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(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. A while back, the satirical website, *The Onion*, published an article. It was called “Miranda July Called Before Congress To Explain Exactly What Her Whole Thing Is”. Here's a little bit from it. “July, however, mostly ignored the probings, and proceeded to cut up pieces of construction paper to make a large banner reading, “you will find it!” Which she then hung from the front of the table at which she was sitting.”

Of course, it is *The Onion*. It is silly. But the truth in there is that Miranda July's work always keeps you on your toes, in part because Miranda July doesn't just make one type of work. You probably know her best as a film director. She wrote and directed the movies *The Future*, *Kajillionaire*, and her breakthrough *Me, You, and Everyone We Know*.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Richard (*Me, You, and Everyone We Know*): What are you doing in my car?

(Christine chuckles.)

No, I don't know you, and you certainly don't know anything about me. I mean, what if I'm a killer of children?

Christine: Yeah, well, that would put a damper on things, wouldn't it?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: She's also shot music videos for the bands Sleater-Kinney and Blonde Redhead. She's published short stories in *The New Yorker*. She's designed apps. She even recorded a spoken word album.

Clip:

Music: Ominous, dramatic organ music.

Miranda July: But one, d-did you see the arky girl? T-two, I th-think the arky girl...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: July's work is almost designed to confound you, at least a little bit. It can also disarm you in its plainness. She explores big new ideas about stuff like purpose and aging and class, and gives voice to the kind of stuff that you always think about but maybe you don't talk about, like how it's hard to buy good bed sheets online.

All Fours, that's the title, is narrated by a protagonist who is not entirely dissimilar from July. She's a successful multidisciplinary artist. Her relationship with her husband is changing, maybe ending. She's approaching menopause, exploring all the changes that go along with that—physical, emotional, and social. In fact, *The New York Times* recently put out a review of the book that called *All Fours* the first great perimenopause novel. So, yes, we will be talking about menopause in this interview, and a little bit about sex as well. Nothing too graphic, just wanted you to know. Anyway, I love the book. I love Miranda July. She's the best. Let's get into it.

Transition: Bouncy synth.

Jesse Thorn: Miranda July, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It's very nice to see you.

Miranda July: Yes, we're glad to be here.

Jesse Thorn: And congratulations on this book. It is so great. It is a hoot and a half and moving as well. I don't want to—

(They laugh.)

Miranda July: A hoot and a half! You heard it here.

Jesse Thorn: That could be right underneath “a giddy, bold, mind-blowing tour de force” from George Saunders, could be “a hoot and a half, NPR”. *(Chuckles.)* I don't think my name gets mentioned on the cover, but NPR probably. Well, thank you for being here. I was reading the book as I was sitting in a shed in my backyard. *(Chuckling.)* And there was a part where the protagonist said that she would do anything after school to avoid going into the house from the garage, and she even had a pee jar in there. Is that a feeling that you relate to?

Miranda July: I mean, to be honest, I think the idea of that came from the first place I ever lived, like off campus housing, which was a shed. Like, I think because she had put a pink wooden floor, and I was so beguiled by that—this woman—that I just didn't notice there was no bathroom or kitchen or plumbing. It was a shed. So, I lived there for a year, and I

remember her saying kind of airily like, “Of course, you know, you just come into the house to, you know, use the bathroom.” And I always thought like what does she think about the fact that I’ve never come into the house? (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: For me, when I don't want to go back into my house, which I often don't. I love my family very much, and I'm always happy to see them, and I'm glad to be interrupted by them, etc.

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But for me, I think it's like an attention issue. Like, I just have a really hard time switching tracks.

Miranda July: Yeah. She—the narrator mentions in the book like an issue with transitions. And that is—I mean, the whole book is—

Jesse Thorn: Sunday evenings is one of them. Oh yeah.

Miranda July: Right. Sunday evenings, getting into the pool, you know.

Jesse Thorn: That one hit hard.

