

## HOW TO SAVE A LIFE

By Kierra Gulmen

### CHARACTERS

ARI	Seventeen-year-old girl, very sarcastic and cynical, uses humor to deal with her pain. Her main concern in life is her brother Dustin. She keeps most of her personal life as a secret from her friends.
ACE	Seventeen-year-old boy. Ari's best friend. In love with film, comes from an abusive household but is a very happy and optimistic personality. He is very open about his life, and his main concern is to win the film contest.
DANIELLE	Ari's mother, 39-years-old. In denial about Michaels activities, won't believe it until Ari tells her but can sense it.
MARINA	Sixteen years old; Ari's other best friend. Her main focus is on her rotten boyfriend, Brandon. Is very easily manipulated by him, but still is trying to give him the benefit of the doubt.
BRANDON	Eighteen years old, Marina's boyfriend. Typical Brooklyn player. Cheats on Marina constantly is very rude when Ari is around.
DUSTIN	Six-year-old boy, Ari's brother. Very innocent, developing issues with anxiety and depression. Looks up to Ari immensely, but still keeping everything from her.
DEREK	Ari's biological dad, 41-years old. Cares about her a lot but respects Danielle's boundaries, also began to get involved with Dustin emotionally. Doesn't have a lot of money, but still cares about his family.
MICHAEL	Ari's dad, 41-years old. He has a skewed view of reality and the family dynamic. He is very calm and methodical about what he does, is very intelligent and manipulative, and exhibits many sociopathic behaviors.
ERICA	Actor for Ace's movie.
MAX	Actor for Ace's movie.

LUNA Actor for Ace's movie.

MS. ROBINS School official

MS. ARDEN School official

SCENE I

*(School park at the end of the school day. Ace runs in.)*

ACE  
(out of breath)

Ar- Ar- shit.

ARI  
Could've just walked, not like I was going anywhere.

ACE  
People run when they're excited.

ARI  
Yeah, I never really got that.

ACE  
Anywho. Remember that film competition-

ARI  
Wait.

(Clearing her throat putting on an announcer's voice)

The lucky student to win this year's Young Director title will be rewarded with a full ride to New York Film Academy, and an all-expense-paid trip to drumroll, please. (Drums legs) Your future!

(Fake crowd screaming noise)

ACE

Why are you so extra?

ARI

I learned from the best babe.

ACE

You act like I ever go above a level four.

ARI

Your level four is most people's level six-

ACE

Anyways...I got in! Well obviously I didn't win but, I have the opportunity-

(Ari quickly wraps herself around him out of excitement and also the hopes that he'd stop blabbing)

ACE

And I finally decided what I was doing.

ARI

When?

ACE

Right before the interview. Just kind of flipped a coin and hoped for the best.

ARI

You know they say flipping a coin is actually a really good way to make a decision.

ACE

Yeah, just kind of leave it to the universe.

ARI

*Actually*, it's because when the coin is in the air, you know which one you want it to land on.

ACE

And if you don't figure it out while the coins in the air?

ARI

*Then* it's left up to the universe.

(Ace nods in a touché fashion)

ARI

What did it end up landing on?

ACE

A documentary, which you're right that's what I wanted while it was in the air.

ARI

Cool, what are you gonna do?

ACE

(Speaking quickly, excited)

Well, I had this really awesome idea. . . So like it's like half documentary half regular, and like each scene starts with a real interview of a real person and *then* it goes into a reenactment of like what happened, and then we'll have like these scenes that are like these kids in therapy to show what they go through mentally and-

ARI

Stop!

ACE

What? You have a suggestion?

ARI

No, my heads spinning.

(Ace playfully pushes Ari's shoulder, they both laugh)

ACE

I don't talk *that* fast.

ARI

Mhmm....

ACE

Well did you understand what I said?

ARI

Yeah 'cause I've known you for five years.

ACE

Well, then that's all that counts.

ARI

You told them all that?

ACE

Yes, but slow and organized. It's just when they asked why I kind of froze. (Chuckling) I was scared I would have been kicked out if I stayed silent for so long.

ARI

Oh, what did you tell them?

ACE

The truth, I was born from marital rape into an abusive household, mom left the guy when it became too much, yadda yadda, I figured the sob story would have helped me get in anyways.

ARI

Well hey, at least you're okay with talking about it.

ACE

I mean it was years ago I'd have to get over it eventually.

ARI

Yeah, I guess.

ACE

(Rising to his feet)

Welp, now I've dug myself into a hole that I probably can't get out of. I need to find *someone* interview besides my mom. Then I need to figure out who's gonna write the scenes, and *then* I need to figure out who's gonna read all the stuff.

ARI

You're not gonna write the scenes yourself?

ACE

I said I could direct, never said I could write.

ARI

Touché.

ACE

*But* I know a person who recently won an award and got their script published by Samuel French.

ARI

Is that person possibly me?

ACE

Maybeeeee.

ARI

(*Sighing*): How many scenes do you need?

ACE

Four or five, and they need like three pages each probably.

ARI

When?

ACE

Like what time period?

ARI

No shit head, what time do you need the scenes?

ACE

You don't have to be mean about it, and I kind of wanted to film two scenes each week, so one scene from you maybe Friday?

ARI

So.. *tomorrow*.

ACE

Doesn't have the right ring to it, Friday sounds better.

ARI

You know, saying the name of the day *tends* to make it feel like it's further away than one day.

ACE

That's the point.

ARI

And what scene am I writing exactly?

ACE

Therapist scene, you're really good at the mental stuff... *And* I know you like watching crime documentaries so scenes like that should be right up your alley.

ARI

So domestic abuse?

ACE

No, sexual abuse, specifically with kids.

(Ari's casual smile drops almost immediately. She stares at Ace numbly for a moment, suspecting Ace had figured her out)

ARI

I- I

(Sighing, trying to gain composure, closes her eyes for a brief second, and opens them again)

Are you sure *I'm* the best person to write about that stuff?

ACE

We share a Netflix, I see what you watch, Ari.

(Ari's phone dings, indicating a text)

ARI

Hey, can we talk all this out later, Dustin's sick and my mom has a shift?

(End scene)

SCENE 2

(Ari's house, in the living room; Ari is on the couch.)

*(Danielle enters)*

DANIELLE

Thank you for picking Dustin up; I really didn't want to call Mike out of work.

ARI

Yeah, he's really busy so...

DANIELLE

Is he feeling any better?

ARI

The rash is kind of bad but uh, he's not throwing up anymore, so that's good. (Pause.) The nurse said the rash didn't look like an allergic reaction rash, though.

DANIELLE

What did she say it was?

ARI

Compared it to diaper rash.

DANIELLE

Hm... Well, I'll put ointment on it, give him some more tea for his stomach... He'll be fine.

ARI

Yeah, but what happened? You're the (mockingly) certified hospital nurse.

DANIELLE

Could be numerous things, rough boxers...maybe he scrubs too hard in the bath, and don't mock me, young lady.

ARI

And the throwing up?

DANIELLE

Is he being bullied in school?

ARI

Yeah....

DANIELLE

Anxiety.

ARI

I guess.

DANIELLE

(Smiling sadly)

Go do your homework, I'll worry about Dustin.

(Danielle exits.)

(Marina enters, slamming the door, goes to the couch and sits down so that her head is in Ari's lap)

ARI

Okay so... One; you don't knock. Two, you don't even say hi, and now I'm a pillow?

(Marina sits up)

MARINA

Brandon isn't replying, and like, he's just being so weird lately, and I don't want him to lose interest, and I don't want to worry about him cheating, but like, he's being so sus.

ARI

Marina, how many times are we gonna have this conversation.

MARINA

No, no he got better he really did. It's just this past week-

ARI

(Exasperated)

You've said that a million times.

MARINA

I know I did, but I'm serious. I trust him I just-

ARI

If you trusted him, this wouldn't even be a conversation right now.

(Marina is silenced)

ARI

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said it like that.

MARINA

Ya think? What's wrong with you?

ARI

Dustin has a rash, and he's throwing up and-

MARINA

Really, you're stressed over your sick brother? (Pause) Ari, your mom's a nurse, like went to nursing school, has a degree, knows how to deal with sick people. You mother him too much.

ARI

Yeah... I guess.

MARINA

Aside from a booty rash and vomit breath, how is the little monster?

ARI

He's growing up, it's kind of sad actually.

MARINA

Growing up how?

ARI

We spent literally two hours talking about what he might wanna do with his life.

MARINA

(Blinking in question)

He's six... What did y'all discuss, what color dinosaur toy he'll want next?

ARI

(chuckling)

Excuse you he wants to be an archeologist.

MARINA

Like I said, dinosaurs.

ARI

Don't harass my little brother.

MARINA

I'm not, I'm harassing you.

ARI

We got pamphlets on this in school, I'm gonna tell the principal. VERBAL HARASSMENT! MR. MICHAELS!!!

(Marina jokingly slaps Ari)

MARINA

Don't bring him up in this good Christian home.

ARI

Good? Christian? Are we in the same house?

MARINA

Your Dad's Christian, is he not?

ARI

That's not my father.

MARINA

He's been here since you were six, so for all intents and purposes-

ARI

For all intents and purposes, he lives here to help with rent.

MARINA

Sorry, didn't mean to strike a nerve.

ARI

(Sighing, composing herself)

It's fine.

(Michael enters holding bags full of groceries. He looks a bit shocked when he says Marina sitting on the couch.)

MICHAEL

Hello, Marina... Ari, I wanted to spend some father-daughter time with you tonight...

MARINA

(Rushed, intimidated by Michael)

Oh, I'm so sorry Mr. Wright, I didn't know, I'll go.

(Marina begins to get up, but Ari grabs her wrist harshly, causing Marina to sit back down)

ARI  
(Quickly)

It's fine Marina, we can do it another night. Besides, shouldn't you be at work Michael?

MICHAEL  
I'll say it a million times, call me dad.

ARI  
Michael has a better ring to it.

(Michael sighs, frustrated with the change of plans.)

MICHAEL  
They got someone to cover my shift because I was *hoping* I could finally spend time with my daughter.

ARI  
Not your daughter.

MICHAEL  
Ariana...

ARI  
Michael...

MICHAEL  
(Sighing)  
I'm gonna go give Dustin a bath.

ARI  
Hey, can you keep the door open, please? He gets kind of claustrophobic in closed bathrooms.

MICHAEL  
(Mumbling)  
Yeah.

(Michael exits stage on the opposite side he came in)

MARINA  
Are you sure?

ARI

Yeah.

MARINA

But your dad wants to spend time with you...

ARI

(Annoyed)

He's not my real dad, Jesus Christ.

MARINA

Hey, at least you have someone stepping up to the position.

(End scene)

*SCENE 3*

(School library, lunchtime)

(Ari enters holding transcripts, Ace is at his laptop.)

ARI

Hey, Acey.

ACE

(Distractedly)

What? Oh hey.

ARI

Watcha doin'?

ACE

I have a coupla friends who know people, who know people who've been abused, so if they'd actually respond to my messages that would be nice. Did you by chance finish that scene?

(Ari throws down a small pile of papers; it's the script)

ACE

Wow.

ARI

What? You didn't expect I'd finish it?

ACE

Honestly no.

ARI

Wow thanks Ace, the faith you have in me is astounding.

ACE

Oh, I know it is.

ARI

When are you gonna film it?

ACE

This weekend, we'll do a cold reading with the actors tonight, you can come watch if you want.

ARI

Sure why not... Who are the actors exactly?

ACE

I asked around school who'd be willing to do it for free, surprisingly small number... But so far I got Erica, Ryland, Michonne, Max, and Luna.

ARI

You can always ask Marina.

ACE

Nah she has enough going on.

ARI

(Frustrated)

Brandon is your definition of "enough going on?"

ACE

He's her boyfriend, and he's hurting her.

ARI

He's a fuckboy, and he doesn't care about her. She knows it, she'll just have to get over it because it's not changing.

ACE

(Sarcastically)

Why don't you say how you really feel huh?

ARI

Am I lying?

ACE

No, but you can at least pretend like you care.

ARI

I do care I just-

(Composing herself)

You're right, I'm being a really shitty friend to her lately.

ACE

Yeah? Well stop, she loves you, like so much. Please don't do anything to ruin that.

ARI

Scouts honor.

(Ari's phone pings with an alert, Ari checks the phone and immediately starts to pack her bag.)

ACE

I didn't hear the bell.

ARI

Dustin got in trouble at school.

ACE okay? You're not his Mom, Ari; have his actual parent go pick him up.

(Ari stops packing her stuff to address Ace.)

ARI

My mom's at work.

ACE

Michael?

ARI

Work.

ACE

Can't Michael pick him up on his break or something?

ARI

Michael's not fun to be around when he gets upset, and I don't want him to be mad at Dus for getting in trouble.

ACE

Kids need discipline.

ARI

(More to herself but Ace still hears)

Not that kind of discipline.

ACE

Huh?

ARI

I'll deal with him myself, he listens to me... Ace it won't take me that long I'll be back by next period.

ACE

Fine go, but hey if he ever calls you "mommy" one day don't get confused.

ARI

Yeah yeah yeah.

(Ari exits, lights down)

(Lights up as Ari enters the main office to an elementary school)

ARI

Ma'am?

MS. ROBINS

Can I help you?

ARI

Dustin Lunez?

MS. ROBINS

Do you have an adult with you?

ARI

Can I just pick my brother up, please?

MS. ROBINS

You need a legal guardian.

ARI

My Mom's at the hospital.

MS. ROBINS

Dad?

ARI

He works late.

(Ms. Robins sighs)

MS. ROBINS

Next time you need to pick him up for whatever reason you need to bring an adult. . . He's in the principal's office—go.

(Ari walks into the principal's office.)

MS. ARDEN

You're a little young to be Dustin's mother?

ARI

Older sister.

MS. ARDEN

I need-

ARI

Mom and dad are at work for the night, and there's four of us to take care of; they can't just call out. Can I please just pick up my brother?

MS. ARDEN

Sit.

(Ari sits down in the armchair next to Dustin.)

