

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - SUNRISE

Time-lapse from present day back to 1910.

EXT. 1910, NEW YORK HARBOR, SHIP DECK - MORNING

A passenger ship from Poland enters New York Harbor. The rhythms of the ship: sailors heaving ropes, the stern rushing through the choppy water, the wind billowing into the sails, and the *hum* of songs from the old country.

YOUNG ARI (4), a rambunctious, slightly grubby tomboy, pokes their head out of a steerage window and gapes at the Statue of Liberty. They rush past their MOTHER (37) and sisters SARAH (15) and RIVKAH (17) to the top deck of the ship. They rush up stairs, push through hems of hoops skirts, and jump gates as they ascend from steerage. Their mother and sisters trail them, but they can't keep up. Ari reaches the mast and starts to climb as their family reaches the top deck.

MOTHER

Ariella! Where are you going?

RIVKAH

You're not supposed to be up there!

Young Ari reaches the top of the mast just high enough to reach LADY LIBERTY's shoulders as the ship passes by. LADY LIBERTY winks at them.

YOUNG ARI

(slack jawed)

Ima! Ima! Look! Look at the Lady!
She's so tall!

EXT/INT. ELLIS ISLAND

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

- They exit the ship.
- They file onto Ellis Island.
- They pass inspection.
- They enter America.

INT. 1911, TENEMENT - MORNING

One year later.

A cluttered tenement on the Lower East Side.

The morning hustle and bustle. Sarah (16) struggles, pulling Young Ari's (5) dress over their head while they try to stack a set of wooden toy blocks:

SARAH

Bissel Ariella, you have to put
your dress on!

YOUNG ARI

(muffled under the dress)
My name is Ari, NOT Ariella.

Rivkah (18) primping in the dusty mirror, Mother (38) polishing the SILVER SHABAS CANDLES and overseeing her perfectly chaotic family.

Once Young Ari's dress is over their head, they go back to carefully stacking their blocks, placing the last one gingerly at the top. The stack shakes and almost falls, but it holds for a moment until...

ISAAC (41), their burly Russian-Jewish landlord knocks loudly on the front door and the blocks topple as he barges in.

ISAAC

Esther!

MOTHER

(ignoring Isaac, clapping
for attention)
Alright, alright out out out
everyone, time to go we can't be
late.

ISAAC

Esther, I need to speak-

MOTHER

It will have to wait until tonight,
Isaac.

Young Ari grabs their TRUSY PENCIL and their school books and starts for the front door when they hear a THUNK and a WHIZZ from outside. They run to the window to see the neighborhood boys playing stickball. Looking back at their Mother and sister squeezing out the door past Isaac, they throw their school books out the window and climb out onto the fire escape.

EXT. TENEMENT, FIRE ESCAPE

They watch the boys play from their new perch when a fly ball pops up! It heads toward them and lands in the fire escape two floors above Young Ari. The boys all gather below and fight over who would go up to get it. Young Ari smiles, this is their chance! They swing their leg over the fire escape and they quickly climb up and up until they see the ball. It's wedged just above their reach but they swing up and they grab it. Young Ari giggles with exhilaration. Young Ari swings down the rest of the fire escape, trusty pencil in tow, down to where the NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS are waiting. They hit the ground a bit clumsily, getting their dress all dusty.

EXT. STREET, LOWER EAST SIDE

They hold the ball out proudly to the Neighborhood Boys who snigger.

NEIGHBORHOOD BOY

She's a better climb than you,
Mendel.

YOUNG ARI

Does that mean I can play?!

MENDEL (15), a scrawny Jewish boy - Isaac's son, rudely snatches the ball away from Young Ari.

MENDEL

You're a girl, you can't play with
us.

Mendel pushes Young Ari to the ground.

Sarah, Rivkah, and Mother flood out of the apartment tailed by Isaac:

ISAAC

Mendel, what are you doing, you
stupid boy.

Isaac grabs Mendel by the ear and drags him away while the boys all run off. Mendel glares back at Young Ari. They brush the tears away from their eyes, rubbing dirt on their face.

RIVKAH

Bissel Ariella, what have you done
to your dress?

Young Ari tries to hide the tears while Mother dusts off their dress and strokes their face.

MOTHER

What's wrong bissel Ari? Tell Ima
what's wrong bubbala.

Young Ari looks back at the boys sadly and buries their head
in their mother's dress. Mother hugs them tight and kisses
their head.

Mother stands Young Ari up. They snuffle. She leans down,
holds their face and says:

MOTHER (CONT'D)

My bissel Ari. Don't listen to
those boys. One day, you'll show
them. You are my child and you are
stronger than all of them together.
You understand? You can do anything
you set your heart to. Don't let
them get to you bubbala.