Miranda July: Yeah. And the whole book is about a sort of very unmapped, unspoken about transition—which is like perimenopause would be the medical way to put it, or just the time—I mean, I started writing this book at 45, finished it at 49. I'm 50 now. So, you know, it was my companion and the way that I worked through an immense transition. I mean, I guess I'm still in the transition. To be honest, I think there's no possible reader that's not in some sort of transitional moment. So, yeah, that is definitely a big one. And there's many little ones every day. And in some ways those are the most upsetting sometimes.

Jesse Thorn: The first time I interviewed you was in an empty house that was not where you lived. I think it had been your house previously.

Miranda July: My studio that I still have.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Is it still empty? The emptiness was—it wasn't like 100% empty, but just there was a lot more empty than I had anticipated showing up at a house in Silver Lake or Echo Park or whatever.

Miranda July: Right, right, right. Well, I guess I keep it somewhat empty because—yeah, ‘cause I'm working there. Huh.

Jesse Thorn: I vaguely remember a giant piece of paper on the floor. Like a—when I say giant, I mean like a six foot or eight-foot-long piece of paper.

Miranda July: Right. God, I wonder what I was doing. Oh yeah, I was painting. Yeah, I still have it, and I wrote this book in it. And it is actually—having this place of my own that I, you know, once lived in when I was 28 and now have kept for all these years, kind of against all odds. It ended up being really so meaningful, and I feel like that place in a way came into its purpose most of all while writing this book. I actually started spending every Wednesday night over in the studio. There's a bed there. And you know, it was a house, as you said—a kitchen, bathroom. That was something that seemed really renegade. Like, can one just ask their partner if that's cool? But it was fine by everyone. It wasn't like I was putting anyone out, you know. It was sort of the novelty of it, I think, was sort of fun—you know, that the week was broken up for everyone.

And for me, I wanted it so that I could write the book, which I felt like I needed one day a week where I woke up and then brought the computer into bed and just began. Because it's—you know, you're working sort of straight from the unconscious at that point. And then just go and go and go until you're hungry. And then eat without getting dressed and then keep going. And you know, like I would come home having really been somewhere, you know. Like, I felt like I'd been gone for, you know, a month or something. So—and that state—it was just a practical decision at the beginning, but I think that state really informed the book and my life.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I very vividly related to in the book, besides the challenge of transitioning on Sunday evenings—I'm an in pretty enthusiastic transitioner, but only in the sense that I'm just like, “Brrah! Let's go!” (*Laughs.*)

Miranda July: Yeah, rip off the Band-Aid.

Jesse Thorn: And you can't do that on Sunday evening. Time only passes as quickly as it does. But one of the things that I found most relatable was just this brief off mention that the narrator makes about her husband. And she says something like—I'm paraphrasing—“It's not that I'm bad, but my husband was definitely better than me.” (*Chuckles.*)

Miranda July: Yeah, of the two of us, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And that's like—I mean on the one hand it's a goof, and it's a goof I've made in the past about my wife, who's better than me. It is a pretty big deal, intense thing also.

Miranda July: Right. The trick with this book was to say stuff that sort of got, you know—yeah, like you toss that off, but what does it really mean to feel you're bad? It was important to have all that in because—well, first of all, I was hoping she would change over the time of the book and that I would change, you know. And I did start to change and have like a different perspective on that from when I first wrote it.

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Like, I knew something was a little funny about it, but I didn't know how deep the roots to it went, you know—that the feeling of wrongness had less to do with me than I thought and more to do with kind of maybe everything built around me that says like, “No, you sleep at

home every single night. Unless there's a really, really good reason, you're at home. That's what makes you good." You know, so just wanting to do that. There's also a running theme of wanting to be known, in the book, and how could someone really know you if they can't see you, because you're so busy trying to be good. You know, like your partner or—I mean, for her, there's this romance early on, and I think this kind of unlikely person happens to maybe see her in this one way that she, by and large, isn't seen. And that's so intoxicating. I mean, it like makes it impossible to go home and return to that life in the same way. In this book, that all happens fairly early on. So, it's not the end—you know, the end of... It's really a beginning. As I think it often is.

Jesse Thorn: Did you, when you started writing this book or previously, realize that you sometimes or always had that feeling about yourself? That you were not good in some way?