MS. ARDEN

We need to discuss Dustin's recent behavior.

ARI

What did he do exactly?

MS. ARDEN

He's usually a good kid, but when he gets angry, he throws things, has a tantrum, disrupts essentially anyone in a 100 feet radius.

ARI

That's not that far...

(Ms. Arden stares at her with a deadpan look on her face)

ARI

Sorry. I'll talk to him okay? There's some rough stuff going on at home lately.

MS. ARDEN

Alright, but if this persists, we're going to recommend counseling to your mother or father.

ARI

Okay. Come on Dustin.

(Ari takes Dustin's hand and leads him out of the office.)

MS. ROBINS

I hope your mom gets better soon.

(They walk away.)

DUSTIN

What's wrong with mommy?

ARI

Nothing kiddo.

DUSTIN

Am I in trouble? I'm sorry for getting in trouble.

(Ari rubs his head)

ARI

It's okay.

(Ari smiles sadly and they exit the school. They are next seen by the bus stop waiting to go home. Ari is nonchalantly playing with Dustin's hair.)

ARI

Do you wanna talk about what happened today Bubbs??

(Dustin shakes his head no.)

ARI

C'mon who are you gonna talk to if not me??

(Dustin shrugs)

ARI

You can't just keep everything inside kid.

DUSTIN

Yes, I can.

ARI

Nah you'll just grow up to be cynical and sarcastic and develop a relentless hatred towards life itself.

(Dustin stares up at her almost in awe.)

DUSTIN

Woah....

ARI

Too many big words?

DUSTIN

Yeah.

(Ari laughs and Dustin giggles)

ARI

So what happened today huh?

DUSTIN

A boy was being mean.

ARI

What was he doing that was mean?

DUSTIN

He called you weird because of all the lines on your arms, and he doesn't know why you have them.

ARI

Why do you think I have them?

DUSTIN

My 4th-grade friend Kitty says that you're a warrior and those are your battle scars.

ARI

Since when were you friends with the older kids?

DUSTIN

She's really nice to me. She got Max and Justin to finally leave me alone. She's really big, kind of scary but she's really nice when you get to know her.

ARI

Well, who said that since it wasn't Max or Justin?

DUSTIN

McKayla.

ARI

Is that why you started screaming?

DUSTIN

It made me mad because they were being idiots.

ARI

(chuckling)

Don't say that, that's a mean word.

DUSTIN

Well, sometimes you have to use bad words to describe bad people.

ARI

Can't disagree with that kid. Just don't say it around Mommy or other adults. Deal?

DUSTIN

Deal.

(Long pause)

ARI

How do you feel about my lines?

DUSTIN

I like them, they look like stripes. You're like a tiger...

(Dustin begins to make fake growling noises)

ARI

That reminds me, need more cereal for the house.

DUSTIN

(Giggling)

Why'd that make you think of cereal?

ARI

Tony the Tiger?

(Dustin stares at her)

"Theeeeeeyre grrreat."

(Dustin continues to stare at her)

No? Okay never mind.

DUSTIN

(Laughing)

I know who Tony the Tiger is.

ARI

So you were just gonna let me look stupid?

(Dustin nods)

ARI

Wow, best brother ever.

(Dustin smiles big, and Ari rustles his hair.)

DUSTIN

Don't touch the merchandise.

ARI  
When did you learn that word?

DUSTIN  
I'm smarterer than you think.

ARI  
"Smarterer" isn't a word.

DUSTIN  
Yes, it is. See that's how I know I'm smarterer.

ARI  
Do you wanna get some burgers to bring home?

(Dustin smiles and jumps up and down. Ari takes Dustin's hand and exits, heading down the block)

(End scene)

#### SCENE 4

(Back of school library in a big space. The school day had ended, and Ace is setting up his camera, as it is placed on a random person from school)

(Ari enters)

ARI  
Hey, Acey.

ACE  
Hey, what happened to "I'll be back by next period."

ARI  
Dustin was upset, and my Mom is many things, but an emotional outlet is not one of them.

ACE  
I accept that excuse.

ARI  
So you forgive me, Acey?

ACE

I forgive you Ari, or should I say, creative director.

ARI

(Chuckling)

I have a title now.

ACE

I mean, I don't think I'll be able to put your name in it without getting disqualified, but, you're the creative director in my heart.

(Ace clutches his hand dramatically)

ARI

Wow Ace, I'm so touched.... about how much you love kissing my ass, does it taste good?

ACE

Mango.

ARI

Woulda guessed strawberries.

ACE

You don't taste that good Ari.

ARI

You gonna start anytime soon or..?

ACE

Yeah yeah, don't rush me.

(Ace hands the actors Luna, Erica, and Max the transcript and everyone sits down in the wooden library chairs in a circle.)

MAX

I hope to be working with you for a while.

(Erica stays silent.)

MAX

I understand meeting someone for the first time could be very nerve-racking.

(Erica gives her a puzzled look.)

Makes you nervous.

(Erica nods in understanding)

So, let's start off easy, what's your favorite color?

ERICA

Purple.

MAX

I love purple, one of my favorites.

(Long pause)

Can you tell me why Mommy said your thigh is purple?

(Erica shakes her head)

MAX

C'mon I can keep a secret.

ERICA

(Hesitantly)

A boy.. In school, he punched my thigh.

MAX

He did? That wasn't very nice.

(Erica shakes her head.)

MAX

Did he do anything else that you didn't like?

ERICA

Nuh uh.

(Short silence)

MAX

Do you want to tell me who really gave you the purple thigh?

ERICA

You can't tell.

MAX

If someone's hurting you, I have to tell your mommy.

ERICA

Why?

MAX

Because mommy needs to know if something bad is happening to you.

ERICA

But why?

MAX

Because, sweetie, it's very important that your mommy knows if you're in danger.

ERICA

But *why*?

MAX

Because she's your mommy, she loves you, and she'll want to protect you.

(Erica goes silent)

MAX

Did Daddy make you purple?

(Erica nods)

MAX

Why did he give you the purple?

ERICA

He wanted to see my no-no parts. I told him Mommy said no one can touch my no-no parts, especially boys. He was squeezing me, hard. It hurt.

MAX

Did he touch your no-no parts?

(Erica nods)

MAX

With his hands or with something else.

ERICA

Hands. He said it was okay, because he gave me all the teddy bears and dolls, and this was my way of saying thank you.

MAX

How many times has he touched you?

ERICA

Only once.

MAX

Do you mind if I bring in your Mom?

(Erica stays silent)

(Max makes a fake come in gesture towards Luna still in his seat. Luna shifts in her seat to show she's now in the room)

MAX

We need to talk about your daughter.

ERICA

No, we don't.

MAX

Yes, we do.

(Erica sticks her tongue out childishly)

(Max chuckles, but Luna gently smacks Erica's hand disapprovingly)

MAX

There are some things going on at home that she hasn't been telling you.

LUNA

What do you mean? She has a perfectly good home life.

MAX

Do you want to tell her now honey?

(Erica shakes her head)

MAX

Your daughter has disclosed to me that there has been sexual abuse going on at home-

LUNA

Excuse me?

MAX

Yes, she's told me that her step-father—

LUNA

(Quickly cutting him off to pretend as if he wasn't about to say what he said.)

I already told you she has a perfectly good home life. She is a child with a wild imagination, all she does is sit around and watch movies. I'm- I'm not surprised that she decided to choose one of them to turn into part of her life.

MAX

I understand that it's hard to believe but most children, especially at such a young age, don't have the ability to describe to me what she's described without it having happened-

LUNA

(Defensive)

She would have told me if he was hurting her.

MAX

Most kids don't say anything. Either their abusers threatened them, they think it makes them dirty, they think the parent will be mad. There are many factors that go into a child staying quiet.

(There's silence as Luna shakily turns over to the Erica)

LUNA

Sweetie, I need - I Need you to tell me the truth, has your stepdad ever touched you?

(Luna and Erica stare at each other for a few moments before Erica calmly shakes her head no.)

LUNA

(Trying to chuckle it off)

Like I said, a wild imagination. Maybe she'll be a writer.

(Max nods and smiles sadly)

MAX

I would still like to see her on a weekly basis if you don't mind.

LUNA

You know what, I think that her outbursts are 'cause of the fact that I just got married, adjusting to the fact that she's not the only one who gets's Mommy's attention. I think she'll be just fine without the help right now, I don't want you to feed into these delusions and have her start believing them too...

MAX

But, Mrs. Sawyer.

LUNA

(No longer in character)

Uh.. it say's that I get up and pull Erica out.

ACE

You're good, we got the idea of it...

MAX

Ari, you wrote this?

ARI

Yeah.

MAX

It's so good!

(Ari smiles pridefully.)

MAX

Can I ask you a question though?

ARI

Sure.

MAX

What's with the mom?

ARI

Denial is a dangerous thing, my friend.

True that.

MAX

I can't wait to read more of your stuff.

ERICA

Thanks.

ARI  
(Smiling)

We good to leave now Ace?

MAX

(Ace nods numbly)

(Max, Erica and Luna leave, leaving Ari and Ace alone. Ace is sat in his chair, zoned out in thought)

You good man?

ARI

(Silence)  
(Ari snaps her fingers in front of Ace's face and he snaps back into reality)

Did that trigger you off or something?

ARI

ACE  
It just... The mom sounds like how my mom used to talk, I mean only slightly considering I was never molested or anything...

What do you mean then?

ARI

ACE  
She was always in denial about what was wrong, whenever her friends came over they would always tell her that my dad was shit and she'd say they don't know him like she did.

(Ari places her hand on Ace's knee to comfort him)

ACE

He would bruise her rib, and she'd still tell everyone she loved him.

ARI

She did.

ACE

I know..

(Momentary silence)

ACE

How'd you come up with that exactly?

ARI

Netflix.

ACE

What movie?

ARI

Uh.. Can't remember the name.

ACE

I'll check when I get home.

(Marina enters with her bookbag on)

MARINA

Ari, we still on for tonight?

ARI

Yeah of course.

(Ari picks up her bookbag.)

ARI

See you tomorrow, Acey.

ACE

Until tomorrow my love.

(Ari and Marina exit the library, and are next seen in the school parking lot.)

ARI

Listen I'm really sorry about all that stuff I said yesterday.

MARINA  
(Out of it)

Hmm?

ARI

About Brandon; it wasn't necessary.

MARINA

So, you're okay with me giving him a second chance?

ARI

Seven-hundredth chance and no, he's horrible for you. I'm apologizing for the way I treated you, not the way I feel about him. Me and you are still friends, but I don't want to see or *hear* about him again.

MARINA

Are you serious?

ARI

There's a lot going on in my life, and I'm just trying to stay sane, help me out here huh?

MARINA

What's this big thing happening in your life?

ARI

It doesn't matter. If I had absolutely nothing going on it still wouldn't matter. Since I've met you, I've been putting up with Brandon drama. So that's two years of trust issues, cheating, breakups, and "I still love him." We used to talk about life outside of Brandon. Your mom, my mom, school, whatever. But *all* you talk about is Brandon, you're turning into an extension of him, kid. And I love you, and I love this friendship, so I'm asking you to stop, not because I don't care, but because I'm trying to keep this friendship alive.

MARINA

You really feel like that?

ARI

I'm sorry but yeah.

MARINA

Don't apologize. You're right; he has been consuming a lot of our conversations.

ARI

Thank you.

MARINA

We still good?

ARI

Listen if I didn't want this friendship to last I would have let you continue.

MARINA  
(Chuckling)

Touché.

ARI

So.. life huh?

MARINA

Wow, this is harder than I thought.

ARI

That's not healthy.

MARINA  
(Zoned out)

Huh?

ARI

Listen, if I said something that hurt your feelings you can tell me.

MARINA

No, you're not the issue I promise.

ARI  
(Deep groan)

Brandon?

MARINA

Yeah it's just, his friends told me some stuff about him, and it's bothering me.

ARI  
(Sighing)

The good friend in me wants to ask *what stuff*.

MARINA

Saying that he's texting other girls, and last night he invited a girl over and just... I don't know. His friends have been out to break us up since day one.

ARI

Why does it matter? If he's cheating on you, you're gonna break up with him, and then when he apologizes, says he loves you and promises this *big profound change* that we all know will never happen, you'll get back together with him. Let the boy cheat in peace.

(Marina laughs loudly, cackling almost, realizing how accurate Ari is.)

ARI

Uh? Are you gonna stab me now or something?

MARINA

No, it's just--

(keeps laughing)

Hearing it sounds so ridiculous, but you're not wrong.

(Brandon enters)

BRANDON

What's so funny over here?

(Ari groans dramatically loud)

BRANDON

What happened to you?

(Ari groans even louder, it almost sounds like a deep scream)

MARINA

Babe, do you mind if we talk tomorrow Instead.

BRANDON

I want to spend some time with my girlfriend.

ARI

I wanna spend time with her too, but you're making it real hard.

BRANDON

What's that supposed to mean?

ARI

What do you think it means Aristotle?

BRANDON

What?

ARI

Philosopher... You know what, nevermind, waste of my breath.

BRANDON

Every time you breathe, it's a waste of breath.

MARINA

Brandon-

ARI

Oooh, snappy. If you're done taking up my time, and *soiling* what good there is left in humanity, we'll be leaving now.

(Ari begins to walk away, Marina follows suit, but Brandon grabs Marina's arm, yanking her back)

(Ari turns around)

ARI

First of all—j

(Gesturing to his hand on Marinas arm)

No. Second of—k

(Gesturing to his face)

No

BRANDON

Shouldn't you be cutting yourself somewhere?

MARINA

Brandon!

BRANDON

C'mon we all know she's fucking crazy.

ARI

Ooh, you use my self-harm issues against me, you must be so good at making good argumentative points.

BRANDON

(Drawing lines on his arm)

Sideways for attention, long ways for results.

ARI

Yeah, maybe you should try the long way sometime huh?

MARINA

Stop it!

ARI

So..*girlfriend* who are you spending time with?

MARINA

Don't do this.

ARI

Pick wisely, but remember (*loud fake whisper*) I'm not cheating on you.

