

I'M READY

By Dana Jaffe

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Woman 1, Ariana	Age 20's
Woman 2, Amy, Grace, Julie, Kathryn	Age 30's
Woman 3, Claudia, Audrey, Barbara, Matilda	Age 40- 80's
Woman 4, Denise, Bethany, Sarah, Delilah	Age 20 - 60's
Man 1, Don, Bill	Age 40's
Man 2, Tony, Michael, Patrick, Dan, Martin	Age 20s - 50's

Note: Six actors play twenty characters.

SETTING:

New York City. The present. An empty stage with six chairs. Six actors will portray all twenty roles.

Authors Note: The play contains four rap poetry pieces that are performed by the cast to a background of percussion beats.

Ariana enters to a short drum track.. The drums fade.

ARIANA, Age 28

They thought I was crazy. Out to lunch. Why would anyone keep talking about this private stuff that happened to your body? Yeah, it was wrong what this guy did to you, but girl, keep quiet for God's sake. It's our way. We don't talk about these things. They happen to everyone.

People would listen and then suddenly have to leave the group at the party 'cause they saw an old friend, or suddenly needed a drink, or they would interrupt me. And the looks on their faces, the winces, the shock, the almost-pity. As if it had never happened to any of them? I don't believe that for a freakin' second.

I'm not excessively pretty, I border on the chubby side, so these things didn't happen to me because I'm some beauty that all men want to touch. It started when I was twelve, with Uncle Larry, my Mom's brother. One day I'm alone in his house with him , looking at some pictures on a dresser, and he comes up behind me and rubs himself against my rear end. I got scared

ARIANA (cont'd)

and ran out of that house. I told my mother and she called him on the phone.

"Ari", Mom told me, "Larry said it was just his wallet in his pocket." His *wallet*? At first I thought she didn't believe me, but she said I shouldn't be alone with Uncle Larry in his house anymore.

So, one year later, at Thanksgiving dinner at my Uncle's house, with lots of family there, I sat down on the staircase for just a minute coming down from the upstairs bathroom. Uncle Larry swoops in like the kissing bandit, kisses me hard, and disappears from sight. How grossed out I was, a thirteen-year-old girl with no experience! I was sick to my stomach and didn't want dessert.

Turns out Uncle Larry abused quite a number of relatives, maybe even my mother (his sister), but Mom never said a word about it. Maybe she knew more about Uncle Larry's "wallet" than she let on. She should have told someone....I should have told someone....

Five actors enter and take seats.

I see awful stories in the news every day about rape, child molestation, domestic violence, and sexual mutilation. These are high level crimes. Well, then who tells my story? Where do the women and men go when the abuse is at a lower level? Who tells the everyday stories of the subway, the boardroom, the classroom, and what happens behind closed bedroom doors.

It's important to speak up, to tell the truth. I'm here to tell *my* story.

WOMAN 2:

My story.

WOMAN 3:

My story.

WOMAN 4 :

My story.

MAN 1:

My story.

MAN 2:

My story.

ARIANA

I wanted to write a book, about my experiences, and the stories of others. It seems important. I wrote one children's book, which was published, but this is way different. This is serious. But first, I had to see if there were others like myself, women who had gone through sexual assault and feelings of anger, shame and guilt. I started a blog, and it started to catch on. People from all over wrote back to me and shared their stories. So I thought, why not meet some of them, and hear their whole story. Grace had a problem on her way to school.

GRACE, AGE 21

I go through Penn Station every day to get to school. Always during rush hour in the mornings, also at night if I stay for my late class, experimental psychology. This morning it happened. I'm wearing jeans and sneakers. I got my backpack. I'm walking through the crowds to the escalator. I stop for a minute. Some guy grabs my crotch, hard. Then he runs away laughing. I scream. I hear people laughing. What is this, some kind of gang initiation thing? The guy looks to be about sixteen. It's so weird....Everybody in the station kept on walking. No one stopped, not one person, to ask if I was OK, or if I wanted them to get a cop. I feel invisible. Did anybody even notice? I am very shaken.

I go to stand against the wall, and stand there awhile. I feel a little better. I go to the police unit in the station. I tell the cops what happened. They took a description of the guy. That's all....That's all they did.... Took a description. What the hell? Aren't the cops here to *help* me? I guess not. I miss my first class. I don't feel safe. There's no other way to go to school. I never anyone else about this.....

ARIANA

Claudia and Denise had similar stories, but they happened in different places.

WOMAN 3 Puts on long necklace with large pendant.

This necklace will identify her as needed as Claudia going forward.

CLAUDIA, Age 55

A wedding's supposed to be a celebration. At the temple for my niece's wedding, on a beautiful June day, I hold my prayer book in my left hand. My right hand steadies me on the pew in front. I'm in the back row of worshippers.

Suddenly I'm pushed forward against the pew. Someone is grinding himself into the back of my best satin dress, with force, like a pervert on the subway.... I cannot move. I'm shocked but I can't cry out, the ceremony is taking place. I must be silent. I push roughly backward, turn and see him as he rushes away out a side door. A paunchy, middle-aged man with a blond scraggly beard. I remember seeing him at the cocktail hour. From the groom's side, I think.

My head spins. I run to the bathroom. We're at a *wedding*. Who can I *tell*? This isn't the packed #7 train with some disgusting creep, where you're never safe. This is a family wedding in a synagogue. *I thought I was safe here*. My dress is not ruined..., I think a part of me is.

From his description, I'm able to get a name to his face. He's the groom's second cousin, Barry. I decide to tell my son and daughter. They are sympathetic. I tell my husband, Dan. ...not so sympathetic. He implies that maybe I did something that caused this to happen. Typical Dan. I get courageous and tell the groom's father. He bellows "That's impossible. You've got the wrong guy. Barry's never gotten as much as a traffic ticket." He chuckles and walks away. I tell several others. They don't all believe me. The weekend goes on.

After the wedding, we are not invited to events from that side of the family. My husband's niece, the bride who married into the family, refuses to speak with me civilly. It feels like

CLAUDIA (cont'd)

their family closes rank on me. I am shunned... an outcast. I tried to speak up for myself, to get understanding, maybe to get justice. Hey, why isn't *he* the outcast? Why isn't *he* afraid to walk around in public?

DENISE, Age 34

Ten years ago, I went on an interview for a position at a big NYC hospital. It was time for the mandatory employee health physical. You know the drill: vital signs, health questionnaire, health history, etc. Since when does the male doctor, who looked around ninety, have the right to grab my right breast and give it its own physical? I mean, what the fuck?. I wanted to complain. I wanted to scream at him. I wanted the job more... I let it go. And wouldn't you know, not two years later, the same thing happens at an employee physical at another highly reputable Manhattan hospital. This time a young handsome doctor. As if that makes a difference. He grabbed me and touched my breast, saying that it was a routine part of the exam. I sat in the clinic hallway, steaming mad. I felt sick not only from what he did ...but.at myself, 'cause I was too scared to open my mouth and tell anybody. If I told the hospital administrator or the police, do you think I would get the job?