Mother straightens up while Young Ari wipes their face.
Mother takes their hand and The Family heads off.

RIVKAH

Come on, we're going to be late!

[The Hustle and The Bustle]

*They sing as they weave through the streets of the Lower East
Side. Past the shopkeepers, pushcarts, rickshaws, fruit stands
and the occasional horse!*

SISTERS

FANCY SHOPKEEPS, DAPER SUITS
SILLY GROCERS, TASY FRUITS

YOUNG ARI

AND THE HUSTLE AND THE BUSTLE OF IT
ALL IS SO EXCITING TO EXPLORE!

RICKSHAW DRIVER

(to Young Ari)
Watch it kid!

Young Ari hops out of the way just in time.

*They pass Schimmel's bakery, the penny candy store, the local
tailor shop, and Bigelow's Apothecary.*

SISTERS

RIDE A RICKSHAW DOWN THE STREET
PENNY CANDY, EXTRA SWEET

YOUNG ARI
*AND THE HUSTLE AND THE BUSTLE OF IT
 ALL IS SOMETHING I CANNOT IGNORE!*

A group of newsboys rush past them, Mendel among them.

NEWSBOY
 Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

The Italian butcher sweeping out front. Young Ari stops for samples.

RIVKAH
 (re: newsboys)
*ALL THE HANDSOME MEN NEED PRETTY
 WIVES*

SARAH
*OVER THERE! WELL THAT ONE HE LOOKED
 TWICE*

YOUNG ARI
 (to the butcher)
*I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING BUT
 I'M SURE IT'S REALLY NICE!*

BUTCHER
 Ah, fagiola!

Rats scamper across the sidewalk in front of a group of well-dressed ladies.

LADIES
 (screeching)
 MICE!

Young Ari dodges past the ladies to gaze into a fancy stationary store. They hold their TRUSTY PENCIL up to the display of expensive fountain pens.

YOUNG ARI
*BRAND NEW PENCILS, PENS AND INK!
 ALL THE TOOLS TO HELP YOU THINK!*

ALL
*AND THE HUSTLE AND THE BUSTLE OF IT
 ALL IS SO EXCITING*

YOUNG ARI
AND INVITING!

ALL
 WHERE MANY DIFFERENT WORLDS COLLIDE
 RIGHT HERE IN OUR BRAND NEW HOME
 ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE!

Rivkah turns back toward Young Ari from down the street and yells:

RIVKAH
 Ariella! Come on, you're making us
 late again!

Young Ari sticks their pencil back behind their ear and rushes to meet their sisters and mother at the corner of Washington Square Park, just outside the doors to the TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY.

Young Ari accidentally bumps into a GIRL and her well-dressed FATHER.

YOUNG ARI
 Oh-ah, sorry!

EXT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

Young Ari catches up with The Family outside the factory. Mother gives Ari a big kiss on the forehead.

MOTHER
 Hurry up and get to school, I don't
 want you to be late.

Young Ari waves as Mother, Sarah, and Rivkah enter the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

Young Ari whips out their TRUSTY PENCIL and uses it to count the factory's stories.

YOUNG ARI
 One, two, three, four, five, six,
 seven, eight, nine!

They hear a tiny terrified SQUEAK! Young Ari spots an anxious baby squirrel in the tree overhead.

A gust of wind.

It teeters on its branch and quivers, terrified of the street below.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
 You OK up there, little one?

The tiny squirrel looks down at Young Ari.

SQUEAKY
(squeaking)
[Nope! Not OK!]

YOUNG ARI
Come down, I'll catch you!

The squirrel thinks about coming down the tree trunk, but the branch shakes. No dice.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
Alright, hmmm.

Young Ari eyes the trunk. Hikes up their dress. Young Ari starts to climb.

EXT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY, UP A TREE

Young Ari climbs! Slowly at first, then their confidence increases and they move faster and faster, passing the first story...

YOUNG ARI
One...

The second story.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
Two...

Almost there!

They see the baby squirrel on their branch. They reach up, but their foot slips. Their dress catches on the bark and starts to rip! Their pencil begins to slip from their ear, they grab it as it falls! They scramble. They find their footing again. Phew! They lift themselves up and get onto the squirrel's branch.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
Three!

They look down, they're a long way up.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
Ok! Ari, you got this. Come here, squirrel. We're not going to fall!

Squeaky is still pretty terrified. They spring to life and scamper away from Young Ari down the branch. It wobbles. They leap through the open window of the factory.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)

Hey!

They stand up, balancing on the wobbly branch. They take a deep breath. They run across the branch with nimble feet and jump through the window. It's pretty miraculous.