BRANDON

Do you really wanna play this game, Ari, cause I don't think you'll win.

ARI

I think I'll be fine, we're kind of best friends.

BRANDON

Yeah, well I'm the one fucking her, so ya know.

ARI

You gave it up to this douche bag!!

MARINA

It doesn't matter!

ARI

Yes, the hell it does! He's using you for pussy! Shit man I just thought he was hurting you 'cause he thought it was fun.

MARINA

It's not your body it doesn't matter!

ARI

Yes, it does, because when the shit hits the fan, I'm gonna be the one hearing about how he broke your heart for three weeks until you inevitably get back together with the fucker.

BRANDON

That "fucker" is right here.

ARI

Oh really, I hadn't noticed! Considering I've been contemplating stabbing you since the minute you opened your damned mouth. (Beat) Marina his dick game better be bomb because if you're putting up with all of this-

BRANDON

Don't you dare bitch? I'll slap the shit outta you.

MARINA

Stop it!

ARI

You know what? I'm leaving, I do not have the energy, to deal with this bullshit ass relationship right now.

MARINA

Ari-

ARI

I'll see you tomorrow in History how about that? Go to his house and do whatever the hell you want, after all, it's not my body.

(Ari exits)

(End scene)

SCENE 5

(Next Scene Ari's house.)

Mom! I'm home!

ARI

(Silence. Arianna walks over to the table and sees a note left by her mother.)

ARI  
(To herself)

Arianna, please do the laundry before I get home; don't worry about putting Dustin to bed I won't be home too late.

(Ari crumples up the note and throws it down she looks at her watch, realizing it's too late to intervene as Dustin's probably already asleep. She enters the laundry room and begins to sift through the colors and whites.)

What the...

ARI

(She lifts up a child-themed bed sheet, and there's a big yellowed stain. Looking through more she finds the same stain on more bed sheets.)

Fuck...

ARI  
(Under her breath)

(Ari falls to the floor, holding her head, in the midst of a panic attack, unable to breath)

Fuck.

ARI

(Her house phone rings from the other room. She doesn't move to answer it as she's too consumed by her panic. The answering machine beeps, and then Ace's voice is heard)

ACE

Hey, Ari, I called your cell phone, but I guess you didn't charge it yet. Good thing you're one of those old people who still have home phones right? Anyways I was wondering if you'd wanna come over tonight, watch a movie or something. See you later, babes.

(Machine clicks, call ends)

(Ari begins to slowly scratch at her arm, a sign that she's ready to cut soon. But she stops and squeezes her arm tight)

ARI

I promised Ace.

(She stands, still shaking, she puts the sheets in the washer, closes it, and exits the room)

(End scene)

SCENE 6

(The next day, at Ace's house before filming.)

(Ari enters Ace's bedroom, he's sitting on the bed, twiddling with his new camera. He has a childlike curiosity as if seeing it for the first time)

ARI

Hey.

ACE

(Absentmindedly)

Hey.

(Snapping back into reality)

ACE

Hey, Ms. I don't answer my phone.

ARI

It was dead; I didn't know you called.

ACE

Oh, I know it was... That's why I called your house phone and left a voice message. Why do you have a voice mailbox if no one's gonna check it?

ARI

Who actually checks their voicemail box?

ACE

People, who have a voicemail box?

ARI

I guess?

ACE

Why else you would have one?

ARI

The aesthetic.

ACE

I'm worried about you.

ARI

Me too, kid.

(Ari pulls off a plastic covering on the lens)

ARI

New camera?

ACE

Hey, I like keeping those on-

ARI

Heathen.

ACE

(Sighing)

But yeah, my dad got it for me yesterday.

ARI

It's already been a month?

ACE

Yeah, times going by really fast lately huh?

ARI

I feel like I'm in one giant blur. It's Saturday, right?

ACE

(Chuckling)

Yea, it's Saturday.

ARI

Isn't he usually a Sunday thing?

ACE

Yeah but uh, he has a business trip, which my mom--

(stops himself)

He has to leave tonight, and today he had work, so ya know, came by to drop it off yesterday.

ARI

What were you gonna say?

ACE

Huh?

ARI

Your mom what?

ACE

(Hesitates)

My mom is pretty sure he's lying. She thinks he's jobless, living off of some 50-something-year-old smoker going through a midlife crisis.

ARI

How would he have gotten the camera then?

ACE

I asked her that, and apparently "I know more about this stuff than you do" is a form of currency.

ARI

If I didn't know her, I'd think your mom wore a tinfoil hat to keep the aliens away.

ACE

Listen I don't know what she does when I'm not around.

(They laugh together for a few seconds, a short silence ensues)

ARI

Why'd you cut yourself off before? I love Jane Vance conspiracy theories.

ACE

I'm so tired of talking and *thinking* about how much she hates my dad.

ARI

I mean, she has a reason, it's extremely justified.

ACE

No I know it is, he's disgusting for what he did and, *really* I use him for the gifts but... I just wish, that maybe I imagined everything. Every beating, every trial, every smelly interview room. Maybe if I tell myself it was fake enough times, it'll disappear like it never happened.

ARI

That's not gonna do anything.

ACE

I know.

ARI

You're gonna end up driving yourself crazy.

ACE

(A little louder)

I know.

ARI

And-

ACE

I know!

ARI

I didn't even finish my sentence.

ACE

Whatever it is, I know.

(Long, but comfortable silence)

ARI

How's the movie going?

ACE

Great, super great, keep writing your amazing scenes.

ARI

A little worried that was sarcastic.

ACE

(Laughing)

I've been hanging out with you too much.

ARI

If you're gonna be a sarcastic asshole, the sarcasm needs to be noticeable by other sarcastic assholes.

ACE

I'm working on it.

ARI

But you really like the scenes huh?

ACE

Yeah... It seems so real.

ARI

It is real...

(Catching herself)

For someone, somewhere.

ACE

Yeah, sometimes you realize how sick the world really is.

ARI

How sick did you think it was?

ACE

I thought watching your dad beat the shit out of your mom, then play soccer with you 10 minutes later was pretty up there. Kinda realizing it's not.

ARI

Everyone's version of "the worst thing ever" is different. Some people's unimaginable is another person's daily routine.

ACE

Yeah...

ARI

Enough of this depressing garbage, take a photo of me.

(Ari poses stupidly)

ACE

I can't wait to put that in my portfolio.

(A shutter and a flash go off)

(Lights down)

(Lights up, about an hour later, in an empty studio)

ARI

How'd you score this place?

ACE

Not only is Jane Vance good for conspiracy theories but she's also really good at hookups.

(Ari gives Ace a suggestive look)

ACE

Not those kinds of hookups. Nasty.

(Ari chuckles)

ARI

Who'd you get to read this one?

ACE

Yeah, I meant to talk to you about that...

(Marina enters holding hands with Brandon)

(Ari quickly pieces it together and sighs)

MARINA  
(Awkwardly)

Hey guys.

ARI  
(Dead toned)

Marina. Brandon.

MARINA

Ari stop, this is ridiculous.

ARI

I'm not doing anything.

MARINA

That's the problem! Where's the sarcasm, the loving insults?

ARI  
(Addressing ace)

Hey shit brick.

(Turning back to Marina)

Happy?

MARINA  
(Whining)

Arianna.

ARI

Shouldn't we be starting now?

ACE  
(Awkwardly, in hopes of moving the conversation along)

Yeah, let's start.

(Marina gives up, and they all sit in a circle for the reading)

BRANDON

How are you today?

(Marina shrugs)

Silence? What did your dad do?

BRANDON

Nothing.

MARINA

Are you sure-

BRANDON

Nothing.

MARINA  
(Grinding her teeth)

Johnny?

BRANDON

(Marina goes back into silence)

I know what your silence means. What did he do this time?

BRANDON

(Marina sinks into her chair, still silent)

What did he say?

BRANDON

(Silence)

Did he hit you?

BRANDON

(Marina just chuckles)

Did he-

BRANDON

MARINA

Stop. Stop trying to figure out what's going on! It doesn't matter anymore. I can sit here for hours my problems aren't going anywhere.

BRANDON

Lift up your shirt.

MARINA

I stopped cutting you know that.

BRANDON

I know, and I believe you. Lift the shirt.

(Marina hesitates before very slowly lifting up her shirt revealing multiple puffy and rotten looking bruises)

BRANDON

Why this time?

MARINA

Found out I wasn't a virgin.

BRANDON

You didn't tell him?

MARINA

I didn't know we were gonna have sex.

BRANDON

(Sadly, in realization)

He raped you.

(Marina wipes some stray tears)

MARINA

The only way he was gonna stay is if I let him.

BRANDON

Just because you don't say no; if you didn't want it and you made it clear-

MARINA

I said no! All I *screamed* was no. I made it crystal fucking clear that I didn't want to have sex. Virgin or not that shit hurt, and I was screaming- *screaming* for him to stop. He covered my mouth and told me to be a good girl, or else he'd have to gag me, so I stopped saying no.

BRANDON

When did he realize you weren't a virgin?

MARINA

(Almost now unaffected):

He used lube, so even though it hurt like hell... it went in...when he saw I wasn't bleeding he knew.

(Long pause)

After it was over, he laid down next to me panting like a fucking dog. And after he caught his breath he turned over and asked me if I was a virgin. Lying seemed stupid, so I just told him I wasn't. He stared at me like a used rag for about half a minute, I've never seen someone look *so* disgusted. He punched me in the stomach, 10 times, maybe more. Not hard enough to break a bone clearly. But... (voice breaking) he told me, um... go wash off, but not to use his cloth 'cause he doesn't want it contaminated with *slut*. (Sniffing.) When I came out, he was crying. He fell to his knees in front of me and *begged* that I didn't leave him. And because I'm stupid. I didn't.

BRANDON

You're not stupid.

(Brandon goes silent, stops reading his lines)

BRANDON

That's bullshit.

ARI

(Getting angry)

What is?

BRANDON

The story, no teenage boy is like that.

ARI

One; clearly you're a fucking idiot. Two; he wasn't 16, he was 23, so don't make assumptions.

BRANDON

The bitch keeps asking for it, she keeps going back to him, that's *her fault*.

ARI

Sounds a lot like someone in this room, doesn't it?

BRANDON

I've never hit my girlfriend. I've also never raped my girlfriend. If a girl goes back to her rapist she deserved to get raped, hell maybe she even likes it.

(Ari goes to lunge at him, but Ace grabs her and holds her back)

ARI

You are so much worse than I thought you were. Nevermind cheating on Marina every other night, you blame fucking rape victims. Are you kidding me?! You're disgusting.

BRANDON

You act like you've ever been raped.

(Ari goes silent, still fuming with rage)

BRANDON

Thought so bitch.

(Ari goes to lunge out of Ace's arms, but he's holding her too tight)

MARINA

Brandon, what the hell is wrong with you? Why would you say something like that? Ari, I'm sorry, that was disgusting-

ARI

Oh yeah? You think he's so disgusting, dump him.

MARINA

Arianna-

ARI

Exactly. You're so desperate for his attention you'd--

(Gritting her teeth)

Get out. Both of you.

MARINA

I didn't do anything!

ARI

You're siding with the guy who would blame the victim, you are just as disgusting as he is.

Arianna, this is getting ridiculous.

MARINA

*Getting?!*

ARI

(Shaking Ace off)

Get off.

(Ari storms out)

(Ace follows her out)

ARI

Ace

Arianna stop!

ARI

What?!

ACE

Ace

What's your problem?

ARI

Did no one else hear what he said?

ACE

Ace

Of course, we did-

ARI

Then why am I the only one who's pissed?!

ACE

Ace

What he said was disgusting, but that's not Marina's fault.

ARI

Ari

She's dating him!

ACE

Ace

But she's not him!

ARI

Ari

Ever heard of guilty by association.

ACE

Ari-

ARI

Ace, I love her. Honestly, I do. But not enough to put up with *this*.

ACE

She's not doing anything.

ARI

She's dating a misogynistic, blame-the-victim, fuckboy. Am I supposed to be okay with that?

ACE

You're not the one getting hurt in the end.

ARI

She expects me to stress more about this bullshit ass relationship than my own life!

ACE

Because you never tell us anything. For all we know you don't have a life!

(Ari stays silent)

ACE

Exactly. So whether she's dramatic or not, she at least *talks* to us. You don't, ever. All you've told us in the past month is that Dustin's been getting sick and whiny, that's it. What do you want from us?

(Ari sighs her voice breaking. In order to avoid the situation she decides to leave.)

(End scene)

SCENE 7

(Ari is sitting in her couch at home, staring off into space thoughtfully.)

(Danielle enters holding her purse, in a nurses uniform. She is very visibly exhausted.)

DANIELLE

Hi, honey. It's late why are you still up?

(Ari stays silent as if she hadn't even heard her mother)

DANIELLE  
(somewhat concerned)

Honey?

(Danielle walks over to Ari and puts the back of her hand on Ari's forehead, checking her temperature)

(Ari snaps back into reality and flinches away from her mother's hand)

DANIELLE

Are you feeling alright?

ARI  
(Annoyed)

Why do you think that just because I seem weird, I must be sick? I can't just be having a bad day?

DANIELLE

No, I just thought-

(Ari stands)

ARI

You can't measure everything that's wrong with a person with a thermometer. Sometimes you might have to pay a little fucking attention.

DANIELLE

You are *not* allowed to talk to me like that. Whatever it is that's wrong, you either need to tell me or cut the shitty attitude. You are not allowed to take your anger out on me as if I'm the root of it. Either you tell me what's wrong, or you learn how to speak to adults. If you haven't noticed, I've been at work all day. The last thing I need to come home to is your disrespect.

ARI

It looks like there's a lot of things that aren't noticed around here.

Danielle

(Dead serious, hopeful for an answer)

Like what?

ARI

Nothing.

DANIELLE

(Registering the answer)

G-good, now if...(composing herself) you'll excuse me I'll be taking a nice soothing bath. If Dustin needs anything handle it. Don't disturb me for the next hour.