The doctors think that because you're there for a job interview, and you need their OK, that you won't say anything. That's their safety net. It's like they're privileged to do things that others can't do. I never told my friends about what happened. I took that job, the second one, and I'm still thinking about it to this day. I wonder how long the statute of limitations is in New York. I mean the limit on the amount of time I have to bring charges for this kind of a crime.

DENISE (cont'd)

That's right, it's a real crime! In my mind I dream about bringing charges. If there's still time....

A REAL CRIME

A light drum background track is heard. The actors speak in poetic rhythm.

WOMAN 1

I wanna have the courage ,to speak my mind,

It's a real crime, they should face some time.

WOMAN 3

I'd like to report, my sexual assault.

It's a real crime, they should face some time.

WOMAN 4

Am I over the statute of limitation?

WOMAN 2

Do they think this crime was my imagination?

MAN 2

I'm tired of the shadows , of waiting in line.

It's a real crime, they should face some time.

MAN 1

I shouldn't be afraid, it'll turn out fine,
It's a real crime, they should face some time.

WOMAN 3

It's a real crime

WOMAN 2

It's a real crime

WOMAN 4

If I wasn't so afraid

MAN 2

They would face

WOMAN 1

They would face

WOMAN 4

They would face

WOMAN 2

They would face.

MAN 1

Some time.

WOMAN 3

Some time.

ALL

Some time.

Flourish of drum beats.

DENISE

At 24, shortly after the first job interview,.... I began dating a sweet guy called David. I was a bit of a late bloomer. After going out about a month, David told me that his friend Mike was going to be away for the weekend and left him his apartment in Briarwood, which we could use. It was going to be our first time. I said "Yes." We went to the apartment. It was really nice, I even found a penny on floor, which I thought meant "Good luck." We got all comfy on the bed, and David was so nice to me. When it came time to do it, I suddenly froze up and told him "I can't". "I just can't". David pulled away and I could see that he was shocked, but he was nice about it.

DENISE (cont'd)

As I got older, this happened more and more. I would just freeze up before sex. After a while I stopped even trying to date. So far I haven't married or had any children. I'm just afraid. I mean I have friends, a job, my family, a busy life. But something's always been missing. I still have the lucky penny. I keep it in the jewelry box on top of the drawers near my bed. I just don't feel so, well, lucky.

ARIANA

The first draft of my book only had stories from women in it. But my best friend Diane told me "Sexual abuse is not only a women's issue. There are many men affected by sexual abuse, or being unjustly accused." I met Don at about that time.

MAN 1 puts on a grey hoodie sweatshirt, which will identify him as Don going forward.

DON, Age 43

Chrissie really wanted that promotion. We worked on the ninth floor, cleaning offices last night, till about, uh... 9:00. The cleaning service is part of the company. It's not like one of those private cleaning services. After my shift this morning, I get called up to Corporate on the 12th floor. "Chrissie Williams accused you of forcible touching last night", the company president, John Singleton, tells me. Forcible touching? Uh...what? I never went near this woman. I never went near any woman. The only time we touched was when a bottle of glass cleaner fell on the floor and we like both reached to pick it up. I brushed her hand.

DON (cont'd)

Mr. Singleton told me I was suspended pending an investigation, that I should leave the building. He advised me not to say anything without a lawyer present. Like... what? They suspend me first, and they investigate me later?

I never liked Chrissie. She's mean, uh, competitive and right now we are up for the same promotion... to shift manager. Is this her way of like knocking me out of the way? I go home and call my wife Delilah, who comes home from work. Delilah has never trusted Chrissie. She met her at last year's holiday party and instantly disliked her. Uh, we don't have the money for a regular lawyer, so Delilah calls Legal Aid.

I sit in my recliner sorta in shock.... I was brought up to be very polite to women. I have never said as much as a bad word to a woman, even if she was being difficult with me. I certainly never touched a woman. It's not right. People are going to hear about this allegation! And people always talk! And they believe what they want to believe. Even your best friends can have suspicions. How will this affect my job, or future job prospects? Will I be able to work again, even if I'm found innocent? My social life? We have two kids in school. They may hear about this from the other kids, about *their* Dad. What do we do for money now? We can't get along on Delilah's salary as an office assistant. I've heard these investigations take like a long time. What is going to happen ? I'm panicking...

I 'm mad, uh, *overwhelmed*. I read the news. Women think they can get any man to lose his job these days if they just like say the word. This is crap! It shouldn't work this way. What am I supposed to do now?

DELILAH, Age 41

I came home from work and Don was on the couch. He was crying. I've only seen him cry once, when his Dad died. a few years ago. So this must be damn serious. Don tells me what happened at work. Thank God the kids are at school right now. I gotta tell you, I have never liked this Chrissie. I've seen her at two office Christmas parties, trying to flirt with the top brass, when she's only the cleaning staff. And now she, Ms. Flirt, is the one accusing my husband of forcible touching?

Touching other women is not Don's style. We have been at parties twice where neighborhood women came on to him, and he just gently moved them away. If I was any closer I wouldn't have been so gentle. I believe in his loyalty. I believe in his respect for women. Chrissie is threatening to ruin Don's job, his reputation, and my family, all in one move. What should I do? This could go on for a while. My job isn't enough to hold us. We have expenses... It's not just food and clothing. David, my son, is a Type I diabetic...there are always doctor's appointments.... and expenses outside the insurance...

I called Legal Aid for Don and hopefully they'll call back soon. In the meantime, just put me alone in a room with Chrissie for five minutes.... I'll show her some forcible touching.... You treat my husband with respect...

ARIANA

I've learned that Me Too issues can affect all kinds of people. Julie and Bethany are concerned about family members.

JULIE, Age 38

If you're a man and the Me Too movement started when you were at least forty, you have *some* experience with sex. My son Charlie is only sixteen, a high school junior, and he's suddenly afraid to date girls. He reads the Internet. He's just learning his way with girls. He doesn't want to get in trouble for looking at a girl the wrong way, or God forbid, touching her the wrong way. He's had a thing for this girl Nancy, in his English class, for the last year. It sounds like she likes him too. He won't even ask her on a group date or to his friend Jacob's parties.

Charlie has thick brown hair, bushy eyebrows, and piercing blue eyes. I'm proud of him. And not just because I'm his mother, I think girls find him attractive. But now he's afraid.

He's afraid because he read about a supreme court justice candidate who almost was ruined for what he may have done in high school. He sees television crime shows in which young girls accuse innocent boys of rape, and how they have to fight for their lives to be protected.

Teens have always had worries about sex, about rejection, unwanted pregnancy, STDs. Now, they can worry about legal issues as well. In my day, guys would take you to the movies on a date and curl their arm around your shoulders just to "cop a feel". Now this could put a guy in a jail cell for inappropriate touching. They can use that arm to phone for a lawyer.

