used to dance so much when we first started dating, hon. You know, Brad, your mother was a bit like you when we were young. She didn't play by anyone's rules either.

BRAD

I bet. She's definitely got that wanderlust whimsical thing going on. A real loose cannon. A free spirit even.

DAD

She was a bit of a rebellious spirit, weren't you, hon?

MOM

Thank you for those kind words Bradley. And I suppose I was a bit of a rebel... but... anyway... those days are behind me.

MOM stiffens, sits up a little straighter and turns a bit colder. She stares blankly ahead as she speaks, looking outward towards the audience, but not exactly at them.

MOM (CONT.)

I am under control now. I know how important it is to release when prompted now. My emotions are in check now. There's a time and a place for negativity, I understand that.

MOM loosens again, sort of shaking out the solemnness.

MOM

Aha, look at me getting all worked up. Moral of the story is that's just what kids do! It's just part of growing up! You'll understand one day Bradley. You'll have kids of your own and you can tell them about how wild you were in your youth and how you've moved past that.

BRAD

What if I don't move past it?

MOM and DAD both stop eating. MOM drops her silverware, and DAD stops chewing with food in his mouth, leaving it agape.

MOM

Did I hear you correctly?

DAD swallows and clears his throat.

DAD

What do you mean by that, sport?

BRAD

What if I don't conform?

DAD

You're such a jokester, Brad!

MOM

Enough joking, I'd say, boys! How about we start the ritual?

DAD

Yes! I can start us off – if that’s okay with everyone. Would you like to go first, Bradster?

MOM

Go right ahead, honey! I’m excited to hear your Frustrations.

BRAD

I think I’ll let you go ahead... Dadster.

A spotlight goes up on DAD.

DAD

Oh Brad! What a sense of humor on you. My first Frustration is that the barista messed up my order. I go to that coffee shop every. Single. Day. And they messed it up! I get to work at the SAME TIME. Every. Day. But not today! I had to look like a GODDAMN FUCKING FOOL. I had to be the guy who came in late because they TOOK TOO LONG ON MY DAMN COFFEE... Some idiot girl ruins MY day, makes me look like a jackass in front of MY boss. What a dumb bitch.

The lights go back to normal. DAD takes some deep breaths, adjusts his collar – overall doing some calming down things. DAD then resumes his otherwise happy demeanor.

DAD

That’s probably my big Frustration for today. Wow, I’m sure glad I could say that here.

BRAD

Wow. Sounds absolutely terrible.

MOM

That girl sure sounds like, uh, a scoundrel doesn't she?

What else is on your mind honey? Are you ready to release?

DAD

Ooo boy. It's been a bit of a toughie this week. Maybe today I can release my emotions more than once?

MOM

If that's what you need, sweetie.

DAD

Okay! Let's do this first one then! I think if I didn't I might downright explode!

All three characters proceed to turn their heads to the ceiling and scream as loud as they can in unison for a few seconds.

DAD

Thank you for helping me shed those vile emotions.

MOM

Thank you for letting us participate in The Scream.

DAD

Back to my Frustrations then.

Spotlight goes back on DAD.

DAD

So there I was. Sitting in my cubicle like I do. I was just trying to catch up on some work because guess what! Some dumb bitch made me late so now I have to make up for lost time. I'm doing so well, really putting some pedal to the metal to crank out these reports. Then! My cubicle neighbor Gwen starts talking on the phone – her personal phone – I checked. I'm just trying to work you know but I just can't get her out of my head. She's talking so fucking loudly.

Lights go back up. DAD slams his fist on the table. He gets more and more disheveled as he speaks, eventually getting up and pacing.

DAD (CONT.)

SHE SAYS SOME SHIT ABOUT HER MOM BEING IN THE HOSPITAL OR SOMETHING BUT I DON'T FUCKING CARE! SHE JUST KEEPS TALKING AND TALKING AND I JUST WANT TO FUCKING WORK. I JUST.. I JUST WANT TO SHUT HER THE HELL UP YOU KNOW?

BRAD

DAD! You need to fucking calm down!

DAD

YOU NEED TO SHUT YOUR MOUTH, BRADLEY. YOU NEED TO LET ME RELEASE. IT'S HEALTHY.

MOM

Bradley, you need to let your father release.

DAD

I CAN FUCKING SPEAK FOR MYSELF HONEY.

MOM recoils but solemnly nods, then shakes her head as if she is thinking, "what an idiot I am." BRAD looks at MOM, softens, and then looks to DAD.

BRAD

Okay God, please just fucking hurry.

DAD

I SHOULD'VE SHUT THAT BITCH UP MYSELF.

DAD sits back down and gathers himself.

DAD

Instead, I just got her demoted. I went over smiling and told my boss some absolute hooey about constant personal phone calls and other dumb things women do and he bought it. Not only did I get that bitch back but I also got back into sort of good graces with my boss! Man, did she get me worked up, though.

MOM

Sounds so awful, honey. I'm glad you had the chance to let that out though! Do you have any other Frustrations you'd like to share before we do The Scream?