(Ari just stands there, staring at the floor as Danielle exits)

ARI

Mother of the year.

(Lights down)

(Lights up, about 20 minutes have passed, Ari is still on the living room couch in thought; she looks worn out and exhausted. The house phone by the couch rings and she picks up)

ARI

Who is it?

ACE

You didn't check the caller ID.

ARI

Hoping some stalker would call me, saying he sees me from outside my house and asks me what my favorite scary movie is... might bring some excitement to my life.

ACE

You're a weird girl.

ARI

I know... so what's up?

ACE

I didn't expect you to answer.

ARI

Then why'd you call?

ACE

Was hoping to spam your voicemail.

ARI

With what exactly?

ACE

Nothing inappropriate. 'Cause your mom might end up checking it, like a *normal* person.

ARI

Offended.

ACE

Intended.

(Momentary silence)

ACE

So-

ARI

No, I wanna hear what you *intended* to soil to voicemail with.

ACE

Maybe I was gonna be your creepy stalker.

ARI

You're already my creepy stalker.

ACE

Correct.

(Momentary silence)

ARI

H-Hey ace?

ACE

Yeah?

ARI

Do.. do you agree with the thing that Brandon said?

ACE

What thing? I tend to block him out most of the time.

(Ari chuckles slightly)

ARI

The thing about girls who get raped by their boyfriends. That if they go back, they're asking for it...

ACE

Ari, you're talking to a momma's boy who's momma got raped almost every day. She hated it, but now she's the strongest woman I know. If you love someone, you'll do anything, even if it means giving up your happiness. And if you feel like they're the only good thing you'll ever have, then... it's tenfold. Maybe that's why I'm asexual; I feel like I'm either gonna end up like my mom or my dad.

ARI

But you just said your mom is the strongest woman you know?

ACE

She is but... I don't want to have to be in an abusive relationship in order to figure out I'm strong... And I don't want to be like my dad for obvious reasons.

ARI

You really think that stuff affected your sexuality?

ACE

I'm scared of being with someone, either they'll ruin me, or I'll ruin them. I don't wanna do that to myself or anyone else.

ARI

Do you think... (sighing) Do you think a girl who's been raped will ever be comfortable falling in love?

ACE

Depends on the girl... Ari are you alright?

ARI

Uh, yeah, no I'm fine, I just... I was gonna go write some scenes, and I wanted them to be as realistic as possible you know.

ACE

Yeah, I guess I'm good to come to for that huh?

ARI

You said you wanted to interview people right? Why don't you make one of yourself?

ACE

Yeah but I've never been sexually abused.

ARI

Yeah but I imagine a 7-year old seeing their mom being raped is pretty traumatic.

ACE

Yeah, maybe you're right.

ARI

There's a lot of yeahs happening in this conversation isn't there.

ACE

(Laughing)

Yeah.

(Dustin comes into the living room rubbing his eyes, he had just woken up)

ARI

What are you doing up baby?

ACE

Talking to you, baby.

ARI

Not you.

DUSTIN

I had a bad dream. I wet the bed.

(Ari smiles sadly, taking a deep breath)

ARI

Do you wanna say hi to Ace while I go clean up.

(Dustin nods tiredly)

ARI

Child on the phone.

(She hands Dustin the phone and exits towards his room)

DUSTIN

Hi, Ace.

ACE  
(Endearingly)

Hey buddy.

(End Scene)

SCENE 8  
(The following day.)

(Ace enters Ari's bedroom and sees her wearing a skater skirt and tank top with no shoes on)

ACE

Who we looking good for?

(Ari stays silent as she thinks he's still mad at her)

Ohhh yeah, it's the 24th.

ARI  
(Now unable to hide her happiness)

Yep.

ACE

You're so adorable when you're happy.

ARI

Ew, shut up.

ACE

It doesn't happen a lot let me enjoy when it does.

(Ari chuckles and shoves his shoulder)

ACE

Where are you guys meeting this time?

ARI

Uh, just an ice-cream place.

ACE

Aw, the one by Floring?

Yeah.

ARI

(Ari shoves her feet into her Converse)

Couldn't be that girly, could ya?

ACE

Never.

ARI

(Ari does a stupid twirl)

How do I look?

ARI

Gorgeous. You know, if I wasn't Ace, I don't mean Ace, I mean asexual.

ACE

I knew what you meant.

ARI  
(Chuckling)

Yeah well, if I wasn't, I think I would be dating you right now.

ACE

Aw Acey.... If I wasn't super emotionally and physically unavailable AND you weren't Ace, I think I'd be dating you too.

ARI

Great, let's get married.

ACE

ARI  
(Chuckling)

Well listen, me and Dustin gotta go. If you wanna stay here and nap or something you're welcome to.

ACE

Oh I know I am.

(Ari rolls her eyes and exits; lights down)

(Lights up. Ari and Dustin enter holding hands and walk in front of an older gentleman.)

ARI

Hey, Dad.

(Derek wraps his arms around Ari and embraces her. He then wraps his arms around Dustin and lifts him off the ground twirling him in the air.)

DEREK

How's my big guy?

DUSTIN

Tired.

DEREK

What's wrong kid?

DUSTIN

Nightmare.

DEREK

Will ice cream make you feel better?

(Dustin gives a big cheesy grin)

DUSTIN

I think so.

DEREK

Go get whatever you want.

(Derek hands Dustin a \$10 bill and pats his head as Dustin runs off.)

Hey, dad.

ARI

You said that already.

DEREK

Oh, shut up.

ARI

(They once again embrace once more, then sit down)

How is everything lately?

DEREK

As good as it gets nowadays.

ARI

How's mom?

DEREK

Stressed, as per usual. She keeps picking up more shifts for whatever reason, so she's never home anymore.

ARI

And Michael?

DEREK

Still a piece of shit...

ARI

Correction, a piece of middle-class shit.

DEREK

I don't get it. Okay, he pays bills? You paid bills.

ARI

Yeah, twenty percent at a time.

DEREK

ARI

So? You were a good dad, you made mom happy.

DEREK

Ari, she called the cops on me.

ARI

Yeah, but you didn't do anything wrong.

DEREK

I hit her.

ARI

Because she hit you first, it's not like you just lost your cool and swung at her.

DEREK

Men don't hit women.

ARI

Uhm no. If someone hits you, you hit back. Well unless it's a child 'cause, they're like super defenseless. She hit you first, more than one time. You smacked her open-handed once, and she acts like you shot her. And now, I barely get to see you.

DEREK

There's a lot more to that situation than you know about Ari.

ARI

Then tell me.

DEREK

Not yet... you don't need to worry about what happened between me and your mom.

ARI

I worry more when I don't know.

DEREK

Don't... plus you have a new dad, a brother. You have a whole new family.

ARI

You might as well be Dustin's dad at this point.

DEREK

Ari, his dad's at your house, probably eating lunch right now. He has a dad.

ARI

He has a sperm donor that he calls dad, not a dad. Also, Michael works from 11 a.m to 11 p.m, there really isn't any father-son bonding time. (Under her breath) Not the kind Dustin likes anyways.

DEREK

I only see him once a month.

ARI

Yeah but you talk to him all the time, and he loves you, dude. We were talking about you, and he called *you* dad. You might as well just legally adopt both of us, like in Matilda.

DEREK

I think I know my daughter well enough. And if you ask me, this sounds like some sorta negotiation.

ARI

I see where I get my smarts from.

DEREK

What's up kid?

ARI

Ask for more days.

DEREK

To see you?

(Ari nods)

DEREK

Ari-

ARI

Please, I miss you. I only get to see you once a month, it's ridiculous. At least try to bump it up to a full weekend or something.

DEREK

I'll try to see if I could get you one weekend a month.

(Dustin runs back in holding two ice cream cones; he hands one to Ari.)

ARI

Aww, you bought me one.

DUSTIN

Papa Derek, you can share this one with me.

(Ari looks at Derek in an "I told you so" fashion)

DEREK

Alright. And hey, you can call me papa, or dad, or whatever you want. Just not to or in front of your mom. Got it?

(Dustin nods, and Derek rustles his hair)

(End scene)

SCENE 9

(Ari enters the house holding Dustin's hand, they're laughing about something. Danielle is sat on the couch reading)

ARI

Hey, mom.

DANIELLE

You're finally home.

(She gets up and goes to clean ice cream off of Dustin's face)

Baby go wash off.

DUSTIN

Okay, Mommy.

DANIELLE

Mikey was thinking about coming home early tonight, and we could all go out for dinner.

ARI

He could stay at work, we already ate.

DANIELLE

Ice-cream is not food.

ARI

What if I'm on a diet?

DANIELLE

The *ice-cream* diet.

ARI

Better than the tapeworm diet am I right?

(She waits for her mom to laugh and there's nothing)

No? Kay, cool.

(Ari begins to walk towards the other side of the house)

DANIELLE

Arianna, I really don't understand you.

ARI

Huh?

DANIELLE

Do you know how many girls would kill to have some sort of father in their life, real or not?

ARI

I had a dad. And you got rid of him because you wanted to act like he was out to kill you. My dad lives a state away and only sees me once a month 'cause of you. So yeah, I do know how many girls would kill for a dad in their life, cause I'm one of them.

DANIELLE

Don't act like you know the situation, cause you don't.

ARI

Then tell me!

(Danielle sighs shaking her head)

DANIELLE

Today's the 24th isn't it?

ARI

Yeah.. but I wanna know-

DANIELLE

You know, if the back talk keeps happening, I'm making sure he never sees you again.

ARI

I'm turning 18 in 3 months, you have no say in that.

DANIELLE

Yeah well, Dustin's never seeing him again that's for sure.

ARI

Mom-

DANIELLE

Why do you even insist on bringing him? Dustin has nothing to do with Derek. Wasn't born when I was with Derek, isn't Derek's kid, Michael doesn't know him-

ARI

Dustin likes him. Dustin thinks he's funny and cool, alright. He doesn't make a lot of friends in school; he needs something.

DANIELLE

Dustin is a kid, who needs to be friends with other kids.

ARI

Nah, you just don't want Michael to find out about who you fucked before him.

DANIELLE

Watch your mouth. This is Derek's fault-

ARI

Stop calling him Derek. That's my dad, call him my dad, stop acting like he's a fucking stranger.

DANIELLE

Michael is your dad.

ARI

Michael is a piece of shit on the side of the road, and I will never refer to that man as my father.

DANIELLE

Don't talk about him like that ever again Arianna.

ARI

You're with him because he pays the bills. You started dating him to get back at dad, and then suddenly all of your credit card bills were paid off and y'all got married. The only good thing about your stupid ass relationship is Dustin. If it wasn't for him I would have run away a long time ago, trust me.

DANIELLE

I love him, and I'm aware that's hard for you to understand, but I do.

(Pleading, hoping for an answer)

Why do you have such a vendetta against him?

ARI

Why do you have such a vendetta against my dad?

(Silence)

(Ari exits the house, end scene)

#### SCENE 10

(Ari is in front of a hotel room. She bangs on the door. Derek is on the other side going through his luggage when the knock occurs, unaware it was Ari he answers the door angrily, ready to curse out whoever is being so rude)

DEREK

What the hell- Ari... what are you doing here?

ARI

I can't spend time with my dad?

DEREK

We had our time this is kind of illegal.

ARI

No, we have one day every month together, it's still the 24th. Plus it's only five-thirty, so technically you have six and a half hours.

DEREK

I'm assuming something is wrong, you've never felt the need to track me down after we see each other. How did you find me anyways? I gave you the number to the hotel, not the name.

ARI

Do you know how easy it is to Google a number?

DEREK

Clearly, it's uncomfortably easy.

(Derek sighs and opens the door wider before Ari enters. She sits herself in the armchair in the corner)

DEREK  
What's up kid?

ARI  
(Unphased)  
I think I want to kill myself.

(Derek looks like he almost had the wind knocked out of him, he cautiously sits on the footstool in front of her)

DEREK  
What?

ARI  
I'm not going to I just... want to.

DEREK  
You're making me nervous Ari.

ARI  
I said I'm not going to.

DEREK  
How can I believe that?

ARI  
Like you said I have a little brother, I can't leave Dustin behind.

DEREK  
But.... why, why would you want to kill yourself?

ARI  
I can't tell you.

DEREK  
Then why did you bring it up Arianna, I'm your dad, an idea like that scares the hell out of me.

ARI  
I wanted someone to talk to. Moms always at work, Ace is... he has his own stuff going on.

DEREK

I may not like the guy, but why can't you talk to Michael?

ARI

I hate him.

DEREK

Why?

(Ari looks at him with a level of disbelief)

DEREK

Listen I understand you might want me around, but I don't know the guy, he might be really cool. Don't hate him just cause I hate him.

ARI

I have my reasons.

(Derek understands she doesn't want to elaborate, so he leaves it alone)

DEREK

I wish I knew what to say right now.

ARI

I love you.

DEREK

I know sweetie, I love you too.

ARI

(Beginning to cry)

I miss you so much.

(Derek goes into to hug her, but she shakes her head, so he sits back)

ARI

(Crying harder)

I want everything to go back to the way it was, before Michael, before whatever broke you and mom happened. I want *my* family. Not Michael's family.

DEREK

Where is all of this coming from?

ARI

I just... everything is such a mess.

DEREK

What do you mean?

ARI

Michael....

(She begins to cry harder and stop)

DEREK

What the fuck did he do? I will kill him if he hurt you.

ARI

No... no, he didn't.

(Taking a deep breath, preparing to tell a lie)

He didn't do anything.

DEREK

Promise me.

ARI

Scout's honor dad.

(The hotel phone rings and Derek gets up to answer it)

DEREK

Yes?

(Derek covers the mouthpiece)

DEREK

(Whispering to Ari)

Shit, it's your mom.

DEREK

Danielle- Yes she's with me. Yeah, one sec.

(He holds the phone out for Ari)

(Ari stands and goes towards the phone and takes it from him, he moves aside sitting on the bed)

ARI

Mom. Ma—MOM! I came here 'cause I wanted to talk to my father, Jesus Christ. Why do you get to separate me from him whenever you want?... Oh my god fine I'll come home, fuck.