So how is Charlie supposed to go out and have normal teenage experiences? Charlie says he's never going to date. Ever. Well, he says that now..... You know, it all doesn't have to be that harsh! There are levels! Every inappropriate touch does not have to rise to the level of a jail sentence or a ruined life! There are clear legal punishments for rape, or sexually abusing underage kids. But for certain acts or behaviors, at least in some states, the

JULIE (cont'd)

law is still a grey area. My Charlie is gonna have a lifetime of therapy bills.... And I just want him to be happy
..... I'd like some grandchildren, too.

BETHANY, Age 36

The principal from my daughter's school calls. She says it is urgent. My husband and I must come to her office today to talk about Kristin. No, Kristin is fine. There was an incident in class that we must discuss. I leave my office and drive over to the school. My husband Alan does also, grudgingly. He was just finishing a client meeting and arrives about ten minutes after I do. And there I am, sitting apprehensively on a long wooden bench outside of the principal's office. Brings back memories, doesn't it?The teacher arrives with Kristin and we enter the room.

Mrs. Hawthorne informs us that Kristin created a problem in class this morning, and is being suspended for three days. "What's 'suspended, Mommy?'" asks Kristin. *She's only five.* "What did my five-year-old do that got her suspended from kindergarten?" I ask, trying to keep it together.

According to her teacher, Miss Plum, Kristin went right up to Tommy Krieger, and kissed him... on the lips! According to her teacher, Tommy was upset by this, and started wiping his mouth in disgust. Then he calmed down. Then, Kristen kissed him again. At which

BETHANY (cont'd)

point Miss Plum pulled Kristen into the hallway and into an empty classroom.

“I thought kissing was a sign of affection,” I say, steaming on the inside. “Let’s ask Kristin about it.” Alan hangs back and says nothing. “Kristin, why did you kiss Tommy?” the principal asks. Kristin looks up shyly and says “ They kiss on TV!... I wanted... to try.” Mrs. Hawthorne asks what kind of adult television we are letting our child watch and at what hours? At this point Alan starts on a rampage. “You have no right calling us in here over innocent child behavior. You have no right suspending my child over a kiss... Especially in kindergarten,,” he says. “ I’m taking my daughter home now, and we will handle this situation with her. She will be in school tomorrow. Any further talk of suspension, you can call my lawyer.” We grab Kristin, who by now is crying. by the hand, and leave. I am furious at the principal and the teacher, but not as verbal as my husband about it.

What am I supposed to tell my daughter? By bedtime, Kristen has settled down. I sit on her bed and explain. That kissing is great when you love someone. That kissing and hugging are private and shouldn’t take place at school. I ask her not to kiss anyone at school. She has many questions. The ones I fumble with are “ Mommy, why did they get so mad?” and “Doesn’t Mrs. Hawthorne like to kiss?” How do I draw lines on kissing and touching for a five-year-old, when some adults can’t stay within the lines? How much of my explanation does Kristen understand? Now Kristen asks for a favorite story. She settles down to sleep. I wonder, as always, if I have answered her questions well enough.

BETHANY (cont'd)

Downstairs, I thank Alan for standing up for us today. He usually doesn't speak up when I need him to. Today he was a champion. I give him a kiss, and we go to bed.

ARIANA

Matilda doesn't know if Me Too affects her at all....

MATILDA , Age 86

I was walkin down Hollis Court Boulevard last week, mindin' my own business and pushin my laundry cart filled with groceries, my drugstore pills, my Depends. Suddenly a hand grabs me. On my ass! Hard! Now, I haven't felt a hand on that ass since 1982. Well, there is Melvin, my retired neighbor. I'm not too shy to say that we flirt a bit, Melvin and I, at least when his wife is back in the apartment somewheres. But Melvin usually touches my hand, my shoulder. Well, it felt good, a little rougher than I like, maybe, but good. The man walks by me and I can see that it is Melvin. Yes, indeed! Heh-heh.

When I was in my twenties, and thirties, I had so many boyfriends I lost count. Men used to line up to touch that pretty little ass. Heh-heh. Now the pickins are slimmer, few and far in-between.

I told my granddaughter about this thing on Hollis Court Boulevard. Debbie was shocked, said what Melvin did to me is a crime now, like I could have called the police just for a man

MATILDA (cont'd)

grabbin my ass. Heh-Heh. *(laughs)* She wanted to know more like the time, place, what he looked like, so she could help me and look into it. I wanted to know more, like his phone number, his plans for the week, so I could see him again. I could use a little more grabsies and cuddlies in my life. Heh-Heh.

Debbie told me about the “Me Too” Movement, and how it is helpin’ women of all ages have more independence , more freedom. Y’know, I think I’m too old for that now. I don’t wanna see any women get hurt, but I’m gonna leave the politics for the younger people. I’m just an old woman who flirts with my neighbor. It’s consensual, ain’t that a word? I told Debbie, “Things ain’t always what they seem.” I know this man. I mean there are things I’d like to do to him. *(laughs)*. Heh-heh. Debbie said wait a minute; you’re giving consent, Grandma. You *want* him to do this. So there’s no crime. There’s no problem.... I said ,“Except when he misses a day!”....., After Melvin ran by me, I hung on to my laundry cart and yelled “ Hey there, where ya goin?... Where are you goin? He was long gone.

ARIANA

Amy and Sarah have had unique experiences...

WOMAN 2 puts on a long blue scarf and ties it. The scarf will identify her as AMY going forward.

AMY, Age 32

It started when I was very young. When you're seven years old, you trust adults, 'cause that's all you know how to do. Until my uncle came into my bedroom and started molesting me when he was babysitting me. Suddenly adult men became very scary. I sensed that it was wrong how he was playing with me; a child just knows right from wrong. He made me promise not to tell my parents, not to tell anyone. I didn't. I am an only child and I thought I was the only kid this was happening to. I was scared whenever I heard my parents were going out, and Uncle Jerry was coming over. I sometimes woke up to hear my parents return. They asked Uncle Jerry "Did Amy have a good night?", and he would answer sweetly, "She sure did".

I felt guilty, like what was happening was my fault. I grew up shy and withdrawn, not wanting to play outside with the other kids. My dad just called me his "Shy girl", and if he ever asked what was wrong, I would stand up tall and bravely say "Nothing". It seemed like the only way to survive was to pretend it wasn't happening. Uncle Jerry was the most popular and the most comical of my three uncles, the life of the party, and everyone loved him. Who would believe me over him? I never had a great relationship with my Mom. She never listens to me when I talk, and I felt I couldn't tell her about Uncle Jerry. My father and I got on better, but I felt that Dad would take Jerry's side also. I was just a kid, I felt like I was stuck, where I knew no one would listen to me... because they were all adults.

My abuse went on for five years, ending when I was twelve, when I started to mature a little. It has affected my entire adult life. When I was older, whenever I met a man I liked, I couldn't let myself trust him. This ended several good relationships, including one with Paul, who I thought I loved. I'm afraid to have kids, I'm afraid I might not be able to protect them.. I

AMY (cont'd)

mean, nobody ever protected me... I've never married. I work from home, and some days it's hard to leave the house. I've been seeing therapists for years, but it never helps enough. I guess I'm afraid of the world out there, and definitely afraid of men.

