BLINK

by

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On average, the human eye blinks 17,000 times a day.

ACT ONE

EXT. TRASK HOUSE - EVENING

A Berkeley neighborhood. Nice houses. We settle on one where a CHILD'S TENT, pink and purple camo, sits on the front lawn.

GREG (V.O.)
My son Dodge wrote a paper in 12th grade Anatomy claiming the easiest way to make sense of the brain is to think of it like a family.

DODGE TRASK (23) watches the tent from the porch. He's a guy who feels deeply. It often gets him in trouble.

GREG (V.O.)
A brain is based on connections. It only works when the neurons connect the way they're supposed to.

HELEN (early 40s) gets out of her car, eyeing the tent. She's an Atlas in slingbacks, and these days it's a tiring act.

GREG (V.O.)
A breakdown in these connections means that life becomes difficult. Because like a family, the unified group is infinitely stronger...

We go INSIDE THE TENT to see ARI (16), her old soul brimming with teenage angst, just lying there, staring up.

GREG (V.O.)
...than its solitary members.

HELEN (O.S.)
Maybe pad thai will woo her.

DODGE (O.S.)
You know how stubborn she is.

HELEN (O.S.)
She takes after your father.

ARI
I'm taking that as a compliment!

We POP BACK OUTSIDE, the others look surprised she heard.

HELEN
Come inside, Ari. It's too cold to stage a protest on the lawn.

ARI
Does that mean you changed your mind about the party?

Ari emerges just in time to catch Helen's tired sigh.

ARI (CONT'D)
It's not fair, it's not like Dad un-became a member of the family. And historically as a family we are big believers in birthdays. I mean, we all stayed up for Zeke's birthday last year to skype him at midnight.

DODGE
Midnight in New York is 9 PM here. We did not "stay up."

HELEN
And there is a big difference between Zeke living in New York and your father...

ARI
Why am I the only one who cares about us being a family anymore? You still love Dad, don't you?

HELEN
Ari. Don't.

ARI
Fine. You guys do what you want, I'm partying with Dad Thursday night at his new digs. I'm thinking carnival theme, he'll like that.

Helen and Dodge exchange a look. Ari eyes Dodge.

ARI (CONT'D)
You know he wants you guys there. Even those of you who have pretty much cut him out of your life.

DODGE
Hey, will you give it up with the --

ARI
Excuse me, I'm needed in my yurt.

HELEN
Your school counselor called today. If you wait much longer to go back, you won't be able to catch up.

ARI
I have more important stuff to do than square root things and learn the French word for quiche.

DODGE
Quiche, Ari. Quiche is the French word for quiche.

ARI
I am actually doing something for the world at the hospital.

HELEN
I know you are. But there's no future for a high school drop-out.

ARI
Dodge made it through high school AND college and he's now selling vacuums for a living, so...

DODGE
I'm standing right here.

HELEN
Ari, I'll make you a deal: if you go to school, I'll go to the party.

Ari narrows her eyes, considering this...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

VIOLET O'CONNOR (16) stands at her open locker.

VIOLET
Mr. Nichols obsessed over this crap book for weeks. Cliff notes: a guy sails around for like ten years trying to get home to his family. Spoiler alert: he eventually does.

She closes the locker, revealing Ari, looking uncomfortable. Violet hands her *The Odyssey*. Ari says nothing, she's watching TWO GIRLS pass, obviously whispering about her.

ARI
Everyone is staring at me.

VIOLET
You want me to throw-down with them? You should know this is an empty offer, other girls scare me.

ARI
So I'm back at school. Big deal.

VIOLET
I think the reason you were gone is more of what the staring's about.

Ari looks away, avoiding. She notices movement in the GYM...

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - CONTINUOUS

A FENCER in full equipment practices with COACH HANNAH DUNCAN. Ari watches from the door.

COACH DUNCAN
Keep your shoulder loose when you -- Trask! About time you came skulking back. You are back, right?

ARI
You could maybe convince me to pick up a foil again.

COACH DUNCAN
Good. None of the new kids can master the double like you.

ARI
Try positive reinforcement.

COACH DUNCAN
You shut your dirty mouth.

Ari grins. Duncan hands her the foil she was holding. Ari examines it in her hand. Feels good.

The Fencer finally takes off her mask. This is MIA McALLISTER (16), who's way too hot for someone who spends her time with her face behind a mask -- and she knows it.

MIA
Brent's about to impale someone.

Coach Duncan looks over at a few OTHER FENCERS practicing. Grumbling, she heads towards them.

Mia fake smiles at Ari. Ari steels herself.

MIA (CONT'D)
So you're back.

ARI
Looks like it.

MIA
You know I'm captain now.

ARI
I guess someone had to do it.

MIA
I really need people on the team who are focused. And I know that you have...*family stuff* going on that might distract you.

Ari clenches her jaw. Do. Not. Punch.

ARI
Everyone has family stuff going on.

MIA
True. How *are* things with your dad? I heard they weren't good.

Ari says nothing, just grips her foil.

MIA (CONT'D)
I understand. I wouldn't want to talk about it either. Or be around tons of people who were.
(re: their foils)
Well, if you're back, you wanna go?

She assumes the en garde position, smug.

ARI
You're a real mind-reader.

Ari tosses her foil down and walks away.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

In a huff, Ari rejoins Violet in the hall.

ARI
If I needed a wake-up call, Mia McAllister was it. I can't deal with stupid school stuff anymore.

VIOLET
What did she...where are you going?

ARI
Hospital. I do more good for the world volunteering than being stuck here anguishing in the desert.
(MORE)

ARI (CONT'D)
My mom’s off from work today so she won’t know I’m there.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen sits with LAURIE, her financial advisor/kinda friend.

LAURIE
The bottom line is if something doesn’t change, you’re going to lose everything you built. I assume things with Greg are the same.

HELEN
Yes.

LAURIE
Given that, I think downsizing is an option to look at.

HELEN
What, like the house?

LAURIE
Do you need a four-bedroom?

Before Helen can answer, her CELL PHONE on the table rings. The ID says JACK JOHANSSEN. Displeased, Helen silences it.

LAURIE (CONT’D)
Do you need to get that?

HELEN
Avoidance is the best tactic with this particular person. So, what about the investments we made? Couldn’t I sell those off?

LAURIE
You lose the investments, you lose any cushion you have left. Selling the house means you keep your padding, and other than your boys having to share a bedroom at the holidays, life goes on as usual.

HELEN
That’s...oh, God help me.

She’s reacting to what she sees out the window: a MAN (late 30s), a little disheveled, walking up to the door.

LAURIE
Someone you know?

HELEN
My brother-in-law.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Helen sits at the table calmly as a manic NEAL TRASK paces.

NEAL
Imagine coming home and your life has become To Have and Have Not.

HELEN
Sorry, I never read it.

NEAL
Me neither, but I saw the movie once. I'm the "have not."

HELEN
Isn't it about smugglers on a fishing boat?

NEAL
Am I thinking of the right movie?

HELEN
So Lola just took everything.

NEAL
Every single thing. The apartment's a big empty box right now. She even took the stuff that was distinctly mine. Valuable possessions. 1986 signed Michael Jordan rookie card?

HELEN
I think I get "big empty box."

NEAL
Gone to hell with Lola!

HELEN
Wow, that all sounds...awful.

NEAL
The pits. But it's really made me re-evaluate life. Treating the girl I was dating to a Vegas wedding was a bad reaction to what happened, I see that now.

HELEN
Only took you three months.

NEAL
Instead of hitching my wagon to her crazy, I should have been spending time with you guys. Maybe even moved in to help out. So I want to do that now. Move in. For you guys.

He tries to look convincing. Helen sees right through him.

HELEN
Selling this place might not be a half-bad idea.

