Preface to *A Wolf at the Table*

The first sentence is very dramatic—even to the point that one might think it was hyperbole. What does the author do next to make you understand he is speaking literally?

There is a recurring motif introduced here. What is it? Track all the words and images in the passage that relate to it by circling them in the passage.

How does the father’s bad knee make him all the more frightening for the reader?

How does Burrough’s use simile here?

Selection of detail is key. What does the author include in his descriptions? What does he not spend his time describing?

Look at the last lines here. What do they imply about the frequency and/or uniqueness of this chase? What do they reveal about the relationship between Burroughs and his father?

Augusten Burroughs

If my father caught me he would cut my neck, so I just kept going. Broken sticks and sharp stones gouged my bare feet, but I didn't consider the sensation. A branch whipped across my face; I felt the sting and for an instant I was fully blind, but I didn't stop.

His flashlight sliced into the woods on either side of me. The beam was like a knife, and I didn't want it on my back. He was out there, behind me somewhere in these woods.

I dashed to the right through a clutch of young silver birch trees and ran up the embankment, crouching to maintain speed. With his bad knee, he would have trouble with the hill. Lumber­ing forward, he would need to pause and massage the swollen, throbbing kneecap, catch his breath.

When I realized the jabbing slash from his flashlight was gone, I worried that he had cut around and was one step ahead of me. That he was already on the hill, climbing it from the other side. What if I reached the top and he was there waiting?

I veered back to the path, then crossed it. I wanted to stop and listen, but I couldn't. Fear pressed me forward. My breathing roared in my head as though my ears were beside a gigantic heaving machine, a bellows stoking some hellish fire.

Even though I was wearing only pajamas and had no shoes, I wasn't cold. I wasn't anything at all. I was only a blur.

When I stepped on a branch, the rough bark cut into my arch, but I just kept going. The pain exploded in my foot and shot out the top of my head, and then was left behind in my wake.

I paused finally and watched the trees for slashes of light but saw none. As my heart settled and my ears became less occupied, I listened and heard nothing but the thready pulse of the night. And I sensed that the hunt was over. Prey knows when it has es­caped.