(She slams the phone in the receiver)

DEREK

What happened?

ARI

She said if I don't go home right now she's calling the cops.

DEREK

Can I at least get a goodbye hug?

(Derek stands and opens his arms and Ari runs into him holding him tightly)

DEREK

Please promise me you're not gonna do anything to yourself, you're my life, Arianna.

ARI

I promise, Daddy.

(They hesitantly let go of each other, and Ari leaves closing the door behind her)

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(Ari enters her house slamming the door behind her)

ARI

What's your problem?!

DANIELLE

You weren't supposed to go hunt him down in his hotel, I didn't allow you to.

ARI

I have to be given permission to see my birth father? Who's never hit me, or threatened me, or molested me or *anything*? I'm just forced to pretend that this random guy, who I despise with every fiber of my being is my dad? Why? Because *you* decided to marry him. I didn't marry him, I don't have to love him. That's *your* job. So if you're gonna force me to live with the consequences of your marriage, at least let me see the dad I actually want to be around.

DANIELLE

The consequences of my marriage? What do you view Michael as... tell me, I want to understand why you hate him *so* much.

ARI

It doesn't matter.

DANIELLE

Clearly, it does! It's affecting *our* relationship.

ARI

It never mattered before, why does it matter now?

DANIELLE

What are you talking about?

ARI

I told you I didn't want you to marry him, you didn't listen to me.

DANIELLE

You were a child!

ARI

I...

(Ari gives up and heads for the front door)

DANIELLE

Stop running out! Where are you going?!

ARI

For a walk. Am I not allowed to do that now?

DANIELLE

A walk where?

It's a walk, how far could I go?!

ARI

Arianna-

DANIELLE

(Ari flinches at the name, and exits slamming the door.)

(Lights down for a moment, to indicate time passing)

(A knock is heard at the front door.)

DANIELLE  
(From the kitchen)

Who is it?

ACE

It's Alexander.

DANIELLE

Oh, Ace, come in.

(Ace enters, and Danielle walks into the living room.)

(Danielle is trying to be light-hearted, and avoid showing her frustrations from the argument with Ari)

DANIELLE

And stop with the "Alexander" I like Ace more anyways.

(Ace chuckles)

ACE

Sorry to bother but, I need to pick up some more transcripts for my movie. Is Ari here?

DANIELLE

It's no bother, and no, you just missed her, but um. I'd- I'd imagine they're in her desk drawer.

ACE

Do you mind if I look?

DANIELLE

Of course, not honey, go right ahead.

(Lights down momentarily as Ace goes over to the other side of the stage to Ari's room.)

(Lights up on Ace, sifting through the desk drawer. He pauses, and he lifts up a piece of paper, worried and curious)

ACE

(Under his breath)

Hi, my name is Ariana. I'm 17 years old. And my step dad's been molesting me since I was 6; the rape started when I was 11. I guess that ruined my perception of the world, cause when my 23-year-old boyfriend decided to rape me when I was 13, I said nothing. I said nothing to Ace, or my mom, or my Dad. If I told Michael, he'd get possessive, and it would just get worse. Either way... it still got worse. I've been hiding everything from everyone my entire life, unable to tell family members, friends, anyone. I don't know what to do, I'm falling apart. Michael's moved on to Dustin, and I can't do anything to stop it. Usually, when people commit suicide, it's because they're taking back the control they don't have in their lives... Maybe I need to take back my control... What the fuck is this?

(Ace limply sits on Ari's bed in order to stabilize himself. Lights out)

(Lights up, Ari enters her bedroom and sees Ace sat on her bed holding her letter. He is lost, staring at the floor. But she doesn't notice that that's her letter.)

ARI

I would ask how you got in my house, but at this point, I'm pretty sure my mom likes you more than she likes me.

(Ace stays silent.)

ARI

Earth to Ace.

(Ace silently holds up the paper)

ARI

(Trying to be nonchalant)

Guess I need a better hiding place huh?

ACE

This isn't funny!

ARI

Everything can be funny, if you try hard enough.

(Ace stands up and walks over to Ari)

ACE

How much of this is true??

ARI

How much of it did you read?

ACE  
(Growling)

Arianna!

ARI

All of it's true.

ACE

Were you seriously about to kill yourself?!

ARI

No, no *that* part wasn't true. I wasn't gonna kill myself I promise.

ACE

Then what the fuck is this?

ARI

I was just trying to collect my feelings. I'm not suicidal.

ACE  
(Annoyed and sarcastic)

*Really?! Because looking at the contents of this fucking note I would be surprised if you weren't.*

ARI

Ace, it's fine.

ACE

FINE?! Michael's been rape-... Michael's been hurting you.

ARI

Rape, you can say the word, it's okay.

ACE

Nothing about this is "okay" Ari. This is fucked, so fucking fucked.

ARI

Hey see, you can say the word fuck just fine. If you can say that, you can say rape.

ACE

They're not the same thing!

ARI

Close enough.

ACE

No! Not at all! Not "close enough." Jesus Christ, Arianna.

ARI

Please calm down.

ACE

Why did you never tell me?!

ARI

I don't know!

ACE

That's not a reason!

ARI

Because it was normal, when I met you it was just normal okay?! My dad's been doing it for years. And when we met my boyfriend had started, it was just.. I don't know... easier to leave it be.

ACE

Your scenes...

ARI

Yeah..

ACE

They were both about you, weren't they?

(Ari just nods)

ACE

Jesus... Fuck I'm so much dumber than I thought I was.

ARI

No, you're not, you didn't know. You were right I never tell you or Marina *anything*; that's not really something you could just guess.

ACE

How many times?

ARI

How many times what?

ACE

Did Michael...

(Ari shrugs)

ACE

What? What is that? An "I lost count" shrug or an "I'm blocking it out" shrug.

ARI

Both.

ACE

Oh my god. And Dustin?

ARI

I don't know. I know Michael's started, but I don't know how far he's gotten.

ACE

How do you know he even started?

ARI

The anger fits, the bed wetting, panic attacks, night terrors, it's a long list-

ACE

Night terrors?

ARI

Yeah.

ACE

How bad?

ARI

Not as bad as yours, but... they're getting worse.

ACE

Insomnia? Sleep paralysis?

ARI

Nah... not yet.

ACE

Please don't say yet.

ARI

It happened to me, the same way it's happening to him. The night terrors start out just like some shitty nightmare, and then suddenly he wakes up screaming bloody murder. And then he tries not to sleep *at all* to avoid it, and then he gets so used to that, he stops sleeping period. And his body will begin to shut down *because* he's not sleeping, so he'll sleep. And then he'll wake up in the middle of the night unable to move.

ACE

That happened to you?

ARI

More or less.

(Long pause)

ACE

What now?

ARI

What do you mean?

ACE

Who are you gonna tell?

ARI

What? No one. Ace you found out by accident.

ACE

Seriously? You're just gonna let him keep....

(Ace stops himself)

ARI

Raping me? Yea Ace, I don't know what you want me to do.

ACE

Tell your mom, your dad, the cops, fuck—say it on the loudspeaker at school I don't care!

ARI

I'll be moving out soon enough Ace, it'll be fine.

(There's a long silence. Ari attempts to leave the room, but Ace grabs her elbow and pulls her back)

ACE

What about Dustin huh?

ARI

Maybe he'll tell someone himself.

ACE

Are you seriously not gonna protect your brother?

ARI

Ace, I have an essay for Mrs. T., can we have this conversation tomorrow.

(Ace nods and goes to leave)

ARI

Wait... We're still friends right.

(Ace turns around)

ACE

Ari of course we are. (He goes over and hugs her tightly) You're stuck with me kid.

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(Next day. School library. Ace is sitting, zoned out, camera in his lap. Marina enters)

MARINA

Hi, Ace.

(Ace stays silent. Not ignoring Marina, but is so zoned out, he doesn't realize she's there.)

MARINA

You're mad at me too?

ACE

(Finally zoning in)

What oh, hey.

MARINA

I understand what I did was a little fucked up, but no need for the cold shoulder.

ACE

One—what you did was a little fucked up, two—it's not a cold shoulder, I'm just thinking...

MARINA

About what?

ACE

Ariana....

(Ace stops himself)

MARINA

What about her?

ACE

Nothing just, you need to stop bringing up Brandon around her, stop bringing *him* around her in general.

MARINA

But-

ACE

Listen, I respect him helping me, but you should have told me what happened before you brought him over. She was trying not to start problems for my sake.

MARINA

So she's perfectly fine telling me he's cheating to my face, but she won't do it in front of you?

ACE

One, she was being honest, two, she knows I hate that drama.

MARINA

So you think he's cheating on me too?

ACE

(Exasperated)

Oh my god, is that all you worry about? A high school relationship? I'm telling you about Ari, and all you keep hearing is Brandon.

MARINA

I don't see the problem with me talking to her.

ACE

The problem is that you expect her to want to keep listening to bullshit that won't matter 10 years from now. Do you even ask her how she is anymore.?

MARINA

She's my best friend; she knows that's information that she can offer up on her own.

ACE

First, she's not your best friend she's mine. I'm the only one who cares about the real shit going on in her life. Every time you two talk it's about Brandon until she tells you she's had enough for the day. That's all you care about, point blank.

MARINA

No it's not.

(Ari enters, oblivious to the argument that just occurred; Marina tenses momentarily)

ACE

How was the paper?

ARI

It was fine. Hi, Marina.

(Marina visibly relaxes)

ACE

Did you figure out how you wanted to end it?

ARI

Still thinking, it's not due until next week I have time.

ACE

I think it's best that maybe you decide as soon as possible cause then it might help you figure out what you're gonna do in between.

ARI

Figuring out endings are hard.

ACE

It's easier when you ask for help.

MARINA

The paper on the red scare?

(Ari and Ace almost forget that there was an actual paper)

ARI

Huh? Oh... yeah.

MARINA

Isn't it due tomorrow?

ARI

Ms. T. gave our class an extension.

MARINA

A week?

ARI

She pities us.

MARINA

Oh, I would help, but communism was my worst part of US.

(Ari just nods)

ACE  
(Under his breath)

Can't disagree there.

(Ari hears and chuckles softly, understanding what he means)

ACE

How are you though?

ARI

Just your usual casual existential despair.

ACE

Fair enough.

ARI

Yep.

MARINA

I think I should go.

ARI

Okay.

(Ace still frustrated ignores her and Marina leaves)

ARI

What happened there?

ACE

Had to defend my best friend.

ARI

Do I wanna know?

ACE

I already know how you would react.

ARI

And how's that?

ACE

Indifference.

(He smiles)

ARI

Do you still wanna talk about it?

ACE

The red scare?

ARI

(Confused, but after a few seconds catches on)

Yeah, why not?

ACE

You can go first, how do you feel about it?

ARI

Indifference. You?

ACE

Communism is such a fucked up thing.

ARI

Fucked... so fucking fucked.

(She chuckles to lighten the mood)

ACE

Worst thing is most... Communists are so good at hiding it that no one ever knows. They hide in plain sight.

ARI

I mean, people taken over by communists, especially if it's from a young age, they get used to the control that the person has.

ACE

They shouldn't, they should fight for their rights.

ARI

When people are so *used* to having their rights stripped-

ACE

That's not something someone should get used to.

ARI

It's easy to get used to.

(There's a long silence)

ACE

This is such a stupid analogy.

(They lightly chuckle momentarily before going silent)

ARI

Why do you hate the word so much?

ACE

It's a nasty word.

ARI

You've said it before when talking about other people.

ACE

Other people aren't my best friend.

ARI

You've said it when talking about your mom.

ACE

I never did before a year ago. I coped. This just happened yesterday. Plus for my mom, she got away.

ARI

I'll get away... someday.

ACE

When? College?

(Ari nods)

ACE

Dustin has a while to go before he can go to college.

ARI

I know, Ace.

ACE

Why are you so okay with Michael getting to Dustin?

ARI

I'm not okay with it, at all....I hate it, I just don't know what to do.

ACE

I know I'm just repeating myself at this point, but you really need to tell someone.

ARI

I can't...

ACE

You can start with Dustin.

ARI

Yeah, I've been thinking about that, heavily.

ACE

Yeah, have you figured it out?

ARI

I'm gonna talk to him... When the time is best.

ACE

When do you think that'll be?

ARI

I don't know yet but, I feel like when it's time to, I'll know.

ACE

You sure?

ARI

*I know* that when it's time you'll tell me.

ACE

Correct.

Did you ever do the essay?  
ARI  
What's that a metaphor for?  
ACE  
Nothing Ace, did you do the real not metaphorical very literal essay?  
ARI

Oh  
ACE  
(Chuckles)  
No.

Good job man.  
ARI

Actually, do you want to come over and help me do it? 'Cause contrary to our little metaphorical powwow it is actually due tomorrow.  
ACE

(Ari chuckles)

I can't.  
ARI

Why?  
ACE

ARI I-  
(Realizing she was about to lie on impulse she stops herself)  
My mom's not gonna be home until really late 'cause of her shift, and I'm not gonna leave Michael alone with Dustin.

Finally, reasons I accept.  
ACE

Oh, shut up.  
ARI

ACE

Are you gonna be in school tomorrow?

ARI

Of course, why wouldn't I be?

ACE

I figured you might wanna take a day off after everything.

ARI

Trust me, more climactic shit has happened, I still have perfect attendance.

(Ace just sighs)

ARI

See you tomorrow husband.

ACE

Tomorrow, wife.

(Ari exits)

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(The next morning)

(Ari is seen splayed out in the armchair in the living room, head back mouth open, sleeping. Her school clothes are still on, but her shoes are off, a book is open on her lap.)

(Dustin runs in fully dressed for school. He runs in front of Ari, and begins bouncing up and down.)

DUSTIN

Ariiiiiiii..... Ariaaanaaaaa.

(No movement)

DUSTIN

(screaming)

FIRE!!

(Ari pops up frantic, the book falling to the floor)

ARI

Huh? What? Where?!