EXT. TRASK HOUSE - NIGHT

Dodge and a BRUNETTE make out hardcore against her car.

DODGE
You wanna come inside?

BRUNETTE
You've got a really nice house.

DODGE
I could give you a tour.

BRUNETTE
That sounds...who's that?

Dodge turns to see who she sees -- Ari going in the door.

DODGE
Uh...my little sister.

BRUNETTE
Oh. You live with your family?

DODGE
Temporarily. Well, since college. But it's not like it's permanent...

INT. TRASK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A disappointed Dodge enters. Ari's putting her jacket away.

ARI
It's amazing how many Rachel doppelgangers you've managed to find in such a short span of time.

DODGE
What are you talking about?

ARI
Car Girl? Brown hair, earthy soul --

DODGE
You could see her “earthy soul”?

ARI
I could see her Prius with a vegan bumper sticker. Since generics are never as good as name-brands, if you’re still in love with Rachel, you should just go get her back. If she’d take you. You were a real rat bastard at the end, I’d have had you Eternal Sunshined by now.

Dodge looks upset by this implication. But more importantly:

DODGE
I’m not in love with Rachel.

ARI
Even Zeke knows you still are.

DODGE
Zeke? Ari, you can’t broadcast my private life to the whole world.

ARI
Zeke is hardly the whole world and the baker’s dozen of girls you’ve brought home is hardly private.

DODGE
There has not been a baker’s dozen.

ARI
Did I low-ball?

DODGE
I’m moving on from Rachel, okay? I get to do that however I want.

Helen enters from the next room.

HELEN
Hey kids. Ari, how was school?

ARI
What are the chances I use a positive adjective?

HELEN
Well, in any case, I'm glad you went. And that you're both home. There's a new development in our lives: Uncle Neal's moving in.

ARI
Are we becoming a halfway house for manchildren or something?

HELEN
He's going through a rough patch.

ARI
It's not like this place is freakin' Shangri-La.

HELEN
Maybe not, but he is family. You're the biggest family supporter here.

Ari knows she's beat, isn't happy about it. Neal enters, no idea what he's walking into. Before he can say anything --

ARI
Are you wearing Dad's clothes?

NEAL
Yeah, I didn't think he would mind.

ARI
I mind. You're not him.

She walks out. Neal looks apologetically to Helen and Dodge.

HELEN
Welcome to Shangri-La.

INT. ZEKE'S NEW YORK OFFICE - NIGHT

ZEKE TRASK (25), a guy who wears a suit and loves it, works in his office. Pretty empty this late. His PHONE RINGS...

ZEKE
Hello?

INT. TRASK HOUSE - ARI'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ARI
Are you working?

ZEKE
Good guess. What's up, kid?

ARI
Is there any way you can come home for Dad's birthday? It'll be worth it, it's gonna be a blow-out. I mean stilt-walkers, fire-eaters...

ZEKE
Wow, you're gonna wrangle all that?

ARI
If I did, would you come?

ZEKE
A, you know I'd be there if I could, but I really can't get away.

ARI
Yeah, I figured. I was lying anyway. People on stilts kind of freak me out.

ZEKE
Hold on, I'm getting another call.
(switching the line)
Hello?

INT. TRASK HOUSE - DODGE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

DODGE
I don't know what Ari told you, but I'm over Rachel. I'm moving on.

ZEKE
Great to hear. Hold on.
(switching the line)
Hey.

ARI
Hey. Dodge?

DODGE
Hey. Ari?

ZEKE (CONT'D)
Guys, I really have to finish this, but you should feel free to work out your issues without me.

He puts his phone down.

DODGE
Zeke? Hello?

ARI
What were you calling him about?

DODGE
Nothing. You?

ARI
This is dumb. I'm hanging up now.

They both hang up. Dodge sits, pensive. On his floor we note a guitar, out of its case, a pile of junk on top of it.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

GREG TRASK (40s), weary, aching -- but maybe a spark left in him yet -- sits in a cell, seemingly talking to himself.

GREG
I've started seeing things. Maybe that's not the right way to put it. My brain's been playing games with me. It knows I'm trapped here, but it's started sending me other places. Right now? You and I are --

ARI
I wish I could stay longer but I don't want to get caught.

Greg looks out, revealing Ari on the other side of the bars.

GREG
What do you say you break me out, that'll solve both our problems.

Ari pulls a PINK SWISS ARMY KNIFE out of her pocket.

GREG (CONT'D)
I thought you lost that thing.

Ari glances down the hall, no sign of anyone. She flips up the corkscrew and goes to work on the lock.

GREG (CONT'D)
This is very imaginative, but no way are you picking that lock.

CLICK. Greg's surprised. Smiling, Ari opens the door and steps aside for him. Greg looks longingly at the open space.

GREG (CONT'D)
I wish it were that easy.

ARI
Good thing you're not an epileptic. This room is like Seizure's Palace.

Greg cocks his head: what? Off his confused look we go to --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ari sits staring up at the flickering fluorescent light.

ARI
On the other hand, they know you're not gonna complain. You up for a round of Two Truths and a Lie?

She turns to the bed, revealing Greg -- *in a vegetative state*. Sunken, wilting, practically one with the sheets. *This is his reality -- the prison cell was all in his head.*

GREG (V.O.)
Fine, but I always lose.

ARI
#1. Uncle Neal's imploding marriage is a step away from reality show trashy. #2. Mia McAllister is sleeping over tonight because we've decided to give peace a chance. #3. The tent I vomited in when I was 8 still smells like vomit. Okay, you know the rules. Blink one, two, or three times for the lie.

GREG (V.O.)
Number two. Blink twice. Come on.

ARI
Come on, a half-wit could do it.

GREG (V.O.)
A quarter-wit could do it. Eyes, please, open for me.

Ari waits, watching him. No movement. She's not surprised.

ARI
Time's up, you lose again. Ari, 92, Coma-Dad, 0. Maybe for your birthday you should ask for some eyes that actually blink.

Off Greg's closed eyelids...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Ari walks out of Greg's room. Down the hall, she sees Helen approaching. She ducks into another patient room and waits as Helen passes, hoping she won't notice her. We follow Helen...

INT. HOSPITAL - NEUROLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Helen sits across from DR. BARBARA LUCA.

DR. LUCA
The three-month marker is huge in these cases. Unfortunately, Greg is still completely unresponsive.

HELEN
I noticed that.

DR. LUCA
Even if somehow he showed any progress at this point, the prognosis would be grim. "Severely disabled" -- non-functional -- at best. It's time to really consider what kind of life this is. For all of you. The emotional strain, not to mention the financial burden you must be under...

Helen takes this in, stares at her.

HELEN
If you're suggesting I take him off life support, the answer is no. I'm not giving up on him. On all of us.

DR. LUCA
His brain isn't responding to tests, Helen. I hate to put it so bluntly, but the Greg who got into the car that day is gone. The change and loss have already happened. Now it's just a matter of accepting it.

HELEN
I don't accept it. What if we do it, what if we unplug him, and he *could* have woken up?

DR. LUCA
The kind of miracle you're waiting for? I've never seen it happen.

Helen digests this.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Ari walks with CAROLYN (20s), the volunteer coordinator.

CAROLYN
Why the sudden interest in the ER?

ARI
I just wanna branch out, try something new...
(off Carolyn's look)
And avoid my mom for a few days. I feel bad but I sort of lied about --

CAROLYN
It might be better if I don't know.

ARI
She always stays in the north wing. I just need to be in the ER through Thursday, can you switch me?

CAROLYN
Yeah, there's a new guy who I can probably move for a few days. Come in here with me and I'll...

ARI
Rachel?

RACHEL DELANEY (23) turns. She's surprised. It's awkward. Carolyn continues into her office.

RACHEL
Ari. Hi.