ARIANA

Talking with Amy reminded me so much of my own story. I was up almost all night writing her piece. All the feelings are the same. It's very hard to feel them again, but that just spurs me to go on with the book.

SARAH, Age 53

I don't love my job. I need my job. I'm a private home health aide and you'll find me livin' in Mr. Johnson's house, or Mrs. Paulson's home, helpin' them out after they have surgery or when they've been sick.. I cook their meals, help them bathe and dress, do the food shoppin', take them to the doctor for appointments. My current client, Mr. Winters, just found out that he has gout on top of his heart problems and the doctor wants him completely off his feet for three days and on a special diet. This is all I need to deal with right now. I've seen Mr. Winters leer at me when I'm bathing him and dressing him, and I don't like it. . . . Anyway.... I get my own room in the house, sometimes just an old rollaway single bed that their teenager used to sleep in. I mean there's hardly enough room for my stuff, my special comforter and my Sarah Vaughn CDs. I mean I'm livin' here. Anyway....

I'm usually hired by a family member, their daughter or their son. And some of these people

SARAH (Age 53)

are picky! They like only Campbell's tomato soup when another brand is on sale. They like their sheets folded and their beds made just so. One man didn't have a shopping cart for me to go to the store with. So I asked to buy one, with four wheels, like they've had for years. I bought the cart and this man is so cheap, he roars because it has four wheels instead of two, and cost him \$69.99. I mean, those two-wheelers went out with his youth! He tried to take it out of my pay, but I wouldn't let him. Anyway.... This is my job, and I try to do it the way they like.

Lately I've been having some trouble with Mr. Winters. When I'm in the kitchen, washing the dishes at the sink, he keeps sneaking up behind me and pinching my rear. It hurts! He makes suggestive comments when I'm bathing him. and has tried to pull me by my arm into the bed when I'm making up his bed. He once grabbed my breast when I was helping him dress. I have complained to him, but he doesn't stop. I have complained to his daughter, and she laughs it off.

I'd like to leave this house, but I need the money for me and my daughter. I have no other income and these jobs don't come by every day. But I hate this! My friend Angela, another aide, told me that if we worked for a company we'd have Title Seven, whatever that is, to protect us from these kinds of men. But she says you need to be in a company with fifteen people to have Title Seven. And Angela and I, and all of us private home aides work alone.

What am I supposed to do now? Pick up and leave the job? How come these fifteen people with their Title Seven get protected? I need a Title Seven... I need a Title Something..., I'll tell you that.

Chairs are moved to form an “audience” facing a speaker standing stage left . Women and men form the support group.

ARIANA

Sarah needs protection, like Title Seven of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title Seven makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any person based on race, creed, color, national origin, religion, age, gender sexual orientation and ten other categories . We all need protection. And better protection may come in the form of a legal system that is more fair, more equal, and doesn't have as many loopholes, like the statute of limitations, that affect when or how the law can be applied. Barbara was invited to speak at my Sexual Assault Victims Group. They're in the blog too.

BARBARA, Age 56

Speaks to meeting. I'm not your typical state supreme court justice. I'm a woman, which is not that common. Second, my daughter, Chloe, was sexually assaulted at her job four years ago. Her case had a good outcome, and now I have to recuse myself from all sexual assault cases that come before me. My daughter was thirty years old and the most courageous woman I know, as she faced the courtroom and told her story.

I was happy when the Me Too movement started, I think their advocacy will continue to spur legal changes which I thoroughly approve of. Legal change, which takes place in the legislature, takes time. I am glad that so many more women are coming forward, telling their

BARBARA(cont'd)

stories, and commencing cases against their offenders. There are Federal sexual abuse laws specific to aspects of the constitution. The state sexual abuse laws are different in every state, in terms of categorization of the crimes. Some of the rules pertaining to these laws can create difficulties.

For example, if Chloe had waited more than five years to report her assault, she would have missed the statute of limitations to report the crime and would not have been able to bring legal action in our state. If Chloe's company had paid her in a settlement which included a non-disclosure agreement (that she cannot talk about or bring suit for the incident), she would have been effectively silenced. The use of non-disclosure agreements is now being questioned. Through the advocacy of the Me Too movement, at least six states have limited the use of non-disclosure agreements. Finally, if Chloe's company did not have mandatory reporting laws, her supervisor would not have been required to bring forward her complaint to management. Many states and companies differ in their approach to these policies. There is room for improvement in these areas pertaining to the law.

The Me Too movement has advocated in many areas including the statutes of limitations, non-disclosure agreements and improving the testing of the backlog of rape kits in many states.

It is important for you to know that you can always ask for help. There is always someone to talk to, by calling the RAINN (Rape Abuse and Incest National Network). I have left their brochure for you with the hotline phone number on the table, along with other resources that can be helpful to you.

Chloe is doing better now. She sees a therapist each week, and she was able to continue

BARBARA (cont'd)

working at her job. Chloe was “lucky”, in the sense that her offender was prosecuted, and he received the sentence required by the law. I hope that we are moving in the right direction. Do you have any questions? Yes?

WOMAN 4

How do you decide whether to actually do it, or not? Bring charges.... It's a big deal....

BARBARA

People have a great reluctance in telling what happened to them, and especially in bringing charges. It's a big decision and one only an individual can make. I'm not here to advise anyone about whether to bring charges or not.....there are legal assistance groups and counselors that can walk you through the process. advise you about this. I brought some website information about these groups for you, such as the Times Up Legal Defense Fund. You know, many of these incidents have no witnesses and that makes it difficult to prosecute a crime. There are other forms of evidence. Once you have learned the process, ask yourself this question: Should you speak up? What makes you feel better and stronger inside? Which decision works for you? Which can you live with? Any other questions?

WOMAN 2

When did the Me Too movement begin, and what is it's main purpose?

BARBARA

The Me Too movement began in 2006 but came to national attention in 2017. #MeToo believes in the radical possibilities of a movement against sexual violence, led by survivors of sexual violence. Purposes include increasing resources for victims and building a community of advocates, led by survivors. An action arm of the Me Too movement is the Times Up Movement. Brochures are in the back. I think you'll find them to be of great interest. Other questions?

WOMAN 4

I've heard that New York State recently changed the statutes of limitations on sex crimes. Can you tell us about that?

BARBARA

Yes, thank you. “ The NY Child Victims Act, first approved in 2019 and extended during the COVID pandemic, opened a “look-back” window for abuse survivors to file civil claims, regardless of how long ago the abuse occurred. In 2022, lawmakers passed the Adult Survivors Act, for people aged 18 and older. The deadline to file cases expired Nov. 23, 2023. Now lawmakers and advocates hope to go farther during the 2024 legislative session while also aiding survivors not covered by the initial laws. This includes ending the statute of limitations for most childhood sexual abuse claims; a move that could result in more cases being filed.”¹

I feel like we can celebrate these recent and upcoming changes in the law.

A light drum background recording is heard. Chairs are turned forward. The actors speak in poetic rhythm.