Miranda July: Um, yeah. And I thought that I probably wasn't going to get very far if I didn't admit that. Like, kind of like in a 12-step way, maybe? Like, you know, you need to just sort of say the ugly truth first, and then hopefully you'll be allowed to change from there. And it's like, well, if you never say it, if you never say the vain—you know, ways that you're vain—I think often a lot of stuff around aging for women—it's like, me and my friends, like we're all so smart, you know. Like, we're like very like intellectual, educated, risk-taking people. So, you don't exactly want to have the same concerns as are being marketed, you know, to and about. And yet, if you don't risk being dumb, you know, acknowledging like, "Yes, it's absolutely working."

And for me, the shame is really like my mom, you know, is such a woman of like the '60s and '70s. Like, she has—if I asked her about aging, she'd be like—kind of scoff, like only a silly woman would be concerned about that or have that kind of vanity. And the vanity is sort of like the starting point, again, of the book. Because I, unfortunately—though I may pretend to be, like I'm going to spend a certain amount of the rest of my life feeling really miserable about this. And I guess increasingly? I don't understand what the path forward is. And every conversation I had with another woman was sort of like this whisper network kind of conversation of like trying to gather information or pictures or role models. You know? Or just some way forward. And so, the book was really trying to widen that territory and with that was like, "Okay, shame! You're along for the ride. You're invited to the party. Get comfortable, and we're all gonna go here kind of off the cliff."

Jesse Thorn: Was that something that you were comfortable with previous to this point in your life?

Miranda July: No, no! No, I mean, I was horrified probably for the first year. I'd be writing, and then I'd stop and think, "Oh god, if I didn't do this like people might not know exactly how old I am for a pretty long time. And also, do I really want to be associated with this? With like the word perimenopause? Like, I really can't think of anything worse." (*Chuckles.*) Like, that was my feeling at the time, at the beginning.

Jesse Thorn: You don't want to be perimenopause writer and artist Miranda July?

Miranda July: Yeah, I mean, I just—and also, like we don't, even as it is with the work that I've been doing—it's already, you know—people find ways to, you know, marginalize or—

whatever. Make it seem—whatever. Sexism already has its work cut out for itself with me—and, you know, kind of most women putting themselves out there. So, this seemed like, oh God, I just put like a target on myself.

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But the further I went, the more I thought—and frankly, also the older I got as I wrote the book, the more I was like, well, okay, so if I don't do this, if I just kind of am graceful about the whole thing and just keep being charming and looking the best I can and never really mention anything in particular about age—“It doesn't bother me, you know; I feel like I always do.” You know, kind of like that. What will be the reward of that?

And the only reward I could think of was I'll get ignored less meanly. And then I thought, well, what's the reward of just totally digging in? Like, everything. Nothing's off limits. Well, it would be this conversation with other women. Potentially, it seems like for the rest of my life, and that seemed like a pretty big reward. My audience is—you know, it's global. It seemed like I could maybe go anywhere in the world and have this conversation and therefore be safe and be interested and have support. And so, I thought, oh, well, (*editorial*) it. I mean, like YOLO. (*Chuckles.*) Just like, truly, what am I here for? You know? And so, from there, from that point, I was on fire. I was—I had such a sense of like, “I'm coming! Just hold on! Like, I'm getting it all for—”

You know, because I would have these conversations, and I'd want to sort of hand them the book. And then, you know, the conversations would also be in the book, or there would be some point of view, or even someone would say something, and I would feel embarrassed, and then that embarrassment would go in the book. So, there wasn't one way that all the other voices were in it. It was like it was all in there. And it kept me company, you know. It like—I felt like I was on this wild ride every day, through the pandemic, through—you know, all in that room, that place you met me in, yeah. That's where I was.

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna take a quick break. Don't go anywhere. We have so much more to get into with Miranda July. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Miranda July. She is an artist and filmmaker. She wrote and starred in the 2005 movie *Me, You, and Everyone We Know*, among others. She's also a prose writer. She just published her second novel, *All Fours*. It's a funny, touching, and honestly, somewhat groundbreaking novel about marriage, middle age, and perimenopause. Let's get back into our conversation.