ARI
Hey. Are you okay? Is someone sick?

RACHEL
No, I -- I was actually here to see your dad. I've been sneaking by to -- I'm sorry, I shouldn't be here.

ARI
Dodge and I were just talking about you.

RACHEL
(in spite of herself)
How is he?

ARI
He still hasn't touched a piano, guitar, or even the rim of a half-full water glass. And he's taken a job as a vacuum salesman. So...

Rachel's affected by this, but doesn't want it to show.

RACHEL
I should really go. Please...don't tell him you saw me.

ARI
I won't.

Rachel nods and heads off. Ari watches after her, sad, then:

ARI (CONT'D)
Rachel? We're having a birthday party for Dad on Thursday. Do you want to come? You were there for the last few, so...but you don't have to. You can think about it.

RACHEL
Yeah. I'll think about it.

Rachel takes another step, then doubles back and unexpectedly gives Ari a hug. Ari looks relieved.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
It was really good to see you.

INT. RISSA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Dodge vacuums up a line of dust. RISSA LEE (20s), blonde, pretty, stands with him, amused (and 100% checking him out).

DODGE
You see, the various Colby heads make all dust possible to reach.

RISSA
You just did that with the normal head in a wide open space.

DODGE
Oh, you're right. Sorry, sometimes I just go on automatic, and...

RISSA
I didn't imagine when I woke up this morning that a door-to-door salesman would come knocking. Isn't that like a 1950s thing?

DODGE
The Colby Company was founded in --

RISSA
I'm not interested in the Colby Company. Tell me about...what was your name? Dodge? That's unusual.

DODGE
It's a nickname.

RISSA
Let me guess. Dodge-Mahal.

Dodge smiles. Something's brewing. Then the door opens and MARGARET BROOKS (20s) enters. She'd rather kill flies with vinegar than catch them with honey.

MARGARET
Rissa, is it too much to ask for you to park in a way that my car will actually fit next to yours?
(seeing Dodge)
Oh, hi.

RISSA
This is Dodge. He's showing me his vacuum.

Margaret raises an eyebrow, sizes Dodge up.

MARGARET
Right. Well, don't let me interfere with the deep personal connection that's going on here.

She plods off to her room, slamming the door.

RISSA
Sorry. She hates her job.

DODGE
I know the feeling.

RISSA
You are a pretty bad salesman. In a good way. You don't have a douchey vibe.

DODGE
I don't know, apparently recently I've been a pretty big douche.

RISSA
I'm an accidental expert on the matter, and you're not setting off any of my alarms.

DODGE
That's nice to hear.

RISSA
Any chance I could interest you in a beer? It is after five.

DODGE
I may be a bad salesman but I'm pretty sure I'm not supposed to drink on the job.

RISSA
What if I tell you that there's no way I have $3200 to drop on a vacuum, are you off the job?

Off Dodge's smile --

INT. HOSPITAL - PSYCH SUITE - HELEN'S OFFICE - EVENING

Helen lies on couch, lights off. DANNY DAUZ (late 30s) enters with an extravagant floral arrangement.

DANNY
Are you napping or brooding?

HELEN
Not mutually exclusive.

DANNY
Got ya something.

HELEN
Danny, they're gorgeous. There's no way they're from you.

DANNY
Fine. They were delivered to my office by mistake.

Helen opens the attached envelope. Under an embossed logo for *La Rouge Club*, the note says, "*I know I shouldn't call.*

But today makes five years. I just wanted to thank you. -- Jack." Poker-faced, Helen puts the card back in the envelope.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Who're they from?

HELEN
Someone who can't take a hint. You have a sec?

Danny sits across from her.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Pretend you're me, I'm a patient.

DANNY
Then can't I just be me?

HELEN
What would you say to a patient when a doctor is advising her to unplug her PVS husband?

DANNY
Luca said that?

HELEN
She said that him waking up and coming back to us is a miracle we're not going to get.

DANNY
I'm so sorry, Helen.

HELEN
So she wants me to pull the plug. She made some cogent points about it. That on top of being an emotional wreck, I must be under tremendous financial strain to care for him.

DANNY
She's a real sugar-coater.

HELEN
She wasn't wrong. My financial advisor told me to sell my house. I don't want to sell my house, I love my house. The kids grew up there and it feels like if I sell it, I'm saying Greg isn't coming home. Although Luca says he's not.
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)
I don’t know, I can’t...get a handle on any of it, it’s too much.

DANNY
How do we know she’s right about Greg’s condition?

HELEN
Well, she’s the best, isn’t she?

DANNY
She’d have you believe.

HELEN
(hopeful)
You think she’s wrong?

DANNY
I don’t know. She is the best. Assuming she’s right, you have to take the finances out of the equation for now. You need to process this decision on an emotional level first.

HELEN
Then the question becomes, am I ready to give up my irrational hope and let go of my dream of the life I’m supposed to have with Greg?

DANNY
That’s a big enough place to start.

HELEN
Do I tell the kids?

DANNY
Do you want their input?

HELEN
Yes. But no. I can’t put this on them.

DANNY
Then there’s nothing to tell. Yet. I should go, I have someone coming in. But I’m around if you need me.

HELEN
Thanks. By the way, to really make this easier, Ari’s throwing Greg a birthday party. You’re invited.

DANNY
Of course she is. I'll be there.

He heads out. As soon as he's gone, Helen looks at the flowers again...and throws them in the trash with disgust.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - EVENING

Ari walks by Greg's room, carrying a box of hospital teddy bears...and notices FISHER CAPPS (19) sitting across from Greg. He's got a couple tattoos, pierced ears, and a volunteer uniform like her. She looks suspicious.

ARI
Hi. Who are you?

FISHER
I'm Fisher. I was supposed to be in the ER but I got switched this week. You volunteer too?

ARI
Did the flattering salmon vest clue you in?

FISHER
Yeah, I guess so. I really like this guy. He's so peaceful. Do you know what happened to him?

ARI
His car flipped into a ditch.

FISHER
That sucks. He looks like he was probably a nice guy.

Ari doesn't say anything, just hovers.

FISHER (CONT'D)
I guess I should probably get back to work. Don't want to find out the hard way there's a Nurse Ratched around here. I'll see you around...

He waits for her to fill in her name. She doesn't.

FISHER (CONT'D)
I'll see you around, salmon vest.

He heads out. Annoyed, Ari sits next to the bed. **Fantasy Greg** is suddenly sitting next to her.

GREG
You that terse with all strangers? He seems like a good kid.

ARI
I wish you could see his lame tattoos. Anyway, how was your day?

INT. TRASK HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Neal and Helen eat in silence. Finally:

NEAL
Does Ari always skip dinner or is it me and my cooking?

HELEN
Lasagna was the last meal we ate with Greg. She has a thing about it now.

NEAL
Ah geez. I can’t do anything right.

Helen weakly smiles. Neither can she. The silence resettles.

HELEN
This is one of the hardest parts.

NEAL
What? Of what?

HELEN
Of life since the accident. The quiet. I miss the talking. The laughing, the music. All the signs of life. I hate the quiet.

NEAL
I’m with you. Lola didn’t know the meaning of the word. Now the calm after the storm makes me crazy.

Helen nods. Sips her wine.

NEAL (CONT’D)
I cheated on her. It only happened once, it was stupid. Maybe even stupider that I told her. There was no way we could survive that.

HELEN
I’d pretend I’m surprised but...

NEAL
I know. I don't make the best decisions. Even if I hadn't cheated, we were never gonna be like you and Greg. I always admired you two. You were so good at it.

HELEN
At what?

NEAL
I don't know. Being in love.

Helen says nothing, just furrows her brow, considering this.

Neal grabs her empty plate and takes it to the sink. He notices the radio on the counter -- turns it on and scans stations. Finally he finds a HIP-HOP SONG.