EQUAL PROTECTION

WOMAN 1

The law must protect

MAN 2

Everyone

WOMAN 3

Woman, man, child,

MAN 1

Daughter, son.

WOMAN 2

The law can protect us from an abuser.

WOMAN 1

Protect us from a false accuser.

WOMAN 4

Our laws are mighty

WOMAN 2

But loopholes exist

MAN 2

That weaken the laws

WOMAN 4

Some people get missed.

MAN 1

I want equal protection

WOMAN 1

Equal protection.

WOMAN 2

Let's keep moving in the right direction.

WOMAN 4

Longer statutes

MAN 1

of limitations

MAN 2

Justice will benefit

WOMAN 2

From the duration.

WOMAN 4

No more non-disclosure deals,

MAN 1

The time has come to keep it real.

WOMAN 2

Title VII for everyone,

WOMAN 4

An idea now whose time has come.

WOMAN 1

I want equal protection.

WOMAN 3

Equal protection.

MAN 1

Let's keep moving

WOMAN 2

in the right direction

WOMAN 1

Equal Protection

WOMAN 3

Equal Protection

MAN 1

Let's keep moving

WOMAN 2

In the right

WOMAN 3

In the right

WOMAN 1

In the right

ALL

In the right

ALL

Direction.

Flourish of drum beats.

Two chairs are set across downstage center. Ariana and Kathryn, interviewer for WYZ TV, sit.

KATHRYN

We are meeting today with Ariana Rodriguez, author of the internet blog “My Story, Your Story”, which has gone viral in just a short time. Ariana, did you know your blog is reaching over 170,000 readers?

ARIANA

Yes, I’m not surprised. So many women and men have had experience with sexual abuse. It affects people of every age, sex, race....

KATHRYN

Did you say men? Do men read your blog and write to you?

ARIANA

Not that many yet.. Many men have been affected by sexual abuse, as a victim, family member of a victim, or as someone unjustly accused.

KATHRYN

Wow, that's a little surprising!. Tell us about yourself. What made you want to start the blog?

ARIANA

The main reason for the blog, and the book I'm working on now, is to let sexual abuse victims, even victims of minor abuse, know that they are not alone. There is a large powerful community of people who have been affected. My hope is that we can join together for change.

KATHRYN

What kind of changes would you like to see?

ARIANA

Legal change in the court system, social change, changes in victim's rights, ..., please read my blog.... and read my book.... I'm speaking with publishers, and hope to have it out be the end of the year.

KATHRYN

Ariana, what kind of feedback have you received for the blog?

ARIANA

I've received many positive comments from sexual abuse victims. They are so glad to have the blog as a place to voice their opinions and speak .. to share what they have been afraid to share. I

ARIANA (cont'd)

have heard from their partners, parents and children, about the truths being shared and the effect on their loved ones.

KATHRYN

And are there any nay-sayers? Any negative comments?

ARIANA

There have some negative and downright nasty comments, mostly from men who would like to quash what I'm saying. They think that this is just a women's issue, and that women shouldn't speak out.

KATHRYN

Ariana, are any of the stories in the blog about you?

ARIANA

Yes, especially when I first started writing it. If I can share my experiences, then other people can share too.

KATHRYN

Are you ever afraid?

ARIANA

I was afraid when I was being sexually attacked, I was really frightened. Now, I'm afraid to

ARIANA (cont'd)

NOT write this blog and this book. From the comments I get, people are telling me what I am doing is important.

KATHRYN

Ariana, thank you for joining us today at WYZ, Wishing you the best with your blog. I look forward to your book later in the year. Good luck.

Kathryn exits. A third chair is added. All chairs face forward. Claudia sits center. Ariana moves SL.

ARIANA

Claudia, and her husband Dan continue their stories.

CLAUDIA

A month after that awful wedding, I was at my therapist, telling my story again. Sally, the therapist, asked me, “What is stopping you from going after this guy?” My first reaction was “Nothing.” I thought about it. I went home and spoke with my husband. Dan never totally believed me that this attack happened, and vehemently disagreed with going to the police, a month after the wedding. “You’ll upset the whole family even more”, he told me. “You’ll have to take time off from work. No good will come from this.” I have always been shocked and sickened that Dan doesn’t believe me about the attack. It threatens the very basis of our marriage, something I don’t like to think about. I said “Yeah, I’ll have to take off time from my part-time job at the day care center, the only job you agreed to let me have. Listen, *you* weren’t the one who was attacked. I’m going to the police.” Dan said to leave him out of it and left the room.

DAN, Age 57

I can't believe she wants to do this....why get the police involved in something that *might have* happened over a month ago? I don't need all the crap that's been going on in this family.

It was my niece, my brother Carl's daughter who got married. Now, not only does Claudia not get invited to anything happening in Carl's family, I don't get invited either. My own brother, and we're taking sides, hardly talking. If Claudia goes to the police and there's a trial, the whole thing will be public! The whole neighborhood will know! Why doesn't she just listen to me, like a wife is supposed to? Why can't she just let it pass and leave it alone? She never can. Early in our marriage, I had a friendship with Danielle at the office. We had drinks a few times, but it never became an affair. Claudia found out about it, the drinks, and she almost left me over that. She certainly hasn't let me forget about it for twenty-two years, brings it up almost every time we have an argument.

Now this thing with Barry at the wedding. I was there, I didn't see anything, I didn't hear anything. How do I know it actually happened? Claudia always tells the truth, but this time I just don't know.....

Claudia exits. Amy, Don and Dan (now Tony) sit in the three downstage chairs.

AMY

At twenty-three, I told a therapist about my uncle and my abuse. I grew up in a family where we were taught to keep things inside. But all those years, from childhood to twenty-three, the abuse was killing me from the inside out. I faced everything in my life as a victim; I had no confidence. Once I started to tell people, I started to get some help. I joined a therapy group for sexual abuse victims, which has been both comforting and sometimes painful. At age twenty-five, with help from the group, I decided that I wanted to go to the police about my uncle. . It turned out that I was still within the statute of limitations in my state to bring charges against Uncle Jerry. I asked for help from Aunt Sheila, my father's sister, who is an attorney. I told her about Uncle Jerry and the abuse.. She was shocked, and I was surprised at how supportive she was. She said she couldn't be my attorney, but she would find an appropriate attorney who handles this kind of case. It turned out she had an abuse history herself. She agreed to keep my story private from the family. I decided to move out of my parent's house and get my own place. I couldn't bear the chaos that my decision would bring to the family. I still hadn't told them about Uncle Jerry. Although Aunt Sheila was supportive, I didn't see my parents and the others as taking my side.

DON

They let me back into the building at work, back to my locker, you know to pick up some personal stuff that I left there. Two security guards come with me. That means everyone, on the way down and the way up, is staring at me. It just makes it worse. I'm really pissed, but I don't say anything in front of the guards. I grab my stuff. Everyone is glaring at me except my friend Matt, at the next locker. He looks worried, and like sympathetic. I'll, uh, call him when

DON (cont'd)

I get home.