There's this great part at the beginning of the book that I wanted to have you read that reflects the kind of hilariousness and ridiculousness and amazingness of art making and the silliness of it that I just loved. I laughed out loud when I was reading it, and also found it very heartwarming. It's in the middle of this page here. It's just this.

Miranda July: “‘Right,’ I said, snapping out of it. I'm not a household name. I won't go into the tedious specifics of what I do, but picture a woman who had success in several mediums at a young age and has continued very steadily, always circling her central concerns in a sort of ecstatic fugue state with the confidence that comes from knowing there is no other path.

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“Her whole life will be this single conversation with God. God might be the wrong word for it. The universe. The under-knitting. I work in our converted garage. One leg of my desk is shorter than the others, and every day for the past 15 years I've meant to wedge something under it. But every day my work is too urgent. I'm perpetually at a crucial turning point. Everything is forever about to be revealed. At five o'clock, I have to consciously dial myself down before reentering the house, like astronaut Buzz Aldrin preparing to unload the dishwasher immediately after returning from the moon. Don't talk about the moon, I remind myself. Ask everyone how their day was.”

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) I mean, like your protagonist here is struggling with their own self-awareness, obviously. And what I loved about that is how it captures the duality of that feeling. Like, on the one hand, that's completely ridiculous. Like, it's completely ridiculous to think about going into a garage and working on art as though it's like going to the moon to be on the moon, right? Totally absurd. On the other hand, what could be better than that? To do one's work with that level of passion and commitment. Or even to tell yourself that you're doing your—you know, even if you're not successfully doing it with that level of passion and commitment, even to strive for that. And like, how are you going to make art without trying to do—you know what I mean? (*Chuckles.*)

Miranda July: Yeah. No, I mean, I think actually we are all going to the moon. I mean, I do—like, it's ridiculous, but so is going to the moon, frankly. Like, why are we doing that? You know?

(*They chuckle.*)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. It's doing fine without us.

Miranda July: Yeah. It's funny. Like, of course, Buzz Aldrin—like, his work has nothing to do with his family. Zero, right? There's no connection. But you know, like I could picture some like promo materials for the expedition, whichever one it was, where—you know, lots of stuff where he's posing with the family and stuff, because there's this kind of almost sexy feeling like, “Look! On the moon, that has nothing to do with the family, and then here he is with the family.” And so—

Jesse Thorn: (*Playfully.*) He still chooses to spend time with his family!

Miranda July: He could be on the moon, not just in the garage! I think I was trying to, early on in the book, kind of make it clear—like, this way that we think of like important men, my narrator thinks of herself like that. So, every juncture where she's not being received that way—you know, at all, at all, at all—is going to be a slight crisis. And there's going to have

to be a—you know, and of course, there is no moment where she is being treated like Buzz Aldrin. Well, she's semi-famous. That is actually part of the book. So, celebrity is a notion in there.

But I think the quote/unquote “masculine” inner life—that is a life that doesn't feel like it needs to apologize for having like a life's purpose that isn't about the home—you know?—while still being like a parent and wanting that and loving that just as much as Buzz Aldrin, that was just something kind of crucial to set up. Yes, in a lighthearted way, but also totally serious.

Jesse Thorn: You're a really driven person. I don't think you could have done the amount of different stuff that you have done in your life without being a driven person. Like, not much of your art is the kind where you could just be lying around in bed and then, once every ten months something occurs to you, and you put it down, and everybody applauds. And I wonder if you were ever embarrassed or self-conscious about working so hard and putting so much of yourself into the world? And to what extent you were able to generate the blinders that this protagonist has and just rushed forward?

Miranda July: I think like my narrator, the work world seemed easier to figure out and be bold in than the world of, essentially, intimacy. You know, like there was another kind of intimacy with humanity that I was able—wherein I was able to be very, very vulnerable. But other ways of being known and having trust have been elusive.

