

A Plan Fails

A scene

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Characters

ARIA, 26, female, an artist who finds great comfort in repetition¹, currently living with her boyfriend BRENDAN

BRENDAN, 28, male, ARIA's boyfriend, generally supportive and affectionate.

Setting

Modern day, ARIA's bedroom. ARIA's bedroom isn't particularly tidy, but it is very comfortable, set out with objects that bring her joy.

Notes

Italics in stage direction signify notes for those putting on the play. This information is not necessarily meant to be clear to the audience.

¹ It is not made explicit whether or not ARIA has Autism Spectrum Disorder, but that is an entirely welcome interpretation, and may be used to inform the performance as desired.

SCENE 1: In which it doesn't happen

Soft white lights, mirroring morning sun, fade in on ARIA, under the covers and asleep on a bed at stage left. A few seconds pass before the sound of a phone alarm goes off. ARIA shifts in bed, pressing herself deeper under the covers for a beat or two before finally reaching out to her bedside table downstage and picking up her phone. The alarm stops. She stares at her phone for a moment before placing it back on the table. She pushes the covers off of herself and sits up in bed. Another beat's pause, then she shuffles out of bed and stands, stretching. She is wearing a comfortable tank top over underwear.

ARIA walks to center stage, stopping at a wardrobe. She pulls on a pair of jeans, then looks down at her tank top. After a moment of consideration she leaves it.

ARIA walks to stage right, stopping at a counter. She mimes brushing her teeth, with the sound of running water playing as she does.

She finishes brushing her teeth and goes back to stage left, picking up a nondescript notebook and pencil from the bedside table. She sits down on the side of the bed, facing the audience, and opens the notebook, flipping to an empty page. With a calm sense of expectation, she lowers her pencil to the paper.

ARIA is an artist, but the nature of her artwork is not made clear. She may be attempting to write prose, or poetry. She may be attempting to sketch something, or doodle, or draw a schematic. The sense of creativity is important, but the audience should be

free to associate whatever specific activity they wish with ARIA's actions.

ARIA stops. Her pencil hovers over the paper. The pause is significant — something that was expected isn't happening. Her brow furrows.

Slowly, ARIA pulls the pencil away. She closes the notebook, glancing between it and the bedside table. Holding the notebook in her lap, she closes her eyes, taking a deep breath.

ARIA opens her eyes. She looks down, opening the notebook and once again finding a blank page. She lowers her pencil. There is a pause.

ARIA's expression grows more concerned. She closes the notebook, setting it and the pencil back on the bedside table. She sits on the bed for a beat before standing, striding quickly back to the counter, retracing her steps.

ARIA looks down at the counter. She reaches out, turning the faucet on, then off, accompanied by the start and stop of the sound of running water. She walks back to center stage, staring down at the wardrobe. Finally, she moves back to her bed.

ARIA carefully lies down on the bed. She closes her eyes. A few seconds pass, then she sits up, sliding to the edge of the bed and grabbing at her notebook. She opens it up and quickly pushes her pencil towards the page. Another pause.

ARIA sets the notebook and pencil back on the bedside table more forcefully. Her expression is frustrated. After a pause, she lies back down, pulling the covers over herself. As an afterthought, she shuffles

under the covers, then throws her jeans at the wardrobe.

ARIA lies with her eyes closed for a few seconds, then throws the covers off of her. She steps quickly out of bed and goes to the wardrobe, unceremoniously pulling on the jeans. She goes to the counter and quickly turns the water on and off. Then she strides back to the side of her bed and sits down, pulling the notebook towards her. She lowers her pencil. There is a pause.

ARIA waits, then throws the notebook, folded around the pencil, back onto the bedside table. Her expression now shows a higher level of stress, with a slight fearful aspect. She pulls off her jeans and again tosses them at the wardrobe. She returns to being under the covers and closes her eyes for a beat, then opens them. She reaches out, picking up her phone and tapping at the screen for a few seconds before setting it back down.

ARIA lies back down, eyes closed. She mouths along with the countdown. 10 seconds later, the alarm goes off.

ARIA's arm shoots out, grabbing her phone and stopping the alarm. She stands quickly and strides to the wardrobe. She pulls on her jeans, then pauses. After a moment she pulls off her tank top, now retrieving a patterned button-up from the wardrobe. *This shirt could be plaid, or have some other just-slightly-quirky pattern, or have some design over it. What's important is that it is not one solid color.* She slips her arms through and buttons up most of it, leaving the top and bottom few buttons undone.

ARIA moves quickly to the counter, turning on the water. She mimes using a toothbrush — this time applying no toothpaste — as

water runs. She turns off the water and, finally, returns to the bed, sitting down.

ARIA grabs her notebook and pauses. She takes a breath, then opens it, her pencil marking her place. She picks up the pencil, lowering it towards the page. She waits. A few beats pass.

ARIA throws the notebook and pencil onto the ground, burying her head in her hands. *ARIA is not crying — she is overwhelmed. Her shoulders do not shake with sobbing.*

There is the sound of knocking. BRENDAN enters from a door upstage.

BRENDAN

Hey. Breakfast is ready.

ARIA looks up at him.

ARIA

(meaningfully)

I can't do it.

BRENDAN pauses. *He considers asking if "it" means "breakfast", but understands that this is something more serious, and stops himself. BRENDAN has also noticed it is taking ARIA longer than usual to come out of her room.*

BRENDAN

Yeah, something holding you up? Why don't you come down for breakfast?

ARIA

But—

BRENDAN

Come on. You can get some food in you, and you can tell me what's wrong. You'll feel better, I promise.

ARIA stares at BRENDAN for a beat or two, then slowly nods. She stands, hesitantly, and BRENDAN smiles. He spreads his arms slightly, directing her out of the room, and follows her out, closing the door behind them. Lights fade.

Artist as Questioner

- Does the tension of the scene, and ARIA's attempts to address what's happening, feel like it builds naturally?
- Are the italicized notes effective (both at fulfilling their goal in general and, in terms of formatting, as an effective way of delivering this information)?