HELEN
What is this?

NEAL
It might break up the quiet for us.

HELEN
I'm more of a classical girl, but sure. This'll do for now.

Neal cranks it and starts busting moves like he's in da club. Helen just drinks more wine, amused in spite of herself.

INT. RISSA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Dodge wakes up. Hears the shower running. He smiles, happy.

He gets up, starts collecting his clothes. He notices a folded t-shirt on top of a pile of laundry. Picks it up -- it says "GO VEGAN OR GO HOME." He considers this.

DODGE
Well, at least she doesn't have brown hair.

He grabs his pants off a dresser, knocking over a photo. He puts it back and looks at it. Rissa and a friend. Rissa has brown hair in it. The color drains from Dodge's face.

INT. RISSA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dodge quietly emerges from the bedroom, putting on his shoes.

MARGARET
Sneaking out. Classy.

He looks up -- didn't know she was on the couch.

DODGE
Sorry, I -- this was a mistake.

MARGARET
That's what all girls want to hear.

DODGE
I didn't mean it like that. She's great. She just reminds me of -- is she a natural brunette?

MARGARET
I have no patience for guys like you, so why don't you just take your "I stuck it in your sister by mistake" excuses and get out?

DODGE
You're sisters? She didn't mention that. Anyway, listen, I just I want you to know I'm not this guy. Usually.

MARGARET
You're not the guy who uses his job to meet girls, sleep with them, and then disappear as soon as you can?

DODGE
No. Well, okay. But I didn't mean to be. I swear I'm not a bad guy.

MARGARET
What kind of guy do you think you are then?

The words hit -- Dodge doesn't have an answer.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - ARI'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ari digs through a box in her closet. Neal's in the hall.

NEAL (O.S.)
Lola, come on. You can't take everything I own and just disappear. Those sports cards were never yours! Call me back.

He hangs up and peeks in. Ari pretends not to notice.

NEAL (CONT'D)
Manic search you're doing there.

Ari nods as she pulls out what she wanted -- twinkle lights.

NEAL (CONT'D)
Lot different in here than it used to be. You had ballerina wallpaper.

ARI
Yeah. When I was like 6.

Neal nods. He picks up a RATTY TEDDY BEAR from her bed.

NEAL
I remember this guy. Greg gave him to you when you were a baby and --

ARI
Look, we all know you're only here because you natural disastered your own life. You don't have to pretend to be a real member of the family now when you've barely even managed to show up to holidays before.

Neal looks guilty, but still hovers.

ARI (CONT'D)
I need to get ready for school...

NEAL
I know you're having a party for Greg. I want to come. I do want to be a real member of this family.

ARI
Will you actually show up?

NEAL
Yes, I will show up.

Ari eyes him, then begrudgingly nods.

ARI
Fine.

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - DAY

Ari struggles to hang the twinkle lights on the wall. It's not going well.

ARI
Uncle Neal just needs to give it up. I wish I could make him and Mia McAllister fence to the death.

Fantasy Greg sits in a chair, watching her.

GREG
Hey. Watch it. He may be a real knucklehead, but he is your uncle.

ARI
Okay, maybe not to the death, but to the hurting in a lot of ways.

Greg nods, fine. All of a sudden, THE ROOM STARTS TO SHAKE --

INT. CASTLE - GREAT HALL - DAY

Greg stands in a great hall, in 16th century garb, a fencing foil in hand. He examines himself, chuckles.

On the wall hangs a LARGE PORTRAIT of a 16th CENTURY FAMILY. He looks closely...it's his family. He lingers on it, then hears a noise. He turns to see Ari in a large puffy dress.

GREG
Oh, I wish you could see yourself right now.

He notices she's got a foil too. And with a smile, she lunges. He parries. They go back and forth, having fun.

Finally, as Ari lunges, Greg ducks down and thrusts his arm out, hitting her from underneath. She steps back, surprised.

GREG (CONT'D)
Coach Duncan never taught you the passata-sotto, did she? I actually like to call it the "down and out," it's far less pretentious. You want to give it a try?

Ari says nothing. Greg looks up, as if to the real world.

GREG (CONT'D)
Ari? You still there?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ari's not talking because she sees Fisher in the hall. She looks down, willing him not to come in. He does.

FISHER
New service for patients?

ARI
Just this one.

FISHER
Need a hand?

The whole strand of lights she's been struggling with falls.

ARI
I've got it under control.

FISHER
Right. I just finished my shift, I'm off to raid the nurses' lounge where they have the good quality knock-off Twinkies. Care to join?

Ari looks like it's the last thing she wants to do. She's saved by her RINGING PHONE, which she answers...

ARI
Hey. -- Where are you going? --
Okay, yeah, come get me. Bye.
(to Fisher)
Sorry. I have plans.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

Helen stands with a bunch of brown bananas by a trash can. Unmoving. She's staring at a TWO-SEATED KAYAK. Thinking.

Neal approaches from the kitchen, but just watches, sympathetic, as Helen runs a finger over the kayak dust. There's a VOICE from the phone in Neal's hand, he remembers:

NEAL
Hey, Helen. Dodge for you.

Helen throws out the bananas and takes the phone.

HELEN
Hi Dodge. -- Yeah, I can meet you.
What's wrong?

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAY

Dodge paces back and forth over faint skid marks that lead to a ditch. Helen pulls up, gets out. She looks worried.

HELEN
Honey, what are you doing here?

DODGE
I come here all the time.

HELEN
You can't do this to yourself. Being here isn't going to fix anything.

DODGE
What is? Nothing feels real right now, Mom. I'm living this life that isn't me -- I've given up music and I'm selling vacuums and I'm having one-night stands? Who am I?

HELEN
You're not alone. We've all become different people.

DODGE
I don't see you ruining your life.

HELEN
I let your Uncle Neal move in, you think I would have done that three months ago?

DODGE
I'm being serious, Mom.

HELEN
So am I. Dodge, we went through a tragedy -- we're still living in a tragedy. Of course nothing makes sense right now. And I know it's harder for you than the rest of us.

DODGE
I keep telling myself that things will get better if I can just make sense of it all. But what if we never figure out what caused it? We flip off the road, I break nothing but my wrist, and I can't remember any of it? What if we were fighting? What if I distracted him? What if all of this is my fault?

Off Dodge, this great weight on him...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAY

DIRECT-PICK UP on Dodge and Helen, who looks so sad for him.

HELEN
Your dad was driving. It wasn't your fault.

DODGE
Yeah, but --

HELEN
No buts. You can't play a what-if game, trust me. Come here.

She leads him over to a patch of grass, they sit. Dodge starts ripping grass out in chunks.

HELEN (CONT'D)
What changed today that sent you into this? Is it because of Dad's birthday?

DODGE
This birthday wouldn't even be that big a deal, except...it is.

HELEN
When was the last time you went to see him?

DODGE
I don't know. I hate feeling bad about myself all the time.

HELEN
About the accident.

Dodge nods. Helen eyes him. Can tell there's something else.

HELEN (CONT'D)
And Rachel.

DODGE
What? I don't feel bad about Rachel.

HELEN
My mistake.

They sit quietly a moment, then:

DODGE
Okay, I feel really bad about Rachel. Ari's right, I *am* trying to replace her. But I can't. She's family. Except I screwed up our relationship worse than anything.

Helen puts an arm around him, sympathetic.

HELEN
It's not over til it's over, kid.

DODGE
What do you mean?

HELEN
You're in control of what happens next. You've got a whole lifetime to work out how your story with her ends. Not everyone has that luxury.

Dodge considers this. Helen thinks about it too, looking far less hopeful than Dodge does.