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And I mean, I never thought that until recently, actually. And I've been having this conversation with a lot of friends where we're like, “Wait, I thought I was the vulnerability expert! Like, that was my—” You know, so I do think that's actually sort of a midlife thing of like the story you've been telling yourself, the reverse might turn out to be true at around this time. And then what do you do with that? It's like a decision you make again and again. Lying around in bed and like the idea will strike me like—it's like you're constantly being given like sleepy—like, you're in a field of poppies, and you're constantly sort of drifting off. And with the book—and maybe this was because the book is so much about the body, and I did start like lifting weights around the time I started the book. And I began to realize that in writing, you have to have a kind of athlete—like, there's a lot of points where it's like you're running up a hill, and you're not going to be able to do that with a kind of poetic sensibility in your nervous system. You have to be like an Olympic—like, (*intensely*) “Okay, we got this! Yeah! Come on! We're gonna do this!” And I would some—

Is that way too loud for the mic?

Jesse Thorn: It was, but it's fine.

Miranda July: (*Chuckles.*) Okay, like I would kind of, alone—

Jesse Thorn: I encourage you to do that in the future; it was fun.

Miranda July: (*Chuckling.*) Okay, I'll do it a few more times. But that realizing like, oh no, this isn't something we can do sleepily. Like, it will not happen. You can try and try, and it won't happen. Like, you need to have like a tremendous amount of energy. And like maybe it doesn't last for very long in the day, but you're gonna go at it. And I think sometimes artists and writers, like we all forget that. Almost because it's just—it's like off brand or something. And yeah, that was tied to the spirit of the book, and there is a thread in there about—there's some weightlifting in there too.

Jesse Thorn: You were trying to write on something that was factual, right? Before this book became a fictional book. Like, you were compiling like you were gonna write a *New Yorker* article about—

Miranda July: Oh, yes. Right, right. No, I was interviewing gynecologists. I was interviewing women who were older than me. I mean, this book does have a graph in it. It's my first book with a graph. I don't—you must know how excited I was to write my editor and be like, “This graph will be on page—”

(*They chuckle.*)

For a while there, it was really confusing. How do I have actual science? Because this—I mean, it was only near the end of writing the book that there was an article front cover of *The New York Times Magazine*, called “Women Have Been Misled About Menopause”. And I already knew that, not to sound like I know it all. But I had also, in doing all this research, come to that conclusion and was sort of actively trying to educate everyone around me and also kind of asking the book to do that at that point. And that article, in combination with just really finding it too hard to educate while writing a novel—I let that go. I let about 100 pages go and just realized, oh wait, I can have a way about perimenopause that entirely is seen through the eyes of my narrator, who frankly only cares about it as much as it impacts her desires.

It was fun to like finally get the reward of being able to treat it less clinically, less professionally, and more like a shapeshift-y, unreliable, character theme.

Jesse Thorn: We'll finish up with Miranda July in just a minute. After the break—Miranda July is funny, as I have said several times. But she doesn't want her work to be taken as a joke, so we'll talk about how she finds that balance. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

(*Pleasant school announcement chimes.*)

Janet Varney: Hello, teachers and faculty. This is Janet Varney.

[00:30:00]

I'm here to remind you that listening to my podcast, *The JV Club with Janet Varney*, is part of the curriculum for the school year. Learning about the teenage years of such guests as Alison Brie, Vicki Peterson, John Hodgman, and so many more is a valuable and enriching experience—one you have no choice but to embrace, because yes, listening is mandatory. *The JV Club with Janet Varney* is available every Thursday on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you. And remember, no running in the halls!

(Pleasant chimes.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Miranda July. The director and writer just published her second novel. It's called *All Fours*.

Your work is often so funny. And like as someone who's whole—to a problematic extent—whose whole value system revolves around what's funniest, it just means the world to me to have someone creating such beautiful art that's really funny. I mean, I think it's easy to get worried that if you do something that's funny, it means that the subject matter is a joke. You know, you alluded to that. Is that a concern for you?