I go home and call Matt. I want to know what they are saying about me. Matt says most of the women think I did it, and the men think I did nothing. There's nothing from Mr. Singleton's office on the suspension. Chrissie isn't answering any questions. Uh, none of this is helping me. I'm worried about my family. We only have like about a month of savings. The phone rings. It's Legal Aid. I have an appointment with them tomorrow morning.

TONY, Age 43

My friend Don, he got suspended from his job three weeks ago, fuh what they call "forcible touchin", an act I do not believe he did. I know him too well. I know his history. He dated my sista for years. Back in Canarsie. Back in the day . He's a nice guy. He called the Legal Aid lawyers and they are workin with him. Meanwhile, there's little money comin in and the rent is due next week.

Sounds like "Me Too" struck again. Every day you hear about anotha famous guy goin' on trial for a sex crime. We don't hear about the non-famous guys. And every time I hear dis, I feel like all men is being attacked.

I mean, everybody has a bad day occasionally and perhaps uses da wrong word with another person. In this atmosphere, I'm afraid to open my mouth, I feel like I could go to jail for one wrong word or one meaningless touch. Example: Let's say I'm in public and a woman trips on the sidewalk. Am I supposed to not try to help her up cause one of my hands might brush her chest? I used to be a helpful guy. You are *not* going to find me helping anyone,

TONY (cont'd)

anymore.

I understand that many women, and guys, have been sexually abused and it is very important to find and report their abusers. But doesn't the "Me Too" crowd understand that most guys, the majority of guys, are good people? We're not trying to hurt anybody. This is going too much in the negative direction of accusing everyone. It's like a feeding frenzy. Like way too much pizza and calzones, you know what I mean? If you are considered "guilty" without evidence, and *then* investigated, that is not the American way. I'm actually frightened. Frightened out there on the street. Most guys won't tell you that. But I am. I'm a good friend. I'm gonna see Don through his problem, no matter how long it takes. But this has to stop. It's just not right.

AMY

Aunt Sheila helped me find an attorney. I realized I was going to have to tell my story in court, in front of a room full of people, with Uncle Jerry in the room. I almost ran out of the

AMY (cont'd)

attorney's office. I mean, I'm afraid to go out of the house sometimes, how am I supposed to tell my story in front of strangers? How am I supposed to tell my story to Uncle Jerry's face? The kids in school used to laugh at me when I could hardly speak up in class, and never in front of the class! I was terrified. Susan, the attorney, had seen this many times before. She wanted to work with me and suggested a speaking coach to help me with that.. She said that it was a long time before an actual court date would come up. I wasn't so sure. I told her I'd think about it.

AMY (cont'd)

My therapist suggested yesterday that I actually see my parents and tell them. It would be helpful to have them in court with me. I haven't seen them in about six months, since I moved out..

Chairs are moved downstage; two chairs facing one, like a sofa facing a chair. Amy's parents, Audrey and Martin enter and take the 'sofa'. Amy sits in the chair facing them.

AMY

How are you, Mom? And Dad?

AUDREY

Rambles. Hello, dear. Ever since Aunt Susan had her mastectomy, she's been impossible to get on the phone...either the phone is busy or she doesn't call me back.... I leave messages on her voicemail almost every day and she doesn't...

MARTIN

Audrey, slow down. We haven't seen Amy in almost six months...

AUDREY

But Amy's fine, dear. It's Susan I'm worried about. I don't understand how someone doesn't answer six messages. Ted says she came through the surgery OK, but she's my best friend and...

AMY

Mom!...

AUDREY

Of course Ted doesn't listen to me either....He always has to have the last word in every conversation...Why, just last week...

MARTIN

Please, Audrey...

AMY

Mom...MOM...I am not fine!

MARTIN

You're not fine?.

AMY

Annoyed. No, I am not *fine*.

AUDREY

Calmly. Oh! What's wrong, dear?

AMY

Everything. You knew when I moved out that something was wrong.

MARTIN

Well, yeah, I guessed...but I didn't guess what.. You've never told us.

AMY

Well, Mom never listens.

AUDREY

I listen. I do listen sometimes..... But sometimes I'm too busy talking to hear what people say.

AMY

It started when I was only seven. The two of you went out a lot on the weekends, like most parents do...

AUDREY

Yes, we went out. Do you remember this one time.?

MARTIN

Audrey, let her talk!.. What happened when you were seven? We went out

AMY

And you had babysitters,,,like Uncle Jerry....

AUDREY

I was glad Jerry was available to take care of you...

AMY

He came into my room. Mom! After I was asleep... He made me play games...He hurt me...

MARTIN

Oh my God, Amy. Are you saying?

AUDREY

Is she saying what? What is she saying, Martin?

MARTIN

She's saying that she was raped! Your brother Jerry raped her!

AMY

Wait! He sexually abused me. For five years. It wasn't rape. He touched me. *Bursts into tears.*
It's against the law! I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I couldn't tell you...

AUDREY

My brother Jerry? He couldn't have. Oh, c'mon, he's great. You're making this up!

MARTIN

She's trying to tell us something important!

AMY

It's so hard to tell you anything!

AUDREY

Oh c'mon, you were a child! You don't remember...

AMY

Quietly. I was a child. And I remember every detail like it was happening now. What he *did* to me.....I was so scared every time you were going out, and he was the sitter... I knew what he was doing was wrong...

MARTIN

Oh my God! Why didn't you tell us?

AMY

It's her brother...She loves Uncle Jerry... She would never believe me..., and clearly, she doesn't.

AUDREY

It's not that I don't believe you... I think you're confused....

MARTIN

But I would have believed you...I would have helped.

AMY

Tearful. Thank you, Dad. I just couldn't....You can...You can help me now....

AUDREY

Stop this!

MARTIN

How can I help?

AMY

You can be in the courtroom. To support me.

AUDREY

Quietly. The courtroom?

AMY

I'm pressing charges against Jerry. For what he did to me as a child. Felony sexual assault. I asked the two of you to come here... so I could tell you...

AUDREY

You are not ..

MARTIN

This happened when you were a child...

AMY

The law lets me act on it now.

AUDREY

You're not taking Jerry to court! He's my brother!

MARTIN

And THIS is your daughter! She needs your help...

AUDREY

Amy, I love you dear.... Maybe it did happen..... Maybe Jerry made a mistake....But I think you are taking this too far. *..pressing charges?*

AMY

Mom, I've had a lot of time to think about this. More time than you and Dad. It really happened...for five years....and I would like you and Dad to be sitting in the courtroom for me...

AUDREY

You..you don't know what you're asking.. Over my dead body you're taking Jerry to court!

AMY

Yes, Mom, I am.

AUDREY

God...I need some air.. I need to get out of here...You're not *thinking*...

Audrey rises and starts to leave SL.

AMY

Bitter. Right...

MARTIN

Don't you walk out.....

AUDREY

I'm just taking a walk..

AMY

Like always...

AUDREY

Loud. And you're not doing *anything*.

Audrey exits. Amy begins crying.