EXT. SOME KID'S BACKYARD - DAY

Ari, Violet, and a few other KIDS, including Mia and BRYAN (a cute guy Violet keeps sneaking glances at), hang out. Ari looks miserable as she listens to a GIRL, mid-story:

GIRL
--and she pulled out a condom. A day later.

JOEY
Blake had to have noticed.

MIA
Maybe, but would you want to go spelunking in the Vanessa fly trap?

Everybody laughs. Except an annoyed Ari.

ARI
I thought you guys were friends.

VIOLET
(trying to intercede)
Did any of you start the chem lab?

MIA
It's too bad you decided to stay out of school, Ari.
(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)
Coach thinks we could have medalled in team competitions. I guess I'll have to settle for individual medals.

JOEY
(oblivious)
You've got a sweet deal, Trask. My dad would never let me drop out.

Everyone kind of awkwardly looks away. Joey realizes...

JOEY (CONT'D)
Oh. Sorry.

ARI
I should go. I have stuff to do.

She gets up. Mia smirks. Violet follows Ari a few steps away.

VIOLET
I'm sorry, I didn't know Mia would be here, just that Bryan would be.

ARI
Joey's a dick too.

VIOLET
He didn't mean anything by it. But come on, let's go do something fun.

ARI
No, I'm fine. I'll get a ride. You should stay, talk to Bryan. Really.

VIOLET
Okay, well...can we do Ari-Violet time tomorrow?

ARI
Tomorrow's my dad's birthday, we're doing a thing. Raincheck?

Violet nods, gives Ari's hand a supportive squeeze.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

Dodge KNOCKS on Rachel's door. Stops. Listens. Knocks again.

DODGE
Rachel, can we please talk?

He listens. No response.

DODGE (CONT'D)
I know you're home, your car's outside. You probably never want to talk to me again, I get it...but Ray, I have so much I want to say.

He slumps back against the wall.

DODGE (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry about everything. The accident really messed with me. But I still love you. I never stopped. So whenever you decide you want to talk, I'll be around.

He puts his hand on the door, then walks down the hall.

He reaches an ELEVATOR. As he waits for it, he looks out the window. Down below is a PARK. He eyes it, an idea forming...

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - A LITTLE LATER

Rachel sits with FELIPE, a super hipster gay guy, and a bottle of tequila. She's on her way to drunk.

RACHEL
I should have talked to him.

FELIPE
Incorrect. You just got yourself back together from that toolbag.

RACHEL
Was he a toolbag the whole time we were together?

FELIPE
He had moments.

RACHEL
Of being a toolbag or --

FELIPE
Don't think about him. Think about Justin. You have him now.

RACHEL
I don't "have" Justin. He's a guy I've gone out with three times.

FELIPE
And so far he's got a great track record for not breaking your heart.

Rachel still looks conflicted.

FELIPE (CONT'D)
Mama, you need another shot.

As he pours a shot for each of them, Rachel's PHONE RINGS. She looks at it, debating answering.

FELIPE (CONT'D)
Toolbag?

RACHEL
Not Toolbag. Hello?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ari sits on the curb.

ARI
Hey. I'm sorry to call you, it's just that I called Dodge and my mom and they didn't answer. I know this is high on the weird scale, but is there any way you could give me a ride home from someone's house?

Rachel hesitates. Looks at the shot glass in her hand.

ARI (CONT'D)
Sorry, I shouldn't have called.

RACHEL
No it's not that, I just...my car's in the shop. But it's not weird to call me. You were like my little sister for years.

ARI
I wish everything could go back to the way it was.

RACHEL
Me too. But I don't know how that'll ever happen. And I don't think I can come to your dad's party. I'm sorry. But tell him happy birthday for me.

ARI
Oh. Okay. I will. Bye.

Ari hangs up and looks through her "favorites" list: MOM, DAD, ZEKE, DODGE, VIOLET, RACHEL. She's tapped out.

She sighs. There IS another option...

INT. NEAL'S CAR - DRIVING - DAY

Ari rides with Neal. Awkward silence between them.

ARI
Thanks for getting me.

NEAL
No problem. Just out of curiosity, why don't you have your license?

ARI
Just haven't gotten around to it.

NEAL
I got mine the day I turned 16.

More silence. Then Neal's PHONE RINGS. He looks at it.

NEAL (CONT'D)
(answering)
Lola, finally! -- Why would you even take my box of cards?

He narrowly swerves to avoid another car -- Ari looks uneasy. He's not a great driver to begin with.

NEAL (CONT'D)
I can't tomorrow night, I have a thing. I can't get them earlier? -- You could leave them on Helen's porch for me. -- Why are you so --

ARI
Uncle Neal!

Neal looks to see another CAR TURN OUT IN FRONT OF THEM. He SLAMS on the brakes. They screech to a halt.

NEAL
You okay?

ARI
I don't have a license because I'm terrified of being in an accident, how do you not get that?

Neal understands now. And feels awful. Ari opens the door.

NEAL
What are you doing?

ARI
I'd rather walk. And don't worry about picking up your precious cards, you're free tomorrow night. I don't want you at Dad's party.

She gets out and slams the door. Neal looks crestfallen.

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - DAY

Helen comes to the door. She watches Greg, sad for a beat, before going to sit with him.

GREG (V.O.)
Helen? Is that you?

HELEN
I miss you, Greg.

Fantasy Greg appears in the chair next to her.

GREG
I miss you too.

HELEN
Remember when we first got married and we used to talk all the time about all the great things we were going to do together? You know, like take up ballroom dancing.

Greg nods, smiles. Then, the ROOM STARTS TO SHAKE --

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Greg's in a tux. He examines himself. Interesting. He looks up to see Helen in a ball gown.

GREG
I always loved you in formal wear.

He offers his hand, and they begin to waltz. Elegant, romantic, classic Fred and Ginger.

HELEN
Before you got yourself into this mess, we did what we said we would. We built a life together.

GREG
A damn good life.

HELEN
A life I'm still wholly living. I still buy bananas for two even though I can't eat your share before they go brown. It's bizarre.

GREG
I find it real endearing, Hel.

HELEN
Even my breakfast fruit now reminds me that you're a living ghost. That our story ends in what should have been its middle.

Concerned, Greg stops dancing.

GREG
Our story isn't over. And I'm not a ghost. I'm right here.

Helen's looking down, won't meet his eye. He follows her gaze to their feet. He starts to tap his foot...

And then breaks into a full-on tap routine. He's going all out. We're talking jazz hands.

GREG (CONT'D)
See? I'm right in front of you.

But Helen says nothing. Getting desperate, Greg closes his eyes, snaps his fingers -- and behind him appears a whole ENSEMBLE OF GREGS tapping with him. Think Busby Berkeley.

GREG (CONT'D)
Do you see me now?

HELEN
Greg, I think I have to accept that I've already lost you.

GREG
No, you don't, you haven't! We're not at the end. I promise. We...

He looks around, manic, looking for any kind of help --

Ari, Dodge, and Zeke emerge from the ensemble, tapping their hearts out. Enjoying themselves. Greg watches with Helen.

GREG (CONT'D)
We have so much I want to come back to.

HELEN
The sad truth about us is we never took weekend trips anymore. We hadn't dragged the kayak out in years. And we certainly never took up dancing.

All the dancers -- the kids included -- VANISH.

GREG
Hey, I wasn't done with all of you!

HELEN
We weren't even the couple we always thought we'd be.

Greg turns to Helen, pained by the notion -- but she's GONE. As are all the flashing lights and everything else his mind created. He's alone in a sad spotlight, speaking to no one.

GREG
Listen, maybe we didn't do those things, but if there's any benefit to being trapped here it's that I get a lot of time to think. And I spend a lot of it thinking about how you were my favorite part of being awake. Helen? Say something.

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - DAY

Back to reality... Helen wipes a tear away.