DAD

Woo boy, that was the brunt of it. I'm ready to go!

All three do the scream again, but BRAD looks down at the table as he does it as opposed to screaming into the air.

MOM

Bradley, you know you have to scream up and out! You gotta open up that diaphragm to let everything go!

BRAD

This is weird bullshit. That lady didn't do anything wrong, Dad! Neither did the barista.

DAD

I'm sorry you feel that way, Bradley.

MOM

You shouldn't talk to your father like that, Bradley. Do you know how hard he works? THIS IS WHAT'S HEALTHY! Why don't you go next if you don't think your dad's Frustrations are valid?

BRAD

I am not doing this. I'm sick of it. I just don't fucking like it.

MOM and DAD cock their heads at BRAD, smiles go away.

DAD

You have to participate, Brad. It's the only way to let go.

MOM

You have to let go, Brad.

MOM goes back to smiling.

MOM

Well, I'll give you a minute or two to gather what you're gonna say. So much is probably happening for you right now, it must be overwhelming to talk about! What with puberty and everything.

DAD

You're so right honey! Just take a second to cool down, champ, and we'll get back to ya!

BRAD

Golly gee, Mom and Dad, I sure do appreciate it! It sure is neat of you guys to let me work out my adolescent issues! Let me stew on it. Just what I need.

DAD

Good to hear it!

MOM

I might as well go, then!

Spotlight goes up on MOM.

MOM (CONT.)

So today my boss asked me to start another project. I already have two going, so I thought maybe I should ask if someone else could take it on.

MOM, still smiling, begins talking through gritted teeth.

MOM

And you could never guess what happened.

DAD

Oh, I'm excited! What?

MOM

She told me to make sure to appreciate the opportunities that are given to me. She told me THAT I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL THAT SHE TRUSTS ME SO MUCH. SHE THINKS THAT SHE CAN JUST PUT ALL OF THIS SHIT ON ME. I DO EVERYTHING I'M ASKED, MORE EVEN! AND WHAT DO I GET? NOTHING! DOES SHE THINK I DON'T NOTICE THAT THE NEW HIRE IS GORGEOUS AND YOUNG? DOES SHE THINK I DON'T NOTICE HOW HE JUST HAS TO BAT HIS LITTLE EYES AT HER AND POOF HER WORK IS NOW MINE? THE ANSWER DOESN'T REALLY MATTER BECAUSE SHE JUST DOESN'T GIVE A SHIT.

DAD

Honey, it just seems like she trusts you!

MOM snaps out of her anger. Lights go back to normal.

MOM

Well, I guess you're right. It's still a bit stressful, though.

DAD

I know, sweetie! Working is definitely stressful. But you know what? I've met your boss. She's a great woman. Gorgeous, smart, driven, a real go-getter! She probably just wants you to be able to get to her level of authority someday! Don't you worry about it. Do you have anything else to share?

MOM

Of course, dear. After work I went to the grocery store. Had to get food to feed my big strong men.

BRAD

How kind of you.

DAD

What a caring woman you are.

MOM

But you know what? They were all out of my truffles. I have one indulgence. The gourmet truffles at the grocery store. I asked if they had any in the back! The employee smiled this dumb fucking smile and apologized and said they actually stopped selling the truffles. I HAVE THIS ONE THING I LOVE. THIS ONE THING. AND IT'S GONE.

DAD

What a bummer!

MOM

A bummer indeed... That's really it I suppose! I'm glad I could get that off my chest.

DAD

So you're ready for the scream then?

MOM

I guess I am. Thank you for asking.

MOM and DAD repeat the screaming ritual but BRAD completely abstains.

DAD

Brad. You know you have to participate. It's healthy.

MOM

BRADLEY. I'm going to give you one final chance. Just share your Frustrations and we can all look past this.

BRAD

Fine. I'll share.

MOM

I knew you could do it, honey! I used to be just like you.

Resistant. Those days are long gone.

BRAD

Today I got a really good grade on my math test. I've been struggling lately but I put in some extra work and it really paid off.

DAD

That's great, son!

MOM

That IS great Bradley but that's not a Frustration. You know what this time is for.

Screams are again heard off stage.

DAD

Your mother is right Bradley. You know now's not the time for that. You hear those people? That's what we need to be doing here.

MOM

I'm really growing tired of these games, Bradley. Your dad may think your little jokes are funny, but I'm growing REALLY GOD DAMN TIRED OF THEM. Woo. Okay. Sorry about that. I need to keep myself in check. I need to be a good example. I need to be healthy. Please, Bradley, can you just share a Frustration?

DAD

Just share and we can watch the game! Wouldn't that be great, pal?

A spotlight goes up on BRAD.

BRAD

Okay, sure! Well there was this one dumb bitch who spoke on her phone at work like I do all the time and then uh, my dumb fucking boss made me do my job. So all in all it was pretty terrible.

DAD

Since when do you have a job, son?