INT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

The rhythm of the factory. Women everywhere stitching, and cutting, and measuring, and *humming*. Young Ari crouches next to the window, trying to be inconspicuous. They spot Squeaky. Young Ari chases Squeaky around the factory:

-Between stacked fabric bolts.

-Under long tables of sewing machines.

-Through piles of fabric cut into shirtwaist patterns.

-Around mannequins.

Young Ari and Squeaky run past Sarah who sees them.

SARAH

Ari?! What are you doing!

Young Ari catches Squeaky.

YOUNG ARI

Gotcha!

A FACTORY GIRL sees Squeaky.

FACTORY GIRL

AHHH!!! It's a mouse!

Chaos ensues. Girls everywhere scream scamper and climb up on tables.

Sarah grabs Young Ari's ear and shoves them under the table.

SARAH

The doors are all locked, I don't know how to get you out of here! You're going to get us in so much-sh sh get under there, quickly.

The room suddenly falls into tense silence.

We see the FOREMAN's feet stalk past. The feet stop near the open window. SLAM! A SIZZLE as he flicks his cigarette into a nearby bin.

The Foreman walks down the tables and stops next to Sarah. He checks her work, nods, and moves on.

A door slams. The humming slowly grows again.

Sarah looks around cautiously, and brings them to the passenger elevator.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(whispering)

We're not supposed to use the passenger elevator, but it's the only way out now. Just try to be quiet, okay? And run straight to school.

Sarah gives Young Ari a big kiss on the forehead as the elevator door opens.

Sarah sneaks back to her work station and we see all of the factory worker's heads turn toward Young Ari and the elevator door. Rivkah stands up in the back squinting but she can't quite make them out. The doors snaps shut behind Young Ari and Squeaky.

EXT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

Young Ari and Squeaky exit the elevator.

Fancy men in business attire are waiting outside the door, they look at Young Ari quizzically in their dusty dress with scraped up knees.

Young Ari sheepishly sidesteps out of the elevator. It's pretty awkward. The class tension is palpable. They hold their breath until the men enter the elevator and the fancy men chatter amongst themselves again.

Exhale.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK

They wander through Washington Square Park.

[Scrape The Sky]

Young Ari sings and wonders about the men in suits and growing up to be rich and fancy like them because then they could do whatever they want and be whoever they wanted to be.

Past the fountain, Young Ari stops to gape at the ARCH. Pencil out! They trace it's curves.

YOUNG ARI

Squeaky, don't you ever wonder how something like that stays up?

Squeaky hops off Young Ari's shoulder and climbs up the side of the arch. He looks back, he wants them to follow!

Young Ari hesitates at first, but they start to climb. *Young Ari exchanges greetings with the STATUE on the arch on their way up.*

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)

Hi! Mind if I step on you?

STATUE

Oh, oh yes, that's quite alright little one.

They reach the top and marvel at the skyline. The view is spectacular.

YOUNG ARI

(spinning, counting the windows all around them)

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight...

The windows on the buildings twinkle at Ari as they count.

Young Ari sings about growing up to be big and strong just like these buildings, taller than those fancy men at the factory.

A SCREAM.

Young Ari snaps out of their reverie. They stand up and whip their head around. FIRE reflects in their eyes. Young Ari quickly slides down the arch with Squeaky and runs to the factory.

EXT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

A fire on the eighth floor of the factory.

A horse-drawn FIRE WAGON nearly hits Young Ari. Chaos.

YOUNG ARI

Ima! Rivkah! Sarah!

An OFFICER stops Young Ari from running into the burning building.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
My family is in there! Ima! Ima!

OFFICER
You can't go inside little girl.

A piece of the upper window starts to fall. Young Ari sees the same young GIRL from earlier on the corner. She's staring at the firemen, not paying attention to the piece of building about to fall above her.

Young Ari runs.

YOUNG ARI
Move! It's falling!

GIRL
What?

Young Ari pushes the Girl out of the way as the rubble falls and just misses them. They're both ok. They cough and splutter.

YOUNG ARI
Are you ok?

GIRL
I think so?

They lock eyes.

RIVKAH
(coughing)
Ari! Ari! Is that you!?

YOUNG ARI
Rivkah!

Young Ari leaves the Girl to run to Rivkah. They fall into each other's arms.

Young Ari looks back briefly for the Girl who turns the corner, lead swiftly away from the scene by her stern father.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
Rivkah, where are Ima and Sarah.

Rivkah cries and shakes her head.

INT. TENEMENT - NIGHT

Rivkah covers a grubby mirror with black cloth. She lights the Shabas candles and prays over them.

EXT. TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY

The Girl lays flowers at a small vigil near the smoking building.

INT. TENEMENT

Young Ari curls up and cries on the bed near the window. Rivkah crawls into bed with them and Young Ari turns to face her, a tear falls down their cheek and Rivkah wipes it with her thumb.