HELEN
I wish our story didn't end in its middle. We could work at being that great couple with the happy ending, if you were here. But Luca says you're gone.

GREG (V.O.)
Luca's an idiot! I'm waking up, I promise, just give me time, Hel --

HELEN
I'm sorry, Greg.
(then)
You could really use a haircut.

She tenderly adjusts a stray hair, then gives him a really good look-over. Sure he's gone, she kisses him and walks out.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. TRASK HOUSE - ARI'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ari's on SKYPE with Zeke in his office.

ZEKE
Cut Uncle Neal some slack. He --

ARI
Thinks the world's Nealiocentric?

There's a KNOCK, a worn-out Helen enters.

HELEN
Want me to drop you at school?

ARI
Violet's taking me.

HELEN
Oh, give it up, Ari. I know you're lying, I've known all week.

ARI
You have?

HELEN
Why aren't you going?

ARI
I tried, Mom.

HELEN
Like I "tried" to make it to my cousin's baby shower?

ARI
I went. I just didn't stay. There were too many people. I couldn't.

She looks sad and earnest. Helen softens.

ARI (CONT'D)
Does this mean you're not coming to the party now?

HELEN
I was never not going to go. I just wanted to get you back to school.

Ari feels kind of bad about this. Until her phone buzzes.

ARI
Violet's here. I gotta go.

HELEN
If you're going to the hospital, I can take you. There's something I need to talk to you about anyway.

ARI
She's already downstairs. Bye Zeke.

HELEN
Zeke's there?

Ari swivels her laptop so Helen can see and heads out.

ZEKE
Don't worry, Mom, I wasn't eavesdropping. I've been trying to finish this simulation I'm doing.

HELEN
How are things going out there?

ZEKE
Good. Busy. Sorry I haven't called in a while, I'm just swamped.

HELEN
It's okay. But while I've got you here, I think we should talk about your dad. Things are --

A GUY enters Zeke's office.

GUY
Tom wants you, Zeke.

ZEKE
Sure. Mom, I'm sorry. Boss needs me. I'll try to touch base later.

The screen goes black. Helen sighs and closes the laptop.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A handwritten sign reads: "*You Occupy My Heart*." It's hanging on the camo tent, which Dodge and Helen sit in front of.

HELEN
For someone who feels like he's gone off the deep end, camping out overnight in a park is a bold move.

DODGE
I know. But I'm taking control. Girls like grand gestures, right?

HELEN
They also like men who shower but that's neither here nor there.

DODGE
Thank you for the mockery and the coffee, you can go to work now.

HELEN
Sorry, even if I think it's crazy -- Rachel likes grand gestures.

DODGE
Hey, I wanna show you something. Ari left it in the tent.

He pulls out a PHOTO of Ari and Greg at a baseball game.

HELEN
I've never seen this before.

DODGE
I think it's that A's game Dad wanted us all to go to, like a week before the accident. Zeke had been in town, remember? But he was packing to go back to New York, I had plans with Rachel, and you...

HELEN
I just can't stand baseball.

She stares at the photo, wistful.

DODGE
They were really the standout pair among us, weren't they?

HELEN
Somehow, they still are. Do you think she gets it? That he's...

Dodge thinks about it.

DODGE
Do you remember the Charlotte's Web debacle when we were kids? By the time Ari got around to watching the tape, it wouldn't play past the part where they get to the fair.
(MORE)

DODGE (CONT'D)
That was how the movie ended for her. They saved Wilbur from the slaughter and went to a fair.

HELEN
Yes. We had to tell her the ending. That Charlotte dies and everything.

DODGE
And she had a meltdown. She didn't accept it. Because she couldn't see it and didn't want it to be true. Right now, she's watching the broken tape. And even though you and me and everyone else think we know the ending, she can't see it.

HELEN
She'll never be able to let him go.

DODGE
Lucky for her, he doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

HELEN
No. He doesn't, does he?

She processes this. Of course she can't pull the plug. Deep relief and resolve settle.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Maybe none of us knows the ending.
(then, realizing)
Which means...how do you think Ari'd feel if we sold the house?

DODGE
I don't think she'd like it. I wouldn't either, I love our house. Wait, what's going on, Mom?

HELEN
Nothing. I love our house too.

She hands him back the photo, a steely determination to her.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Ari walks down the hall. She sees Fisher coming out of Greg's room and, per usual, looks annoyed. He sees her.

FISHER
Hey Ari.

ARI
How do you know my name?

FISHER
I asked Carolyn about you.

Ari furrows her brow, doesn't really like this. Until:

FISHER (CONT'D)
I lost my dad when I was 12. I know it's different for you but for what it's worth, I hope you're okay.

They share a look...which goes on a beat too long. Ari looks away into Greg's room, where the twinkle lights now hang.

ARI
Did you do this?

FISHER
Birthday present.

Ari's touched, and before she can help herself:

ARI
Do you want to come to the party?

FISHER
I'd love to, but...

He glances down the hall, where Carolyn (the volunteer coordinator) talks to a nurse. Ari follows his gaze.

FISHER (CONT'D)
I actually have plans tonight.

Carolyn sees them, gives a quick wave. Fisher smiles. Ari gets it -- and feels like an idiot, but tries to hide it.

ARI
Oh, cool. Have fun.

FISHER
I'll see you around. Ari.

He heads off, leaving Ari a mix of confused feelings.

INT. LA ROUGE CLUB - NIGHT

Helen sits in an upscale strip club. Alone and uncomfortable, nursing a drink. She hears voices and turns to look; she sees a MAN (40s), well-dressed, impassive, emerge from a back room, berating an UPSET STRIPPER.

MAN
If you think you're worth more than this, Star, think again. While you're under my employ, I own you. Now go do whatever that man wants, or quit. It's simple.

The stripper starts to cry. Helen can't handle it. She grabs her purse and gets up to leave.

MAN (CONT'D)
Helen?

Helen stops. Caught. She braces herself and turns around.

HELEN
Hi, Jack.

This is JACK JOHANSSEN. And now his demeanor changes completely: he's classy, charming, sweet.

JACK
I can't believe you've come.

HELEN
I thought you might enjoy one of your flowers.

Helen pulls a lone flower from her bag and hands it to him. Pleased, Jack puts it in his lapel.

JACK
Let's go somewhere more private.

INT. LA ROUGE CLUB - NIGHT

Helen and Jack sit at a back table, watching the strippers.

HELEN
I know I'm asking for something big, Jack. It's fine if you need time to think about it.

JACK
I had heard about what happened to your husband. Such a shame. You shouldn't have to worry about the cost of his care, this could drag on forever. I'm happy to give you the money, as long as you need.

HELEN
Not give, loan. This is business.

JACK
(motioning to the club)
This -- is business. Helping you is my pleasure. Without you, I wouldn't have any of it.

Helen looks around, unsettled by this notion.

HELEN
I take it you've been well?

JACK
I haven't taken a whole bottle of painkillers in the past few years, if that's what you're asking. Although I do sometimes still have thoughts that trouble me.

HELEN
Don't we all.

JACK
Alright, since you want a business arrangement, here's my proposition. I help with your husband, I get time with you.

HELEN
What?

JACK
I've been finding myself increasingly in need of someone to talk to. A confidante. You were that once.

HELEN
You paid me for that.

JACK
And now I'll be paying the hospital on your behalf.

Helen holds in a grimace. Jack waits, watching her. Finally:

HELEN
There need to be ground rules, Jack. Boundaries. And we both know you've never been good at that.

JACK
I've always enjoyed the challenge of self-improvement. So, shall we toast our new arrangement?

With the hint of a smirk, Jack raises his glass. Helen raises her too, reluctantly -- what has she gotten herself into?

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ari's almost done cutting Greg's hair. **Fantasy Greg** paces.

GREG
Ari, look at me. Real Me, I mean.