MOM

Are you making fun of us, Bradley?

BRAD

Me? Making fun of you? No! I am releasing my horrible, vile emotions!

MOM

Stop messing around.

BRAD

Sorry! How stupid of me, what a dumb time to make a joke. You want real? How about the fact that I'm depressed as hell? Is that frustrating enough? Every day is a nightmare! You two are a nightmare!

DAD

Well, that's not very nice, is it? But if you need to release.

MOM

Keep it up, Bradley!

BRAD

I'M NOT DOING THIS FOR YOU!

Lights go back to normal.

BRAD

YOU SHOULDN'T BE CHEERING ME! THIS IS A MISERABLE LIFE TO LIVE. WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO ONLY TALK ABOUT EMOTIONS AT THIS TIME! I'M NOT... I'm not doing this anymore.

MOM

But doesn't it feel so good to let it go, Bradley?

BRAD

Don't you see? You aren't letting it go! It just keeps building up! You get angrier and angrier and the reasons get dumber and dumber.

MOM and DAD look at each other and laugh, almost robotically – just no emotion behind it.

DAD

This is just how it has to be, bud. It's what best.

MOM

No reason is dumb, Bradley. We all have Frustrations and we all have to release. Why are you so against this today! You've always participated fervently in the Scream!

BRAD

I've always fucking hated it, Mom! I just haven't been able to have my own thoughts because you guys force-fed me this shit. I was brainwashed for so long. This can't be the only way! Why don't we talk all the time? Why do we let things build up?!

MOM

You aren't brainwashed, Bradley! This is the only way because it works! Look how happy your father and I are.

BRAD

HAPPY? You want me to believe you're happy? You can pretend all you want that you're just pissed off because of the truffles. You can't even talk about the real issues, MOM. Dad treats you like fucking shit, and you can't even talk about it. We all evade it like it's nothing.

DAD

Now, Bradley –

BRAD slowly gets up as he talks, getting more and more worked up.

BRAD

I am finally thinking for myself. I started talking to people from other places online, and they think this shit is fucked up. I do too. I'm not going to keep pretending like just because you compliment Mom while you

BRAD (CONT.)

treat her like shit you're not still treating her like shit. Is it healthy to be a dick to your wife? What about all the women you call bitches? MOM JUST ACCEPTS YOUR MISOGYNY! IN FACT, SHE INTERNALIZES THAT SHIT. I'VE NEVER SEEN A WOMAN HATE OTHER WOMEN MORE THAN YOU, MOM! IT'S ABSOLUTELY INSANE! NO ONE FUCKING TALKS ABOUT ANYTHING REAL! WE ALL JUST HAVE THIS SHIT BREWING UP INSIDE US. I WANT TO BE ANGRY SOMETIMES, I WANT TO BE SAD. I WANT TO TELL YOU

ABOUT HOW FUCKING DEPRESSED I AM AND NOT HAVE YOU PRETEND LIKE SOME FUCKING SCREAM IS GOING TO HEAL ME! MY FRUSTRATION? YOU TWO.

BRAD looks at himself in disbelief.

MOM

Doesn't that feel better, Brad?

DAD

Are you ready for The Scream?

BRAD

No fucking way. That wasn't me participating! What will it take to get through to you!?

DAD begins to speak but is cut off by a mounting scream by MOM. She's really losing her shit.

MOM

You're not special, Bradley. This is what's healthy! You think you're above this all? You think you're the only one who wants to have feelings? This is what's BEST.

BRAD

This isn't best, Mom! You can be different, too.

MOM

I used to be like you, Bradley. Remember? I know what it's like to want to be different, to not conform, but don't think of it as conforming... think of it as growing up. Something you're going to have to start doing VERY SOON.

BRAD

I'm not trying to be a fucking hipster, I just want to FEEL. You can be truly happy, Mom... please.

MOM

I'M SO TIRED OF BEING TOLD WHAT I CAN AND CAN'T BE. I KNOW WHAT I WANT AND IT'S THIS. I'M HEALTHY AND I'M HAPPY. THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS IN THE END. I'M HEALTHY AND I'M HAPPY. HEALTHY. HAPPY.

DAD

Honey, maybe you should calm down a bit, it's not your turn!

BRAD

You don't have to calm down, Mom. Please just consider what I'm saying. Shouldn't it matter if I'm healthy and happy too?

MOM softens and calms, going back to her chipper demeanor.

MOM

It does matter if you're happy and healthy, honey. That's all a parent wants.

DAD

We love you, Bradley.

MOM and DAD walk over to BRAD. MOM has a melancholy look on her face.

MOM

We love you so very much.

As MOM and DAD reach BRAD it seems they are going to hug him.

Blackout.

MOM

It's for your own good, Bradley.

DAD

We tried to warn you, tiger, this is the way it is.

MOM AND DAD

We just want you to be happy and healthy.

BRAD

NO!

3 screams are heard.

*Lights go back up. BRAD is smiling in the same way his parents do –
lifeless and meaningless.*