Miranda July: I mean, it's more of like an eye roll or something, you know? I'm like, ugh, how provincial that people would think that. You know? And I will carry on. I mean, I do have my own carving out of like, you know, I don't want to be funny or weird for its own sake. I don't want to be clever. I, you know, have really kind of my own moderation system on that. Just I do imagine—I guess there's moments where I'm sometimes like, ohhh, right, important prizes. *(Chuckling.)* You know, like they're not going to give them to something that's funny, you know.

But I just think like, well, what's the good life? You know, like I want to have a good time. It has something to do with freedom, you know? I mean, when you—usually, when you write something funny, it's a form of improv, right? It's like you don't—you thought of it once. One time you thought of it, it was the first time, you know? And that's—the funny is right in there, and then maybe you polish it or something. But it stays intact, and so that keeps the book alive, is these moments of improv. And sometimes they're funny things, and sometimes they're not, and they're... I don't really—one's not better. Like, a perfect thing that's very serious, you know, is also very alive.

But yeah, I don't think I distinguish except if I'm like—I don't know, yeah, some moment of competitiveness. But that's all pretty far away when I'm writing. I'm really believing everyone's totally on board. *(Chuckles.)* You know, you kind of whip yourself into this grandiosity, and then you come out, and you're like, “Oh, right, I'm just me and not everyone's cup of tea and whatever.” You know, but it's too late. You have the book.

Jesse Thorn: What are the kinds of guidelines that you set out for yourself? Like, what are the rules that you alluded to earlier?

Miranda July: Oh, in terms of like clever?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, not being—what was it? Yeah, clever.

Miranda July: Yeah, I had a list early on. It was like something clicked in me with this book. And maybe it started with I wrote a short story called “The Metal Bowl” that was in *The New Yorker*, and in a way this novel somewhat—the voice for the novel came out of that short story. And it was like an understanding that specificity was kind of everything. And that you couldn’t—like, you could always sort of go further, you know. And you would know—and then you have to kind of be a sieve and be like, well, what’s just— You know, do you ever have days where you don’t get enough sleep? And always on those days I’m thinking extra thoughts?

(Jesse laughs.)

Which is like between every thought, there’s like an extra thought that really doesn’t need to be happening, you know? That’s like about the—I don’t know, like something real. And I think like, oh god, extra thoughts from not sleeping. And that can get into writing, you know, and so you have to sort of have a filter for extra thoughts. You know, because really you could have a thought about anything, and you could write it down. Yeah, and then like an honesty. Like, I sometimes I would write like a sex scene that would just fly out and seem—and be really genuinely erotic to me. And then I would be so proud—

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—and then come back to it later and be like, but is that true? Like, is that—? Because, you know, so much of sex, I think, for a lot of women—for me—a lot of it is like being sexy for someone else, sort of being a body for someone else. You know, and that’s a kind of cyclical like if you’re always, you know, turning on or getting turned on by turning on, it’s like hard to find the tail of that, like the end of it, in order to figure out like, “Well, what is the—what does turn me on? Or what—?” But I was trying to really get into—and I was talking to people like, “Okay, when you get turned on, how do you get turned on?” Like, I was trying to get into the nitty gritty of stuff, especially because like women’s sexuality—like, wow, you know. Like, science really hasn’t gotten into there, you know like we don’t know what’s going on. And

Jesse Thorn: The protagonist of the book is talking to a friend about her fantasies when she’s sleeping with her husband that involve being her husband in a different situation, that is like a slightly baroque kind of—you know.

Miranda July: Yeah. And not wanting the wife to find out. *(Chuckles.)* Who is her.

Jesse Thorn: It’s like an adult video search string, this scenario. But it’s her imagining herself—like, it’s not even her imagining her husband going off and doing this. It’s her imagining herself as her husband doing this.

Miranda July: Yeah, which I think is far more common. Like, I've done my research, so I'm here to report that's not that unusual.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have any of the same feelings about—that I just described about being funny when writing something serious—about writing something horny?