MARTIN

Bitterly. You know your mother.....Amy, I will be in that courtroom for you. I can tell you that.

AMY

Thank you, Dad.

Martin and Amy reach out to hug.

MARTIN

I love you, Amy. Not to worry.

AMY

Love you, Dad.

*Brief blackout. Chairs are moved upstage, two chairs are left downstage
Audrey returns, Ariana meets with Bill, her college writing teacher.*

BILL

What's up? Haven't seen you in, what's it been, five years? You look *great!*

ARIANA

I want to talk to you about the draft for my book.

BILL

I read it. Thanks for sending. Good stuff!

ARIANA

I think it's good, but I'm getting nowhere with it. I have rejections from nineteen publishers. I'm starting to get depressed.

BILL

Don't get down. The twentieth is the charm! No, seriously, did any of them send comments?

ARIANA

A few.

BILL

I read the draft, I really think you've got something here. Don't stop now. Their stories deserve to be told.

ARIANA

Would you help me with the book?

BILL

Stares at Ariana. Uh, sure, . How about over dinner this week? I know a great Italian place on 3rd

ARIANA

Well, Dinner? Is this a working dinner?. .

BILL

It doesn't have to be... let's see where it goes.. ..I've got lots of ideas... I mean for the book.....

ARIANA

Rising. Right. I'll give that some thought....

Starts to walk.

ARIANA (cont'd)

I'll text you...

Ariana exits. Chairs are reset.

ARIANA

I met Michael at a restaurant in the better part of the city...

MICHAEL, Age 35

I'm an architect and I spent hours working at my drafting table, which may not be the best thing for my back. I've been having a lot of back pain and sciatica lately. My wife Cynthia suggested that I go to her chiropractor. Dr. Anna Segran. At Dr. Segran's office, she asked me to strip down to my boxers and wait on the treatment table. Working on my back, Dr. Segran did a number of adjustments, and massage techniques and my back cracked a few times, which she said was normal. I turned on my back and she worked on my neck.. which felt great. Suddenly, while my eyes were closed, . Dr. Segran moved to the side of the table. Reached under the sheet and started touching my privates. I gasped in shock and jumped up on the table. " Is this part of the treatment"? I asked Dr. Segran. She said "It's an extra part. I jumped off the table, grabbed my clothes and ran out the room to the waiting room bathroom to get dressed. And then left the office as soon as I could. I don't like anyone touching me there except for my partner. I went home quickly and told Cynthia what happened. Cynthia said I could call the police and report this incident. I was really shocked, I mean, do men get abused by women? It's embarrassing, and I felt like a victim.

I went to the local precinct the next day.

I DON'T WANNA BE

A light drum background track is heard. The actors speak

in poetic rhythm.

WOMAN 2

I was all alone
Out on the street
When a predator gave me
A quick retreat

WOMAN 4

It was late at night
And he did me wrong
It was all I could do
To try to stay strong

WOMAN 3

After he left me
On the floor
I said” I don’t wanna be
a victim no more”.

WOMAN 1

As a vic I was helpless
I was powerless to move
It was difficult to speak
And I had to prove
That it really happened

That is really took place,
Can't you see these tears
Streaming down on my face

WOMAN 2

Your very own sister
Might not believe you
The police, the lawyers
Could try to deceive you

MAN 1

I said I don't want to be
I don't want to be
I don't to be
A victim no more.

WOMAN 1

I don't wanna be
I don't wanna be
I don't wanna be
A victim no more.

MAN 2

I'm gonna stand up

Gonna take my time.

Gonna tell the world

Have them face their crime.

WOMAN 3

It's gonna take courage

I'm not lyin'

Don't wanna stay in my room just cryin'

WOMAN 4

Tell a good friend

Tell a therapy group

When people bond together

They can recoup

WOMAN 1

Their sanity, their joy,

Their self-esteem

Things might seem hopeful

If we work as a team

WOMAN 3

I don't wanna be

I don't wanna be

I don't wanna be

A victim no more.

WOMAN 2

I don't wanna be

WOMAN 1

I don't wanna be

MAN 1

No more.

WOMAN 2

No more.

WOMAN 3

No more.

ALL

No More.

A flourish of drum beats.

ARIANA

Denise has had a few years to think it through...

DENISE

Since those two incidents when I was molested during hospital job interviews, I've had a lot of time to think. And many years to work, I got a very good job as a health administrator after the second incident. I always dreamed of taking these two doctors to court. I was very angry, for a long time. I would daydream about the courtroom, my testimony, which scared the crap out of me. I dreamed of seeing the two doctors again... I got some help. I came to see that court, even if I was within the statute of limitations, wasn't going to be for me. I just couldn't go through that. For my emotional health, I had to come to a place of acceptance, that these bad things had happened with two sick individuals....and even though I still am afraid, it's over. It happened years ago, I'm not the right person to press charges, and I had to move on. I get up every day and try to live in the present. My life is pretty good. This is the path I have chosen....

ARIANA

Don, and then Claudia, continue....

DON

Uh....Phil is my Legal Aid lawyer. He asks lots of questions. I get the feeling that he really believes me. He has like called my company. Turns out that Chrissie is filing suit against me for forcible touching and against the company for not protecting her. This is just bullshit! I

didn't do anything! Phil helps me settle down and face what we have to deal with now. He says I am going to be arrested, and should go with him to turn myself in at the police station. I go with him, right, in complete shock. I am charged with "forcible touching", and released on bail pending trial. Delilah called my uncle and he put up the bail money. I hate that she had to call my uncle. I hate Chrissie even more.

Claudia steps forward.

CLAUDIA

I've seen a lawyer named Susan to talk about the possibility of pressing charges against Barry. I'm on the fence about it. I'm getting more and more apprehensive about me and Dan. I certainly wouldn't expect him to be in court. I feel like he doesn't care about *me*. Our marriage hasn't always been perfect, but I think we are heading for a crisis. Susan suggests that I go to a victim's support group to talk about what I'm going through...

*The chairs are arranged in a semi-circle. Claudia,
Women and Man 1 attend the support group. Dan exits.*

WOMAN 1

Who wants to share next? Claudia?

CLAUDIA

Yes, uh, ... hi ...

WOMAN 2

What's goin on?

CLAUDIA

Dan and I are fighting more. Thursday he really scared me. We were sitting at dinner. I told him I was seriously considering going to trial, that I had started working with a lawyer. He got angry. He said he didn't want the lawyer to cloud my judgement. I said I was going to see her again. He slammed his plate down on the table and left the room. The food went everywhere! It's not like he touched me or anything, but it really shocked me. I mean, that plate could be *me*....He never gets angry, like, physically., but now... I just don't know...

MAN 1

He's never, ya know, hurt you?

CLAUDIA

No.... he's never touched anyone. But he does want his way. He could hurt me...I'm really scared....

WOMAN 1

We are all here for you, Claudia. Please take some names and numbers from the group, and don't be afraid to call. Or to speak up..... Does anyone have feedback for Claudia?

WOMAN 4

I do.

Knocks are heard on the door.

Who's that?