(Dustin begins giggling)

DUSTIN

Mommy told me to wake you up for school.

ARI

So... no fire?

DUSTIN

No fire.

ARI

You're the devil you know that?

DUSTIN

Yeah.

(Ari sighs, laying her head back against the back of the chair to calm down)

DUSTIN

Mommy's driving me to school and asked me to ask you if you wanted a ride?

ARI

Tell her I'm not ready, and I'll walk.

(Dustin runs out)

(Ari stands and looks down at herself and then at the watch on her wrist and sighs. She unties the sweater that's wrapped around her waist and puts it on zipping it all the way up. She combs out her hair with her fingers, gives up and throws her hoody on and pulls on her sneakers. She grabs her book bag, making sure everything's in it. She throws it on and begins to walk towards the door)

(Michael comes out of the door to the bedroom, opposite the door to leave.)

MICHAEL

Where are you going?

ARI

School... I have school.

MICHAEL

Come here.

ARI

I repeat.. I have school. I'll be barely on time when I get there. Whatever you need from me can wait.

MICHAEL

(Voice louder, harsher)

I SAID... come here.

(Ari turns around hesitantly and takes a few small steps forward, not fully walking to him)

(Michael walks the rest of the space towards her and gently pulls her hoodie down and caresses her face. Ari freezes, unable to move. He then takes her book bag and slides it off her shoulders)

MICHAEL

School can wait, princess.

(Black out)

(When the lights come back on, they're in Ari's bedroom. Michael is on the bed next to Ari, she is slumped over, her head down)

MICHAEL

See Arianna, everything's easier when you just relax.

(He goes out to cup her face, she stays still. Zoned out)

Maybe soon you'll start enjoying it.

(Arianna zones back in on reality and snaps away from his hand)

ARI

I understand you're sick in the head and all, but you can't be that sick.

MICHAEL

Well, maybe Dustin will enjoy it then, hmm?

ARI

Don't fucking touch him.

MICHAEL

You already know I have, I can see it in your eyes. Every time I talk to him, touch his shoulder, anything... you flinch, you freak out momentarily, it ...bothers me.

ARI

What do you mean it *bothers* you?

MICHAEL

I care about you, Arianna. Seeing you so *bothered* by me hurts, it honestly does. I love you.

ARI

You don't know what love is.

MICHAEL

Well ... Clearly, you must feel something for me too. You're still in the room instead of leaving.

ARI

You're 100 percent right on that, I feel a lot for you.

(Michael's eyes momentarily light up)

Pure hatred, disgust, loathing... any other synonyms??

(Michael looks down, almost devastated)

ARI

What did you want from me? What did you think? I was gonna fall in love with you? Tell you everything you've done and will *continue* to do is okay? Tell you that because you're sick enough to think you love me, it makes it all okay? TO TELL YOU THAT RAPING ME IS OKAY?!

(Michael stands to his feet)

MICHAEL

Don't call it that! I hate when you call it that! You cannot rape someone you love!

ARI

THEN YOU MUST NOT *FUCKING* LOVE ME HUH?! You don't know what that fucking word means. You're a sick man, who's beyond repair. You're a rapist, a child molester, an abuser, and I'm pretty sure you're a fucking psycho. You've been molesting me since I was 6.

MICHAEL  
(Trying to stay calm)

Arianna, stop while you're ahead.

ARI  
You've been raping me since I was 11!

MICHAEL  
No! Arianna, I love you!

ARI  
You were supposed to love my Mom! You were supposed to have sex with my mom! You were supposed to be head over heels in love with her! You were supposed to feel what she feels for you! But you feel all of that for me! Why? Cause you're fucking sick! You need help! You should be in fucking jail!

MICHAEL  
Excuse me?

ARI  
I was screaming so I expect you heard me.

MICHAEL  
You will absolutely *not* speak to me like that. I don't care how much I love you. You *will* respect me, and you've seen what happens when you don't.

ARI  
Oh yeah? What's gonna happen huh?

(Michael grabs Ariana's hair and yanks her head back)

MICHAEL  
Maybe next time I won't wear a condom, maybe next time I'll get you pregnant and truly claim you as mine. Then I can blame it on your little friend Ash.

ARI  
His name is Ace, and don't you think that would get you in trouble? Especially when both him and I deny it?

MICHAEL

I have the power to uproot this entire family and drag you to the other side of the planet if I wanted to, change your number, trash your phone, make sure you can never talk to *Ace* again. Do you really want to keep testing me?

(Ari just shakes her head)

MICHAEL

I didn't hear you, Ariana.

ARI

(Voice small)

No.

MICHAEL

No, what?

ARI

No sir.

MICHAEL

Good girl.

(Michael begins to pet Ariana)

Now that you're beginning to see my side of things princess, I think it's time you rest, you've seemed to have riled yourself up over nothing. I'm going to go to work, and I'll be back tonight around 11. Then we can talk about changing things a bit, starting with Dustin.

(Michael stands and leaves)

(Ari screams and folds into herself, clutching her knees to her chest crying)

ARI

(Screaming out, not to anyone in particular, as no one but Michael is home)

HELP ME!

(She begins to rock back and forth crying intensely)

ARI

(Repeat her words while crying)

Help me.... Help me.... Save me. ...Help me.... Someone please just...

(One last whimper as blackout occurs)

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(Lights up on Ari, she is in her bed curled up in a ball, asleep)

(Ace walks in holding Dustin's hand)

ACE

Ari? You asleep over there?

DUSTIN

She's real sleepy lately.

ACE

Arianna!

(Ari pops up, frightened that Michael is back and angry)

ARI

I'm sorry wh- Oh.. Ace hey...I thought you were... never mind.

(Ace smiles sadly)

DUSTIN

Michael?

ARI

Huh?

DUSTIN

When I have bad dreams they always have Michael in them.

ARI

Come here baby.

(Ari opens her arms and Dustin comes close, and she embraces him)

DUSTIN

What's with all the hugs? Jeez, you act like I'm dying.

(Ari chuckles, and pats his back)

You want dinner?

ARI

Ace got me burgers.

DUSTIN

That was nice of him.

ARI

Yeah, I'm kind of amazing.

ACE

(Dustin giggles, and Ari smiles)

Can I go eat them?

DUSTIN

Uh.. yeah go eat, kid.

ARI

(Dustin leaves like a kid on a mission)

He knows?

ACE

(Ari shakes her head, numb, still traumatized from the earlier events of the day)

(Ace sits down next to Ari and places his arm around her shoulders. She flinches but doesn't move)

How are-

ACE

What time is it?

ARI

Four-thirty I think.

ACE

You picked him up? ARI

Yeah, he called me from his school. ACE

And they just let you take him? ARI

It was after hours, most kids walk home alone anyways, wasn't much they could do. ACE

Oh. ARI  
(She pushes her hair out of her face and looks down)

What happened to you? ACE

What do you mean? ARI

Were you crying? ACE

Huh? ARI

Your mascara. ACE  
(Ari wipes under her eyes and sees the black ink on her hands)

Oh... ARI

You were crying, weren't you? ACE

I have a million reasons to, so why not? ARI

ACE

Why weren't you in school?

ARI

What day is it?

ACE

Ari, what happened to you?

ARI

I don't know what you're talking about.

ACE

Arianna... I already know about Michael, you can tell me what happened.

ARI

I broke, Ace.

ACE

What happened?

ARI

I was about to leave for school, but I...(Takes a deep breath) I was about to leave when he called me back into the house. I should have kept walking I don't know why I didn't... But I walked back inside and he... He pulled my book bag off and threw it onto the floor. I froze, it's like my brain wasn't connecting with my body. He pulled me into my room, and he started undressing me. I didn't move, I couldn't move I just.... I stood there. I didn't even cry, I just stared at him, he started taking off his clothes, and he just...

(Ari whimpers and puts her head on Ace's neck)

ACE

I got the idea, you can stop.

ARI

I don't get it... Why this time? Why was this the time that broke me? It's been happening for six years and this time it just...

ACE

When was the last time. Before today?

ARI

Two months ago. He was too busy trying to groom Dustin.

ACE

Maybe that's it.

ARI

What do you mean?

ACE

I mean, last time it happened, Dustin wasn't a concern, I mean he probably was but not like now. Now you know what's happening to Dustin...

(Long silence)

ARI

Why did I go back inside the house? Why didn't I hit him, or fight back or something... why didn't I scream... why did I let him rape me?

ACE

You know what Stockholm is right?

ARI

Yea... But...

(She just sighs)

ACE

But what?

ARI

I don't *love* him. I'm not staying here because I'd miss him if I left, I'm staying because my brother is here and probably being raped.

ACE

Just so you know you better hope I never see Michael again.

ARI

Why?

ACE

Because there's an 80 percent chance I will beat the shit out of him.

ARI

Only 80?

(They both chuckle)

(Ace looks at his watch nervously)

What's up??

ARI

Nothing.

ACE

Ace if you need to be somewhere-

ARI

No! My best friend was just.....

ACE

Raped?

ARI

Yeah... she needs me... even though she likes to pretend she doesn't.

ACE

No, she needs you. She definitely needs you.

ARI

(Ace cheeses)

Oh, I know.

ACE

So where do you need to be?

ARI

It's irrelevant.

ACE

That's not what I asked.

ARI

ACE  
(Sighing)

My mom needed me for something, it doesn't matter.

ARI

Ace, go to your mom.

ACE

She's fine, really it's not important.

ARI

What's it about?

ACE

Ari.

ARI

It's about me?

ACE

Yes, you're a very entertaining topic believe it or not.

ARI

I know.

(There's silence as Ace checks his watch again)

ARI

Oh my god, what is it?

ACE

My mom... she uh... she wanted to talk some stuff over with my dad, but she wanted to make sure I was there.

ARI

Ace, what the hell?! Go!

ACE

Ari-

ARI

No, I don't want your mom to go alone, and she ends up getting hit or something.

ACE

Okay—one—he'll hit her whether or not I'm there, we've proven that theory *many* times. Two, it's over Skype, not in real life... "business trip," remember.

ARI

You don't believe it's a business trip either huh? Jane starting to rub off on you?

ACE

Nah... it's not a business trip.

ARI

How do you know?

ACE

Don't make fun of me...

ARI

I was gonna do that either way, so what is it?

ACE

Aight, so a while ago I made a fake Facebook account, the profile pic is like some cartoon gun, and like the cover pic is the American flag and-

ARI

'Merica.

ACE

(Laughing)

Yeah. I added him. Apparently this entire weekend he's been at some resort in Cuba, with, *I think* a prostitute? He just needed a good reason to get away without incriminating himself I guess.

ARI

Your family's a mess.

ACE

So is yours.

ARI

Hey, maybe that's why we get along so well.

(Momentary silence)

ACE

You realize, if our families weren't so fucked we would've never met.

ARI  
(Sullenly)

Yeah, maybe you're right....

ACE

Maybe? We met in the psych ward 'cause our parents saw our cuts.

ARI  
(Nostalgically)

Yeah, I remember. I only talked to you 'cause of your hair.

ACE

Is that the only reason we've managed to be best friends?

ARI

I have social anxiety, kid, I wasn't just gonna *talk* to you. But you looked like Pete Wentz.

ACE

I'm glad I was a good conversationalist then.

ARI

I am too.

(Long silence)

ACE

You remember how you said you were gonna wait for the right time to tell Dustin.

(Ari nods)

ACE

Maybe it's the right time.

(Ari takes a deep breath, nodding again)

ACE  
(Yelling to the other room)

Dustin!

(Dustin runs in holding his toy truck)

Yeah?

DUSTIN

Ari needs to talk to you.

ACE

(Ari silently looks at Ace and nods)

I'm gonna go to the bathroom.

ACE

(Ace gets up and leaves)

(Ari pats the bed and Dustin sits down in Ace's place)

ARI

We need to talk about s-something pretty s-serious Bubbs.

DUSTIN

Okay, I know how to be serious.

(He jokingly puts on a serious face)

(Ari seems unable to bring herself to laugh)

ARI

Alright so... we need to talk about M- Michael.

DUSTIN

Oh...

ARI

Yeah. So uhm... I need you to promise that no matter what it is you're gonna tell the truth.

DUSTIN

Okay... I promise.

ARI

And I need you to understand that I will not be mad at you no matter what. No matter what it is, it is NOT your fault, and I will not be mad at you. Nothing that happened is your fault, it doesn't mean anything about you. Okay, Bubbs?

DUSTIN

You're scaring me.

ARI

Sorry Baby...

DUSTIN

Okay, so what is it?

ARI

Has Michael ever...(deep breath) has Michael ever touched you?

(Dustin stares at her for a few seconds before shaking his head no)

ARI

Baby, I know that you aren't proud of it, and he told you not to tell, but please baby you need to tell me.

DUSTIN

He said he would hurt you if I told, that he would kill you and I could never see you again. I don't want him to hurt you.

ARI

I promise Dustin, if you tell me he can't hurt me, I promise.

(Dustin nods understanding)

ARI

Did he ever touch your private area Dustin?

(Dustin nods)

(Ari closes her eyes, bracing herself)

ARI

Has he ever, ever made you touch his private areas, Dustin?

DUSTIN

(Almost a whisper)

Yes.

(Ari opens her eyes and stares at Dustin for a few seconds before pulling him in for an embrace)

ARI

(Beginning to cry)

Thank you so much for telling me Bubbs.

DUSTIN

You're not mad at me?

ARI

No baby, of course not.

DUSTIN

You promise.

ARI

Scout's honor.

(There's a short silence)

ARI

There's more I need to tell you, baby... Michael... Michael's been doing the same stuff to me too bubba. And I'm telling you because I need you to know that you're not alone, I need you to know that it's not your fault, just like it's not my fault. What Michael did, it's not anyone's fault but his, he's the bad one okay? You're not bad, you're not bad... You're not bad baby.

DUSTIN

I'm not?

ARI

No baby, not at all. He's bad, not you, not me.. Him.

DUSTIN

Is he gonna hurt me?

ARI

I would never let him-

(She stops herself realizing she's already let Michael hurt him)

I will never again let him hurt you. I'm sorry for not saving you when I should have.