Ari does, to check if his hair is even on both sides. Fantasy Greg leans in, also examining himself.

GREG (CONT'D)
Do I look different to you?

ARI
You look good, Dad. You're no GQ model, but you'd be nominated for D.I.L.F. of the veggie ward.

GREG
Never say that again. And that's not what I mean. I've been thinking about my brain going rogue. What if it's not playing games with me, what if those are glitches? What if it's shutting down? Ari, I'm worried I might finally be...dying.

ARI
Everyone will be here soon so get ready to put your party face on.

Fantasy Greg looks very worried.

GREG
I won't let go before they're here.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Dodge lies on his back by his tent, staring at the sky. An unhappy Rachel appears above him. He sits up, excited.

DODGE
I knew you'd come out eventually.

RACHEL
One of the neighbors recognized you and asked if I wanted to call the cops to report you for stalking me.

DODGE
I’m not stalking you, I just want to talk. And apologize. I know I was crazy and awful to you, but...

RACHEL
You said when your life flashed before your eyes, I wasn’t in it.

DODGE
Obviously a lie, I don’t remember my life flashing before my eyes.

RACHEL
I know. I tried to tell you that you didn’t mean it. But do you remember what you said?

DODGE
(sheepish)
That the accident really showed me that three years with you was more than enough.

RACHEL
And when I said you were reacting to the trauma, you said...

DODGE
That I’d felt that way for months.

RACHEL
And then you kept saying it. Every day. For weeks. The funny thing is, when you hear something over and over again, you start to believe it. Which is why I told you that if you really wanted me gone...

DODGE
You’d go and wouldn’t come back.

RACHEL
You do have a good memory.

DODGE
Ray, you were right. I didn’t mean any of it, I know that now. And I want to fix things. I want to be a good guy again. For you. With you.

RACHEL
Aren’t you supposed to be at your dad’s birthday right now?

DODGE
Yeah, but my dad would get that --

RACHEL
The good guy wouldn't ditch out on his family, especially his little sister who needs him. You're not the guy you were, Dodge. I wish I could help you put yourself back together. But I can't, it's too much for me. And...I'm seeing someone else. I'm sorry.

Dodge looks crushed. She turns to go, then...

RACHEL (CONT'D)
The part that really sucks is that if you had asked me a few months ago, I would have said three years with that guy wasn't nearly enough.

She walks away. As he revels in his disappointment and self-loathing, an AMBULANCE barrels by, SIREN blaring, LIGHTS flashing. Dodge catches sight of it and we SMASH TO:

EXT. CANYON ROAD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Just after the accident. Lights, sirens. Dodge stumbles, disoriented, next to the car. An EMT steadies him.

DODGE
Where is she? Where is she?

EMT
Who?

DODGE
The blonde!

Off his panicked eyes, waiting for an answer, SMASH BACK TO:

EXT. PARK - NIGHT - PRESENT

Dodge stands in shock at his first memory of the night.

DODGE
What blonde?

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ari's in a Mardi Gras mask. She's hung some red and white streamers and the best party store "carnival" decorations she could find. She watches the clock tick. And tick.

ARI
Why aren't they coming?

GREG (V.O.)
They must be coming.

ARI
I'm done with all of them. You're the only one who's ever here for me. Why don't they get that I just want us to be a family again?

She starts crying, in spite of her best effort not to. **Fantasy Greg** appears and slaps coma-Greg across the face.

GREG
Come on, wake up, she needs you! They all need you. Open your eyes!

A beat -- but nothing happens. Ari hugs her knees and buries her face in them. Greg sits next to her, unable to comfort her, miserable and useless.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - NIGHT

Neal enters the house with a small box. He flips on a light.

NEAL
Anybody home?

No response. He knows where they are. He slumps into a chair and digs through his box of cards. He passes over his prized Michael Jordan card and finds a beat-up photo: two boys, him and Greg. He stares at it, a deep sadness to him.

INT. DANNY'S CAR - NIGHT

Parked in a lot. Dodge, freaking out, sits with Danny.

DODGE
Do you think we hit someone and no one knew about it? Where would she go? What if she's dead?

DANNY
No, if you'd hit someone, she would have been found.

DODGE
Then *what* blonde woman? I don't know any, at least not any I should have been thinking about then.

DANNY
Maybe it's a false memory. It was an extremely traumatic event. Maybe your brain is filling in a gap, you didn't really say "blonde woman."

DODGE
It's such a vivid flash. There's no way it's not real.

DANNY
Are you going to tell the others?

DODGE
I don't want them to worry about it until I know what it means.

Danny nods. He looks at Dodge, a knot of fragility.

DANNY
Maybe you should start coming by my office.

DODGE
Why, you hard up for friends?

DANNY
I think it would help you to...

He sees Dodge's expression -- some mix of denial and fear.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Yeah. I'm hard up for friends.

DODGE
Alright, we can hang out sometimes.

DANNY
Good. Now, we should probably head inside, don't you think?

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ari lies curled up at the bottom of Greg's bed.

Dodge and Danny appear in the doorway. Dodge watches Ari and Greg, thinking. Neal comes up behind them.

NEAL
Greg's always known how to party.

Ari opens her eyes -- sees all of them. She quickly sits up and wipes her face, hoping to destroy any tear residue.

ARI
You guys are late.

DODGE
Unfortunately, that is true.

Ari looks at Neal inscrutably.

NEAL
I know you told me not to come but...family shows up, right?

ARI
Where's Mom?

The guys look at each other, no one's sure. Ari's face falls.

ARI (CONT'D)
She said she was coming.

HELEN
And she's here, with someone she found in the hallway.

Helen enters -- with Zeke, a bag from the airport in hand.

ARI
Zeke!

ZEKE
I wasn't gonna miss Dad's birthday.

Ari practically tackles him with a hug.

ZEKE (CONT'D)
Watch out, I have a very strict you-break-it, you-bought-it rib policy.

ARI
Don't care.

She finally lets go. Dodge and Zeke hug.

DODGE
Glad you're here.

ZEKE
Me too.

ARI
How'd you get out of work?

ZEKE
I pulled some strings. It's good to see you, Uncle Neal.

NEAL
Thanks, I've been working out.
(off everyone's looks)
Am I the only one in this family not allowed to make jokes?

ARI
Usually in this family we make jokes that are actually funny.

But she means it in a nice way. She gives him the tiniest smile. He practically glows. She's letting him in.

She looks past him and sees Violet hovering in the hallway.

ARI (CONT'D)
Violet? What are you doing here?

VIOLET
I didn't want to raincheck. I'm not here to bust in on family time, but I wanted to be here. In case you wanted to talk later or anything. I'm gonna hang in the hallway and --

ARI
Don't be dumb. Get in here.

DANNY
Greg, we've got a whole village here to celebrate with you.

They all turn to look at Greg, remembering the bittersweet reason they're here.

GREG (V.O.)
I'm glad you're all together now. I think you're going to be okay. If I have to go, I'm ready.

HELEN
Ari, did you cut his hair? He looks good.

GREG (V.O.)
But the truth is, I don't really feel like I'm dying.

NEAL
We should sing Happy Birthday, right? Ready? 1, 2, 3.

No one starts. They all look to Neal.

NEAL (CONT'D)
Why did nobody start singing?

ARI
Because you were counting.

NEAL
What, I have to do everything?

ZEKE
Yeah, if you count it, you lead it.

As the family devolves into friendly bickering...

GREG (V.O.)
I'm having a near-life experience.

And with that, we go to --

EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY

Stilt-walkers. Fire-eaters. Painted faces, absurd costumes. There's a surreal feel to everything here.

Greg walks through the crowd. Everyone he passes smiles at him -- they're people he knows. Rachel's a fortune-teller. Fisher's a circus ringmaster. He passes Violet, Danny, a couple friends, all in costumes...