Dan enters the meeting. He stays close to the door.

DAN

You're here!

WOMEN/MAN

Who are you?/ Who's this?

CLAUDIA

Dan, *what* are you doing here?

WOMAN 2

It's him.

DAN

I need to talk to my wife...

WOMAN 1

This meeting's private. We're right in the middle of...

DAN

I need to talk to her *now*.

CLAUDIA

Did you follow me here?

DAN

I heard you talking to these meeting people on the phone. You don't need this. You and I can handle this ourselves...

WOMAN 1

You're interrupting a private meeting...

MAN 1

Get outa here.

DAN

Just give me two minutes to talk to my wife and I'll be gone. Claudia, please step outside?

CLAUDIA

I'm staying here.

DAN

Can you give us the room?

WOMEN/MEN

Firmly. We're staying.

WOMAN 4

You got one minute.

WOMAN 2

Say your piece and go.

DAN

Increasingly menacing. Ok, well....I don't want you to take Barry to court. It's very important to the family that you don't. I heard you talking about this meeting. I came here, well, to stop you. These people are going to convince you to go to court and mess up our family... I don't want you here....You gotta listen to me...Claud!.....

CLAUDIA

I want to be here. I need help with this. You are not helping me!

DAN

Takes steps closer to the group...

Claudia!..... Now!

WOMAN 3

Stop it!

WOMAN 2

Go away!

WOMAN 1

*Rises, pulls out phone.
Faces Dan.*

I'm calling 911. You've spoken to her. You need to leave ...now!

Presses numbers on phone...

DAN

Ok, Ok I'm leaving..... I'll talk to *you* at home.

Dan stares at Claudia, then exits.

*The group is shaken. Woman 1
runs to lock the door.*

ALL (overlapping)

Claudia!

Crap!

I'm scared!

I don't like this.....

WOMAN 1

Trying to take charge. Ok, settle down. He's gone now.....We should never leave our door unlocked during a meeting. Are you ok?

CLAUDIA

I'm a wreck...I'm shaking.....He's not supposed to follow me.... He demands that I do things his way.....well, now I'm sure.

WOMAN 2

Sure?

CLAUDIA

Sure I want to go to court. Dan acting this waymakes me positive.....I have to do what's right.... for me.

WOMAN 4

Wow!

WOMAN 3

I'm glad..

WOMAN 1

Are you afraid to go home right now? Tell us the truth....My house is part of an underground network of safe houses where woman can stay... at least for a few nights...

CLAUDIA

My head is spinning. I have to think....

Lights dim... Three chairs are set downstage center.

*Don, Amy and Claudia sit. Two chairs are placed
downstage left, one downstage right.*

DON

I'm sitting at home, like waiting for a trial date. I hear it is set for October 15th, a couple months from now. My suspension from work will depend on the outcome of the trial. Delilah and I borrow some money from Delilah's brother Sam. Uh, I'm grateful, but it won't last forever.

I've been meeting with Phil, my lawyer, to get ready for trial. He knows all about the things Chrissie has done.. How could Chrissie could come up with such lies and do this to another person. One day I'm fine, the next day I'm in major trouble, all because she made an accusation.

There's one thing that really scares me. Uh, totally freaks me out, and that is public speaking. And it's pretty clear that I'm going to be a witness in this trial, telling my story and defending myself. I'm not afraid of speaking in front of Chrissie, I'd tell her off in a minute. I'm afraid of speaking in front of groups of people. Uh...I have a minor speech defect. I have trouble with the letter "s". It was much worse when I was a kid. Uh... I went to speech therapy. It's very rare now, but it still happens sometimes when I get nervous. How am I supposed to like

DON (cont'd)

defend myself in front of a courtroom, when I could never talk in front of a classroom? I want to do this. I have to stand up for myself. Phil is going to find a speech therapist..... God help me....

CLAUDIA

My trial date in Ocean County has been set for October 15th. Even though that's a few months away, I need time to prepare. I'm not ready. I moved out for a few days., then returned home. When Dan heard about the trial date, he moved out to a motel. I guess I wasn't doing exactly what he wanted. I'm so emotional these days...either afraid of the trial, or afraid of Dan....

AMY

I was going up Third Avenue last night when I saw Uncle Jerry across the street. He was with a woman. I haven't seen him in years. I ducked into a storefront and watched him for a moment. He looked, well, old to me. I was scared but I figured he couldn't see me. I was starting to hyperventilate but I made myself stand there. He looked kind of .. well....sad. He brushed back the woman's hair, and she pulled away from him. Then they kept on walking.

The court date is set for October 15th. My worst fear has been seeing Uncle Jerry in court, confronting him face to face. I want to be strong. I need to be strong....Now I've seen him. He looked pathetic. Somehow, that helps....

*Claudia, Don, and Amy stand forward of their chairs.
The sound of a gavel is heard.*

WOMAN 2

The defense now calls....

WOMAN 4

The prosecution calls to the stand....

CLAUDIA

October 15th. It's finally come, and...

DON

I've been uh, dreading it, but here I am, and...

AMY

The time has come. I'm here, and...

A few drum beats. The three turn simultaneously and take their seats. We see spotlights on Claudia, Don and Amy. Claudia is apprehensive. Don and Amy are focused and self- confident.

DON

I'm ready.

AMY

I'm ready.

CLAUDIA

I'm ready.

Spotlights out. Light drum track begins.

ARIANA

I'm so glad I met all these new friends, heard their stories. I finished my book last month. I call it "Voices of Me Too." I actually signed a publishing contract yesterday. Never thought that would happen! So many new things starting. I feel happy! And, I'm ready.

All chairs are moved upstage. Actors stand.

I'M READY (*spoken in poetic rhythm*)

WOMAN 1

I was lost, I was scared, thought that no one cared
Now I'm ready.....I'm ready

MAN 1

I was hurt, couldn't feel, was it even real?
Now I'm ready.....I'm ready

WOMAN 4

I'm ready to live, a brand new life
Away from the shame, the guilt and strife,

WOMAN 3

I'm ready to laugh, I have found the path
and I'm ready....I'm ready.

WOMAN 2

I blossom like a flower, bloom like a tree

A new situation, the world will see me

WOMAN 1

I have never felt so free

And I'm ready.....I'm ready.

MAN 2

I'm spiritually ready, emotionally ready

Physically mentally and socially ready

WOMAN 4

I'm ready.....

MAN 2

I'm ready...

WOMAN 3

I'm ready...

ALL

I'm readyright now!

Blackout.

End of Play

REFERENCES

1. Adapted from : <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/new-york-playbook/2023/12/19/will-the-child-victims-act-be-permanent-00132403>

RESOURCES (for Program)

Organizations that offer information and help:

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

National Sexual Assault Line <https://www.rainn.org/resources>

1-800-656-HOPE (4673) Can get help 24/7

National Sexual Violence Resource Center <https://www.nsvrc.org> 877-739-3895 TOLL-FREE
resources@nsvrc.org

Times Up Legal Defense Fund

legalnetwork@nwlc.org 202-319-3053