(Ari puts her head down, realizing what she's done.)

DUSTIN

Hey, it's not your fault. He's big and scary.

ARI

You're not mad at me?

DUSTIN

I could never be mad at you.

(Ari lets out a shaky sigh and smiles)

DUSTIN

*Well..* I *can* be mad at you, just not right now.

(Ari pats his head brushing her fingers through his hair)

DUSTIN

Is that why you've been mad lately?

ARI

What do you mean?

DUSTIN

You're always angry. Are you upset with Ace?

ARI

No.

DUSTIN

Marina?

(Ari thinks about it for a second before smiling)

ARI

No, not mad at Marina.

DUSTIN

Who then?

Michael, Mommy.

ARI

What did Mommy do?

DUSTIN

Nothing... that's the problem.

ARI

How are you mad at someone who hasn't done anything?

DUSTIN

It's a long story, bubbs.

(Dustin just shrugs, brushing it off)

You wanna go see a movie with me and Ace?

ARI

Captain underpants?

DUSTIN

(Ari smiles)

Papa Ace!!

ARI

(Ace enters)

Movies?

ARI

Let's go wife. Son.

ACE

(They all smile, Ari with relief, Dustin with joy, Ace with a bittersweet joy, end scene)

SCENE TK  
(Next scene next day, school library after school hours)

(Ari is sitting at a computer, staring at the screen, lost on what to write. Ace enters cautiously)

Hey.

ACE

Hey...

ARI

Whatcha doin...

ACE

Writing a scene for you.

ARI

(Ace pulls a chair next to her and looks over her shoulder)

What's this one about?

ACE

An abused kid telling their dad they're being abused...

ARI

You told Derek?

ACE

No... I want to, I just don't know when the right time will be. It's not something you just *bring up* in conversation.

ARI

It is if you're a cynical piece of shit.

ACE

I'm trying to get better.

ARI

Don't, that's what I love most about you.

ACE

What? The fact that I use sarcasm to hide the fact that I'm falling apart inside?

ARI

ACE

Exactly.

(Momentary silence)

ACE

Hey can I uh... can I ask you something?

ARI

You just did.

ACE

You're getting better huh?

ARI

Shut up. Ask away.

ACE

Would you be willing to be part of the opening of my movie, after ya know, you finally tell your dad and stuff?

ARI

I don't know... I haven't figured out if that's something I'm comfortable publicizing.

ACE

Nah I understand, if the answers no I totally get it.

ARI

How about this, we film it, I'll watch it... then I'll decide whether or not I wanna put it in the movie?

ACE

Sounds perfect to me.

(A ping goes off indicating Ari received a text message)

ACE

What's up?

ARI

My dad wants to talk to me about something.

ACE

Do you think he knows?

ARI

How would he know?

ACE

He probably doesn't... But you needed a good moment to tell him, here's your moment.

(Ari sighs, responds to the text, stands, and begins to walk out)

ACE

So does that mean you're telling him or?

ARI

I just said I have something I need to tell him, we'll see if it's "I'm being molested" or "My favorite food is no longer burgers."

(Ari exits)

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(Ari is sitting on a park bench, looking around waiting for someone. Derek enters with a hood on and sits next to Ari, looking very suspicious)

ARI

Hi, dad...

DEREK

Hi, Ari.

ARI

Dad, take off the hood.

DEREK

Why? I'm not supposed to be here.

ARI

Because you look like a child molester who I met off the internet who's gonna kidnap me.

DEREK

Huh?

ARI

The hood makes you look like you're trying not to show your face.

DEREK

Well I'm not.

ARI

Yeah, but not because you don't want people to be able to identify you when a 17-year-old girl goes missing from this park, and her body shows up in the river chopped up.

(Derek sighs and yanks off his hood)

DEREK

What kind of movies are you watching?

ARI

You'd be surprised.

DEREK

Would I really?

ARI

Probably not.

(Momentary silence)

ARI

So.. why am I here?

DEREK

I thought you had something to tell me.

ARI

No... *you* had something to tell me, then I told you that I have something to tell you after you tell me what you need to tell me.

(Derek smirks)

DEREK

Your mom raised such an amazing kid.

ARI

So did you.

DEREK

Actually, that's kind of what we needed to talk about. You've been asking for a while about what happened between me and your mom, and you're gonna be 18 soon so you might as well know now.

ARI

Is this where I find out you're secretly gay and you have a husband and two adopted kids from Russia who you want me to babysit on the weekends?

DEREK

I'm taking away your Netflix account...

ARI

Too late for that dude.

DEREK

*Anyway...* Before we had you, me and your mom were real hot and heavy, and I know you don't wanna hear that being my kid and all...

ARI

Who uses the term hot and heavy anymore?

DEREK

I'm 41 years old, Ari...

ARI

Touché.

DEREK

But yeah, we were madly in love, and so fucking happy. And then we found out she was pregnant and-

ARI

You're saying I ruined your happiness?

DEREK

*And then we found out she was pregnant and we were overjoyed. We finally had the opportunity to start a family, and we had been engaged at that point so... We were a little young, but it felt like great timing. Then we went for our first doctor's visit, and, turns out, you weren't the only one in there.*

ARI

I had a twin?

DEREK

Yeah, and he was growing, healthy, I assume happily; can't imagine a sad clump of cells. And then the day came where it was time for her to give birth, we rushed to the hospital, and everything was normal, blood pressure, sugar levels, they could hear your heart beats, everything was fine. But when you guys came out, you cried, he didn't... They did what they could, but he didn't cry, he didn't breathe. But we had you, and I was still happy as shit from that alone but... Your mom was a mess. She loved you, but she had gotten so attached to the idea of two kids running around, momma's boy for her, daddy's girl for me, two cribs, two tv-show-themed beds... It really messed her up, she was depressed for months. I spent most of my time taking care of both of you and having to make money for the house. If I'm being honest, I was stressed the fuck out. So one night, I hired a babysitter and went out with some friends so I could take a break.

ARI

Why do I feel like I remember that?

DEREK

It was the only night I ever left you with a complete stranger. Usually my Mom watched you. But my friends were a mess, they were the party guys who had sex whenever they wanted, refused to get married and settle down. So of course they took me to a strip club. I didn't do anything, but I guess your mom found out, so from that point she constantly accused me of cheating. I know in reality that she didn't actually think I was, but it became ridiculous.

So one day when I was at work, my buddies came over to the shop with these chicks, and I don't know, I guess I thought "Since she keeps telling me I'm cheating I might as well," and I cheated. It felt disgusting while I was doing it, and even worse after. I regretted it immediately, so I told your mom. That's when she started to *actually* hate me. But she didn't leave me, she knew she couldn't take care of you alone, not until she got therapy and she wasn't ready. I tried everything I could to get her to forgive me, I don't blame her for not forgiving me though. She started to get therapy, get better, still hate me, but she was warming up to me again. But the day I hit her... pushed her over the edge. She called the cops, told them I've been abusing her for months, which was believable.

ARI

What do you mean?

DEREK

She was thin as a bone from not eating, so if she fell, hit her leg on a table, anything, she'd bruise almost immediately. So they arrested me, charged me with assault, but I got a deal and plead guilty. And that's

why I only see you once a month. I'm not mad at your mother, she needed help and instead I had sex with someone else. And then I hit her.

ARI

So... she really did take me away from you for no reason?

DEREK

Ari-

ARI

No! You never abused her, you never beat her up, you were never a danger to *me!*

DEREK

We were young, we made stupid mistakes-

ARI

Separating your daughter from her dad for 12 years isn't a stupid mistake! She knew you weren't a danger to me and she still... oh, my god.

DEREK

Please don't hate her Ariana, I rather you hate me than her.

ARI

Dad, I could never hate you...(calming down) Kinda wish I met my brother, though.

DEREK

I wish I met him too.

ARI

What were you gonna name him?

DEREK

Zachariah.

ARI

After the angel?

DEREK

I'm atheist, Ariana, my grandad's name was Zachariah.

ARI

That makes sense.

DEREK  
You had something to tell me?

ARI  
Yeah, not that long of a story though.

DEREK  
Alright, go ahead kid.

(The full extent of what she was about to tell him finally hit her,  
and she begins breathing heavily)

ARI  
I.. I...

DEREK  
Ari, kid are you okay?

(Ari closes her eyes in preparation)

ARI  
(Speaking really fast)  
Michael's been molesting me since I was six.

DEREK  
Excuse me?

(Ari opens her eyes)

ARI  
Michael's been... been...

(She stops and begins crying)

(Derek immediately throws his arms around her and pulls her to  
him)

(There's an extremely long silence)

ARI  
Dad, say something, please...

I'm gonna fucking kill him.

DEREK

Dad-

ARI

DEREK

No, I knew something was off about him, shoulda shoved his ass in a ditch when I had the chance.

(Derek stands up and begins pacing)

Dad-

ARI

DEREK

Does your mom know?

ARI

I don't think so...

DEREK

You don't *think* so. Ari if I find out she knew, I'm getting her psycho ass arrested.

Dad-

ARI

DEREK

What about Dustin?! Is Michael....

(Ari nods)

DEREK

Is this why you were thinking about killing yourself?

(Ari nods)

DEREK

He's fucking dead!

ARI

DAD!

DEREK  
What?

ARI  
Don't do anything, please.

DEREK  
Don't do anything? Ariana, he molested you! Did he rape you too?!

ARI  
Dad-

DEREK  
Is that a yes?!

(Ari looks away from Derek)

DEREK  
I'm gonna fucking kill him.

ARI  
Dad, listen to me, please.

(Derek takes a deep breath to try to calm himself down)

ARI  
I want to do this on my own, I wanna be able to tell mom on my own, tell the cops on my own. I told you because I could see how much it hurt you when I said I wanted to kill myself but wouldn't tell you why.

DEREK  
Do you expect me to just forget?

ARI  
No, but I expect you to stay silent until I've told mom on my own... please.

DEREK  
Ari-

ARI  
Please!

DEREK

Fine... Please call me tonight, I want to make sure you're okay.

ARI

Alright, I have to go... Mom's probably gonna call Ace soon to see when I'm coming home.

DEREK

Of course...

(They embrace each other)

DEREK

Stay strong, please.

ARI

Scout's honor.

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(After school in the school library, Ace is seen editing footage on a laptop, Ari enters)

ARI

Good morning.

ACE

It is not morning.

ARI

It is for me, I just woke up an hour ago.

ACE

That can't be healthy.

ARI

Is anything about me healthy Ace?

ACE

Touché.

ARI

You have your camera?

ACE

Always, why?

ARI

I wanna film my opening.

(Ace immediately closes his laptop and gives all his attention to Ari)

ACE

You do? Wait, did you tell your dad?

ARI

Yeah...

ACE

How'd he react?

ARI

As well as expected. He was pissed, he didn't know whether to console me or punch a wall. He also now wants to kill Michael.

ACE

Well, don't we all.

ARI

That is correct.

ACE

Are you gonna tell your mom?

ARI

Yeah...

ACE

Do you know when?

ARI

No...

ACE

Ellipses intended?

ARI

Very much so yes. If I'm being honest, I'm scared of her reaction.

ACE

Why? You think she won't care?

ARI

No, she will it's just...

ACE

Just?

ARI

I don't know, will she? I tried to tell her when I was six, she didn't believe me then. She knows how much I hate Michael. She might just end up thinking that this is my way to get rid of him.

ACE

Have some faith, anyways if she doesn't just go to the cops.

ARI

There's no evidence...

ACE

Dustin's evidence.

ARI

How?

ACE

The kids having night terrors, outbursts, panic attacks, he's been through *something*. And if you can convince him to tell you again while in an interview room, then there's your evidence.

ARI

Yeah, I guess you're right.

ACE

I know I am Ariana.

ARI

Please don't call me that.

ACE

That's your name.

ARI

It's the only thing Michael calls me when he... Do I have to finish the sentence?

ACE

No... I- I got the idea. Sorry.

ARI

No worries.

ACE

Do you wanna film it now?

ARI

That's why I'm here.

(Ace goes in his bag and fishes out a tripod and a video camera. He places the camera on the tripod in front of Ari and presses record. He then signals her with a thumbs up)

ARI

My names Ariana Lunez, I go by Ari though.... Ace I don't know what to say.

(Ace jumps in front of the camera next to Ari, the green light indicating that it's still recording)

ACE

My name is Alexander Vance, everyone calls me Ace. I entered this film contest to explore the effects of sexual abuse on kids and teenagers. I chose this topic because from a young age I witnessed my dad abusing my mom on a daily basis. I could sit in my room at night and hear him sexually assaulting her. He would then wake me up in the morning with pancakes. He was great to me, but he assaulted her physically and sexually on a daily basis. I have never been in a serious relationship, I've never been good at forming friendships, partly due to my now very intense anxiety issues, but also because of the fact that I feared what would happen if I did. I currently identify as asexual, which I don't know if I'd identify as if I grew up with a normal family. I used to have night terrors every night, followed by sleep paralysis. I found out my mom was sexually abused as a kid, and that after she went to therapy, she realized that her past abuse led her to fall in love with my Dad. She felt it was normal to be in such harsh conditions, to be treated like trash. My mom is the strongest woman you will ever meet, and I'm making this film, not only for her, but for all the girls, *and* boys, who have been sexually abused.

(They look at each other in silence for a few moments, Ari takes a deep breath preparing herself)

ARI

My name is Ariana Lunez, but everyone calls me Ari. My step dad Michael Lunez has been sexually abusing me since I was 6. Him and my mom got married and after her and my real dad, Derek Martinez broke up. He kept me quiet, first by telling me that he'd hurt me if I told. But when I finally spoke out, my mother ignored me, told me I was fantasizing what happened, and that I watched too many movies. She showed me no one was gonna listen, so I stayed quiet. It continued until when I was 11, the touching, the fondling, every disgusting thing no child should go through. But when I turned 11, it got worse. He raped me for the first time, it was painful and disgusting, but... I didn't tell anyone because I was scared that no one would listen to me. I then started a relationship with a 23-year-old man. He raped me, but then told me he loved me, and I believed him. I stayed until me, and my family moved. My little brother Dustin was born when I was 12... He is the *best* little brother anyone could ask for. But about a month ago I started seeing signs. His intense anxiety, his night terrors, anger fits, bedwetting. Michael had stopped doing... anything... with me. Two nights ago, Dustin finally told me that Michael had touched him... and yesterday I told my Dad. Anyone watching this, please, if a little kid tells you they were touched or hurt... listen to them. It's horrible that it happened, but it's better that it only happens once or twice, than *every day* of their lives.