Miranda July: Yeah, I did try and use—like, there is a lot of sex in the book and things that we may not even think of as sex that I'm counting as sex. And I tried to—it's like if you imagine sex is like money. I tried to spend it on the things I most wanted. The most elusive or hard to get revelations. Yeah. So, I might—and I didn't exactly know I was doing that, but it's like she might get revved up in a very kind of conventional way that we can all hold on to and get excited about. And then how she spends that, essentially how she consummates that, I wanted to make sure it opened up huge new territory on the topics that I was interested in. Which were—or that I was like trying to create more space in. Aging, like the body aging, the woman's body aging.

And that's like not—spending the sex there was thrilling. Like, it took me a while, though. Like, there was a lot more kind of—had to get all the more like easy access sex out of the way. And then, yeah, I was like (*whispering*) I can't believe this is happening to me.

(*Chuckles.*) That's what it felt like.

Jesse Thorn: I want to ask you one other thing. So, the like animating event of the book is that the protagonist gets this check in the mail for \$20,000, for having written a sentence for an ad agency that turns into a whiskey advertisement. The sentence is about a very pedestrian sex act. But the whiskey advertisement's about whiskey. And I had no idea of this until I was prepping for this interview after having read that in the book, that part of your career—the like lifestyle that afforded you becoming an artist—was in part driven by like a really similar situation to that.

Miranda July: Yeah. Well, when I was in my mid-20s in Portland, Wieden+Kennedy, the ad agency, had a client—Coca Cola—that had a new product, a new Coke drink that needed a name. And they had a wild idea. Instead of hiring a naming agency, they were going to hire sort of cultural taste makers, young people from all over the world to just come up with names. And I was the Portland person, because I lived right there where the ad agency was. Because I wasn't yet—you know, I hadn't made my first movie yet or anything. And the paperwork said, you know, you get \$5,000—which was like an incredible amount of money for me then.

[00:40:00]

And now, let's be honest, a good amount.

Jesse Thorn: I would sing the *Wayne's World*, “You got \$5,000” song if I got \$5,000. Every time, without fail.

Miranda July: (*Laughs.*) You got \$5,000. If you happen to be the one who named it, you would get \$25,000. And so, whatever, I made my names. One of them was—(*chuckles*) it was a name that came with a concept. It was “Coke 2. It's blue.”

(*They laugh.*)

And I thought the can could be just the same, but blue. After that, I was pretty much exhausted, and all my names were even worse than Coke 2. And some years went by, and I had just made my first movie, actually, and had no money. You know, in that way where like you're flying around the world and doing press, but you literally just—you're counting on there being like paid for room service, because you just—yeah, there's no—you haven't made anything from the movie. And so, I was a little desperate. And I remember I looked in the mailbox one day, and there was an envelope from Coca Cola. And my first thought was, “Oh no, they want the \$5,000 back.”

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Which seemed plausible. Like I knew—I just—I always felt like such a kind of grifter that I was like I'm sure I did something wrong and that that was too good to be true. No, in fact, it was the legal department saying that while you didn't technically name the Coke product, it was named Coke 2. And because there's no way of proving that we didn't get that from you, we have to pay you \$25,000. And what's your address? (*Chuckles.*) You know, or what's—you know. Actually, I think it was just the check. I think the check was just in there. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Miranda, I'm so grateful for your time and so grateful for your work too. I was just—it was such a thrill to read your book. It was just a great time and really exciting, and I really appreciated it. So, thank you very much.

Miranda July: Thank you. It's nice to be here.

Jesse Thorn: Miranda July, everyone. Her new book, *All Fours*, is wonderful, brilliant, and hilarious. Also, very horny. I really loved it. You can find it at your local bookstore or at Bookshop.org.

Transition: Cheerful, chiming synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Folks, I'm speaking to you from my shed. I record in my shed now. I'm very excited about it.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”. It's by the band The Go! Team. Great band. Our thanks to The Go! Team. Our thanks to their label, Memphis Industries for letting us use that. *Bullseye* is on Instagram. We have pictures from behind the scenes and videos and all kinds of other stuff. Find us there on IG,

[@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). I am also on Instagram, [@JesseThornVeryFamous](#). We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, and I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Music: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

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