YOUNG ARI
What are we going to do?

RIVKAH
I don't know, bissel Ari.

Young Ari sniffles.

RIVKAH (CONT'D)
Promise me something?

Young Ari nods.

RIVKAH (CONT'D)
Promise me you'll try to stay out of trouble.

Young Ari nods.

RIVKAH (CONT'D)
And I promise you I'll always keep you safe.

Young Ari nods and sniffs again.

YOUNG ARI
Promise.

Rivkah kisses their forehead and closes her eyes to sleep. Young Ari turns and stares at the ceiling. Squeaky knocks on the window and Young Ari opens it for Squeaky to climb through. They cuddle. Sleep.

EXT. 1912, MANHATTAN SKYLINE - SUNRISE

The skyline rises.

INT. TENEMENT - MORNING

Sad and quiet. No hustle or bustle. Young Ari (6) sits on the floor stacking their blocks but the blocks keep falling, Squeaky munches on a peanut in their lap. Shouting in the hallway between Rivkah (19) and Isaac (42). Rivkah bursts back into the apartment, she's clearly been crying. She collects herself, locks eyes with Ari who turns away uncomfortably, and Rivkah's gaze lands on the SILVER SHABAS CANDLES on the mantle. Rivkah goes to them heavily, picks them up, polishes them, and leaves the tenement with them.

Silence.

EXT. 1915, MANHATTAN SKYLINE - SUNRISE

The skyline rises.

INT. TENEMENT

Another sad and quiet morning. Young Ari (9) stacking their blocks again in a slightly more complex structure. Rivkah (22) pulls them up from the floor, ties a bonnet around their head, and leads them outside.

Squeaky watches from his windowsill perch.

INT. TAILOR SHOP

Rivkah brings them to the local tailor shop. The TAILOR points Rivkah to an empty sewing machine in the back room and shoves a broom in Young Ari's hands.

EXT. 1917, MANHATTAN SKYLINE - SUNRISE

The skyline rises.

INT. TAILOR SHOP

Young Ari (11) and Squeaky behind the counter carefully stacking hangers. Rivkah (24) in the back sewing a hem quietly.

Young Ari gets bored and sees that no one is watching them and the street outside is quiet. They eye a tux and top hat in the shop's window. Young Ari puts their finger to their lips, then points toward the display.

YOUNG ARI
(to Squeaky)
Shhhhh

Young Ari sneaks up to the window and quietly takes the top hat and tux while Squeaky helps by undoing the waistcoat buttons. Young Ari pulls the tux jacket on, with Squeaky's help, and places the top hat gingerly on their head. The get-up is HUGE on them. They preen, looking at themselves in the mirror.

YOUNG ARI (CONT'D)
(to Squeaky, tipping their
hat)
How do you do, madame?

Squeaky curtsies and Young Ari takes Squeaky's tiny hand and they dance around the shop.

Cackling from outside the window. Young Ari stops and turns around suddenly. A group of boys headed up by Mendel point and laugh at Young Ari dancing around the shop in their giant tux. Young Ari and Squeaky scramble to hide behind the counter, but as Young Ari turns the corner, the seam at the sleeve catches on the counter's corner, the sleeve RIPS clean off and Young Ari hits the floor, toppling over a rack of cleans suits and makes a loud CLANG. The boys outside laugh louder.

RIVKAH
(from the back room)
Ari, what's going on up there?

Rivkah comes out to the front room, Young Ari scrambles to get off the floor and out of the tux but they're a bit twisted up. The bell for the front door rings and it's the Tailor walking back into the shop. The boys outside scatter, still laughing and pointing at Young Ari. Mendel grins and follows the rest of the boys. The Tailor sees what Young Ari has done.

TAILOR
Out of my shop.

Young Ari, sad and twisted on the floor, struggles to stand. They look at Rivkah who makes eye contact then looks away in disappointment.

Young Ari takes the slightly squished top hat off their head, tries to fix it a little bit but the top pops off. They place it on the counter.

INT. TENEMENT

Rivkah and Young Ari sit tensely, quietly at the dinner table, eating their meal. Rivkah speaks suddenly and without fanfare.

RIVKAH

I spoke with Isaac this afternoon.
His brother owns the big laundromat
on 9th and he's gotten you a job as
a washer there.

A beat.

RIVKAH (CONT'D)

I've also agreed to marry his son,
Mendel.

Young Ari looks up from their plate.

YOUNG ARI

Rivkah, you can't.

RIVKAH

I keep my promises and I will do
what has to be done for this
family.

Rivkah stands.

RIVKAH (CONT'D)

(reaching for their plate)
Are you finished?