(Ari walks up to the camera and turns it off)

(Ace goes up to her and embraces her rather harshly)

ARI

Jesus, you're like a boa constrictor.

(Ace lets go and backs up)

ACE

Sorry...

ARI

Was it good?

ACE

It was real... it was heart-wrenching to listen to, but, amazing that you said it.

ARI

It feels nice, to say it. All of it.

ACE

I really do think I'm falling in love with you... Platonically of course.

ARI

Do you... do you think anyone will *actually* fall in love with me someday?

ACE

Definitely, *and* if no one does by the time we're 30, which I highly doubt, I'll have gone through enough therapy to learn how to love again, so you got me.

ARI

And what if you're not my type?

ACE

Then you suck it up.

(Ari wraps her arms around Ace, catching him off guard)

ACE

Who's the boa constrictor now?

(Ari doesn't move)

(Ace reciprocates the hug, putting his chin on the top of her head)

ACE

I love you Ari Lunez.

ARI

I love you too Alexander.

(End scene)

**SCENE TK**

(Ari enters her house; Danielle is standing there looking impatient, hiding something in her hand)

ARI

Why hello mother, good to see you too.

DANIELLE

Where were you?

ARI

With Ace... what am I not allowed to have friends now?

DANIELLE

No, I meant where were you last night?

ARI

With Ace...

DANIELLE

Really? Because *Derek* came by to say that this dropped out of your pocket. (Holds up the bracelet.) Do you want to continue lying?

ARI

I wasn't lying, I *was* with Ace, I just *happened* to be with my *Dad* afterward.

DANIELLE

You're gonna kill me, Ariana.

ARI

Oops.

DANIELLE

I tell you not to see him, so what you go behind my back and meet up with him in the middle of nowhere?

ARI

It was a public park two blocks away, calm down.

DANIELLE

No, you're lucky I didn't file a restraining order.

ARI

Against my Dad?!

DANIELLE

That's not your father!

ARI

Are kidding me? He cheated on *you* hit *you* once, and you take *me* away from him. He didn't kill Zachariah, he didn't pray for my brother to die! It happened, GET OVER IT! You can't keep fucking blaming him when he didn't do SHIT wrong! You were going insane, you barely were able to take care of yourself let alone me, you accused him every day that he was cheating on you! Do you *blame* him for doing it, you were basically telling him to! He *never* hurt me, in the four years he took care of me, he left me with a stranger once! He was always there taking care of you, me, himself, *everything*. And you reward him by constantly accusing him! You took me away from an actual fucking father because *you* were petty! Because you can't handle the fact that you fucked up!

DANIELLE

Ariana-

ARI

No! Don't Ariana me, you ruined my life! You marry a piece of shit and force me to call him my dad! He molests me, I tell you, and you call me a fucking liar!

DANIELLE

What?

ARI

He's been doing it since I was 6 are you that fucking blind! What do you need to physically see it to believe it's happening?!

DANIELLE  
(Dumbstruck)

Ariana-

ARI

Go into Dustin's room tonight; I'm pretty sure you'll catch something!

DANIELLE

Ariana what are you saying?

(Ari realizes what she just said and tries to cover it up)

ARI

Nothing... I'm tired I'm gonna go to bed.

(Ari begins to walk away, but Danielle grabs her arm and snatches her back)

DANIELLE

Ariana, please, just this once tell me the truth. I'll believe you I promise.

ARI

Michael...

(Deep breath)

Michael touched me... he'd crawl into my bed when you worked late, and he'd touch me. Tell me I should feel good, happy that someone so experienced wanted me... I was 6. It never stopped.

DANIELLE

Ariana... Please don't tell me he-

ARI

Raped me? He did... probably about 200 times by now. He liked the fact that I cried, told me it turned him on when I tried to scream for you... After a while I stopped screaming, hoping that he'd stop doing it if he didn't enjoy it. But, he told me because I was so young it was so hot to see me submit to him. He's doing it to Dustin, you know your six-year-old son.

DANIELLE

Please stop, I get it-

ARI

No, clearly you don't. I told you what he did to me, and you said it was my imagination. Was it your imagination when you had to wash a bloodstain out of my sheets, and he told you it was my first period? Or was it your imagination when you came home tired from work, Dustin was crying, and you sent Michael in there, and the crying just got louder! Or was I the only one imagining that?!

DANIELLE

Ariana, please. I'm so sorry.

ARI

Are you?

DANIELLE

Yes! It's my job to protect you! You're my baby I never wanted something like that to happen to you!

ARI

Then why didn't you listen to me?!

DANIELLE

I didn't want to believe you! My life had fallen apart, when I met Michael, it felt like things could be normal again. When you told me, I was still going to therapy, I was still sick, I didn't want to believe you.

You never brought it up again, so I figured maybe- maybe you were coming up with something from a movie.

ARI

I want to be mad at you right now but I can't.

DANIELLE

Baby, I'm so sorry.

(Danielle hugs Ari, but Ari doesn't reciprocate)

ARI

What happens now?

DANIELLE

I'm going to call Michael and have him come home. I'm also going to call Derek- your father.

ARI

He already knows.

DANIELLE

I figured, but no, he has friends.

ARI

Like what? Hitmen?

DANIELLE

No, cop friends.

ARI

I didn't know this.

DANIELLE

There's a lot you don't know.

ARI

Lovely.

(Lights down)

(Lights up. Ari is sitting on the living room couch, nervous, Danielle is standing next to her in a defensive stance)

ARI

What did you say to get him to come home early exactly?

DANIELLE

I was going to be working late, and you were gonna sleep at Ace's because he needed you for the film, and that he needed to watch Dustin for a few hours.

ARI

What did he say?

DANIELLE

"Gladly" ... It's so disgusting to think about it.

ARI

Think about going through it huh?

DANIELLE

I'm trying to make it better Ariana.

ARI

Why do you seem unphased?

DANIELLE

I had my suspicions...

ARI

And you never asked anything?

DANIELLE

I was scared.

ARI

So was Dustin.

(Danielle puts her head down sullenly. Silence consumes the room for a few moments before Michael enters)

MICHAEL

(Surprised)

Danielle, Ari, what are you guys doing here?

ARI

Excited for something bud?

MICHAEL

Baby, can I talk to you alone for a second?

DANIELLE

You can say what it is right here, Michael.

MICHAEL

Fine, Ariana your attitude right now is rather disgusting, and I suggest you get yourself together.

ARI

Someone's touchy.

MICHAEL

Ariana-

DANIELLE

Don't you dare.

MICHAEL

Why are you two ganging up on me?

ARI

Why'd you molest me for 11 years?

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

ARI

Pretty sure you heard me.

MICHAEL

Why would you say something like that?!

DANIELLE

Shut up, Michael! You can't pretend you're lying, I was the one who washed the blood out of her sheets-

MICHAEL

I told you that was her period!

DANIELLE

Then why did it not happen again until 2 years later?

MICHAEL

Same thing happened to my sister.

DANIELLE

Yeah? And did your sister wet the bed? Have panic attacks? Act up in school?!

MICHAEL

What are you saying?!

DANIELLE

Michael, I've worked in a hospital for years, children who have been molested, *raped* those are classic signs.

ARI

Then why didn't you do anything earlier?

DANIELLE

Is this a good time?

ARI

Is there ever *really* a good time to talk about your kid being molested?

MICHAEL

Do you think I hurt Dustin? I love him!

ARI

I've seen your definition of love Mikey... You use sex for power, you take advantage of vulnerable people and then claim this *ownership* over them.

MICHAEL

I wish I knew what you were talking about.

ARI

You don't? You don't see how you started dating a woman with *extreme* postpartum depression, who was barely able to take care of herself. You start buying her things that her ex couldn't buy her. You start spoiling her child, the child in question, of course, being me. You made her fall in love with you.

MICHAEL

Love is a natural thing, it's not something you force, it's something you feel.

ARI

Like you feel it for me? You sexually abused a six-year-old girl so you could have power over her. And then, 11 years later you start abusing her six-year-old brother, for that same power. Only difference is... You *actually* had control over Dustin, not me. I kept quiet because no one listened to me, not because I was scared of you, or because I *loved* you. Do you know how many times I've gotten close to poisoning you?

MICHAEL  
(Smugly)

Then why didn't you?

ARI

The untraceable shit is hard to find.

(Derek's friends, both large in size, in casual suits, bearing their badges on the outside enter)

DANIELLE

They're from the special victims unit.

MICHAEL

So what? You've called the cast of Law and Order to drag me out of *my* home?

ARI

Nah, the Special Victims Unit is an actual thing, and this is also no longer your home.

MICHAEL

What are you two doing? Acting out against me? You need me, Danielle without me you'd still be a depressed wreckage consumed by her bed. And Ariana, who do you think buys your school clothes, your food, keeps a roof over your head.

ARI

Okay, buddy.

(Standing up to face Michael)

One, my mom isn't a helpless child, she can take care of herself now, she has a job, she got help. Two, we will absolutely be suing for emotional damages, so I expect that you'll still be paying your way in this house.

MICHAEL

People don't get that much time for rape and molestation, I'll be out in 20 years that is *if* they convict me. What evidence is there? I loved you, I didn't do anything you didn't want, and if anything the maximum for statutory rape in New York is 25 years. I'll be out in five for good behavior.

ARI

Even killers, thieves, mass murderers, they don't like child touchers, you'll probably die in there, and I *can't wait* for the news story.

(Michael goes silent as the two men grab him and place him in handcuffs and begin to read him his rights)

MICHAEL

See you in court, princess.

(The cops exit along with Michael.

(End scene)

SCENE TK

(Next day)

(Ari enters the library, cup of lemonade in hand, serenity clear on her face, Ace is sat there, leg shaking, nervous, checking his phone intently)

ARI

Hey, man.

(Ace jumps to his feet and grabs her)

ACE

Where were you, I called you 20 times.

ARI

Phone died my lovely, overly possessive boyfriend.

(Ace stops, looking like a scared puppy, and backs away)

ARI

Fuck, no I'm sorry I didn't mean that. You're nothing like your dad I'm so sorry.

(She places down her lemonade and wraps her arms around Ace)

ARI

You're nothing like him Ace, I'm so sorry.

ACE

(Calming down)

It's fine, sorry.

ARI

Don't apologize.

ACE

But, seriously where were you, you know how much I worry about you with Michael.

ARI

I told my mom.

ACE

Really? What did she say?

ARI

She suspected... She then proceeded to call Michael home, and then call the cops.

ACE

Wait, you got him arrested?

ARI

Yeah. Kind of amazing.

ACE

(Extremely happy)

Why didn't you call me?

ARI

Kinda needed to be with my mom and brother, no offense.

ACE

No, of course not. Geez, Ari, I'm so happy for you.

ARI

Thanks, babes... My mom was wondering if you wanted to come over for dinner tonight, kind of a celebration thing.

ACE

Of course... I'm so proud of you Ariana.

(Lights down)

(Lights up)

(Ari and Ace and sit on the couch, Ari's legs are on Ace's lap and they're playing with each other's hands)

(Danielle enters from stage right, presumably the kitchen)

DANIELLE

You two really do look like a real couple.

(Ari and Ace high-five as a response)

ARI

So, who picked up Dustin since we're all here?

DANIELLE

It's a surprise.

ACE

Whoever it is, I hope they hurry up. I'm hungry.

ARI

I'm glad you're handling everything so well, Mom.

DANIELLE

I'm coping, but at the end of the day you had to deal with the pain, not me.

ARI

Yeah, but you're my mom.

DANIELLE

I love Ace, but let's have this conversation in private huh?

ARI

Yeah, of course.

(Danielle goes back into the kitchen side of the house)

(There is a knock on the door, and Ari jumps up)

ARI

If that's not Dustin, I swear to god.

ACE

And behind door number one isssss.....

(Ari opens the door and reveals Derek, holding Dustin's hand)

ARI

Dad...

(They throw their arms around each other, Derek almost lifting her off the ground. When they separate Dustin hugs Ari's leg and then runs into the house and towards Ace)

ARI

What are you doing here?

(Danielle enters the room)

DANIELLE

I didn't keep you two separate because I hated him, well I did but I understood that a girl needed her father. Michael said that he would leave me if I involved him in your life.

ARI

Are you guys getting back together or something?

DANIELLE

It's not that kind of movie Ariana. *But*, I figured I could involve him a lot more in your lives.

ARI

I accept that.

DEREK

So this is Ace?

ACE

Yes, sir.

DEREK  
(Chuckling)

Please don't sir me I'm not that old. You're Ari's boyfriend, right?

(Ace looks at Ari for a moment before responding)

ACE

Yes, yes I am.

ARI

No, no you're not.

ACE

I said what I said.

DANIELLE

Let's go people! Dinner's ready.

(Derek, Danielle, and Dustin go into the kitchen leaving Ari and Ace behind)

ARI

Ya know, no matter how much this is ending like some corny movie, I'm really happy right now.

ACE

What kind of movie would it be?

ARI

I don't know, drama I guess? I mean we're not getting married, neither are my mom and dad, so it's not romance.

ACE

Fuck romance movies. You saved yourself, you didn't need a boy to do it for you.

ARI

You helped.

ACE

Yeah, but you saved me too.

ARI

When did I do that?

ACE

The day we met... I was planning to kill myself after I got out of the hospital. You changed that.

ARI

This is getting way too sappy for my liking...

ACE

Yeah, let's go eat.

(Ace wraps his arms around Ari and they walk to the kitchen.)

THE END