And then a BLONDE WOMAN, a belly dancer. Greg's surprised to see her. He wants to say something, but before he can, she points the other way. He follows her lead...

To see his family. Waiting for him. Their glowing smiles match his as he joins them.

ARI
Happy birthday, Dad.

Our family's finally together, and right now, in this magic moment, everything's as it should be.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

INT. TRASK HOUSE - ARI'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ari sleeps. Dodge enters, shakes her to wake her up.

DODGE
Rise and shine, angry-face. You've got school.

ARI
No, I don't.

DODGE
You do today. If Mom won't make you go, I will.

ARI
I can't, Dodge.

DODGE
Why not?

ARI
Because...I don't fit in there. At the hospital, I'm normal. Everybody there has a tragedy. At school, nobody knows how to deal with me.

DODGE
It's high school. Nobody knows how to deal with each other no matter what. But if Dad wakes up and you're a drop-out, he's not gonna be happy.

ARI
You really think he might wake up?

DODGE
I think...I don't want to live in a world where miracles don't exist.

ARI
Rachel?

DODGE
She hates me.

ARI
I don't think so. She'll come around.

DODGE
I don't deserve to be with anyone right now, especially her. But hopefully, one day. Anyway, get up. School starts in an hour.

He leaves. Ari's left unsure.

GREG (V.O.)
One of the things Dodge wrote about in his high school Anatomy paper was neuroplasticity.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - MORNING

TWO FENCERS in full equipment, masks on, go at it. One of them we know is Mia (from some distinctive branding on her gear). Not-Mia keeps up with her. Coach Duncan watches.

COACH DUNCAN
Next hit's a winner.

A few more lunges and parries, then as Mia lunges, Not-Mia drops down and hits her from below. The bout is over. Mia takes off her mask, trying to pretend she's not pissed.

MIA
Well, it's nice to see that you've been practicing, Kelly.

The fencer takes off her mask -- it's Ari.

ARI
I'm not Kelly. But thanks. I like to call that move the "down and out." It's got a nice ring to it.

Mia glares. Ari smirks. It's on.

GREG (V.O.)
The thing is, brains have an unexpected capacity to adapt.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - ZEKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Zeke sits on his bed, going through emails on his laptop. There's a GRUNT from nearby. He looks over to see Neal on the bed -- Zeke's actually on an air mattress on the floor.

NEAL
Morning.

ZEKE
I can't believe my mom gave you the bed.

NEAL
I guess prodigal brother-in-law beats prodigal son.

ZEKE
Do you even know what the word "prodigal" means?

NEAL
Now that you mention it...no. How long are you staying, anyway?

Zeke looks back at his computer, to the email he'd been staring at. From STACY BISHOP, it says, "*I'm so sorry Tom fired you. This is my fault. I'll call when I can.*"

ZEKE
I'm figuring out a plan.

GREG (V.O.)
Damage creates unexpected opportunities for brains to change.

INT. RACHEL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Rachel stares at her phone. Finally she dials, nervous, and waits as it rings.

DODGE (O.S.)
Hey it's Dodge, leave a message.

Rachel opens her mouth...but nothing comes out. She hangs up.

GREG (V.O.)
Any change a brain makes, to be sure, takes time.

INT. RISSA AND MARGARET'S APARTMENT - DAY

Dodge waits at the door. Margaret answers, a guitar in hand. She's annoyed it's him.

MARGARET
Rissa isn't here.

DODGE
I was actually just here to pick up my vacuum that I forgot.

Margaret points to it in a corner and walks back to her seat on the couch. As he goes to get it, she goes back to playing her guitar. Dodge looks up, watches her.

DODGE (CONT'D)
You're good.

MARGARET
The asshat corporate vacuum guy's musical opinion means a lot to me, thanks.

DODGE
I wasn't always the asshat corporate vacuum guy. I used to play a little.

Margaret hands him the guitar, a challenge. He holds it, just feeling it...then strums it, once. Margaret looks vindicated.

MARGARET
Right, clearly what you meant by "used to play" is you once picked one up in a guitar store when you were 8. Can I have it back?

Then Dodge's fingers go crazy with something complicated and beautiful. He closes his eyes, this release long coming.

When he opens them, Margaret's staring at him, impressed. They make eye contact as he continues to play.

GREG (V.O.)
But sometimes when one connection breaks down, another is made.

INT. TRASK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Helen straightens an old family portrait on the wall. She hears a FEW CHOPPY PIANO NOTES. She turns to see Neal at the piano, struggling to play.

HELEN
What are you doing?

NEAL
I know you said classical. But considering I only took piano lessons for a month as a kid, and I got kicked out for trying to touch Mrs. Walkowski's boob...that's a little out of my league.
(MORE)

NEAL (CONT'D)
But I’m thinking, Lady Gaga’s gonna be a classic one day, right? Check this out, I’m teaching myself Poker Face. You know, to break up the quiet around here.

He plays a few notes. It’s a stretch to call that Poker Face. Regardless, Helen smiles, touched.

HELEN
I didn’t really believe you were here for us. I’m glad I was wrong.

NEAL
It’s surprising the hell out of me too.

GREG (V.O.)
Circuits that seem hardwired are in fact able to remodel and take on new tasks.

Helen opens the closet and pulls out a windbreaker.

NEAL
Where are you off to?

HELEN
I’m taking out the old kayak.

NEAL
The two-seater? Is it hard to paddle one of those alone?

HELEN
It’s a beautiful day to find out.

EXT. BAY - DAY

Out of the fog, Helen emerges, alone in her double kayak. She looks peaceful.

EXT. BAY - LATER

Helen pulls the kayak onto the shore. It’s still half in the water, but she stops. She thinks about it...

Then pushes the kayak back into the water, as hard as she can, setting it adrift. She watches it float off, free.

GREG (V.O.)
The brain abandons dead pathways...

INT. LA ROUGE CLUB - DAY

Jack sits at the empty bar, twirling Helen's flower.

GREG (V.O.)
...and makes new uses for old ones, making it possible for trauma to be overcome.

INT. HOSPITAL - GREG'S ROOM - DAY

Greg's in bed. A NURSE checks his monitors. Fisher comes to the door, supplies in his arms. Just peeking in.

GREG (V.O.)
Neuroplasticity is the brain's coping mechanism.

The Nurse sees Fisher, gives him a nod hello.

GREG (V.O.)
What I'm saying is maybe my brain hasn't been shutting down. Maybe it's just been rewiring. Maybe I'm about to wake up and go home and "that time everyone thought I was brain dead for three months" will just be a funny story I tell at parties and --

FISHER
Did you see that?

NURSE
What?

FISHER
His pinky just twitched.

NURSE
It does that sometimes.

FISHER
It does? Does the family know?

NURSE
He moves his toes, wrinkles his nose, hell, I've even seen him smile. Tricks of the hopeful mind.

GREG (V.O.)
Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

The nurse leaves. Fisher stares at Greg's hand. No movement. Disappointed, he turns to go just as Ari enters.

ARI
Hey Fisher.

FISHER
Hey Ari. Good party last night?

ARI
Yeah. Thanks again for the lights.

FISHER
You're welcome. See you around.

He touches her arm as he passes her out. She glances at his hand. Nope, probably means nothing, right?

She shakes it off and takes a seat by Greg. From her backpack she pulls out the copy of *The Odyssey* that Violet gave her. She opens it, starts leafing through.

ARI
You make any progress today on remembering how to blink, Coma-Dad, or am I about to trounce you in Two Truths and a Lie yet again?

GREG (V.O.)
One of these days, kiddo, I think I might surprise you.

Ari looks up at him, almost as if she heard him. And off his closed eyelids, the possibilities beneath them...

END OF PILOT.