

# Outpost

by Alexander Attea

## Characters:

ARIS	A third-generation Martian. (W/Nonbinary, early 20s)
LIAM	A third-generation Martian. (M/Nonbinary, early 20s)
JO	A third-generation Martian. (Nonbinary, early 20s)
TRISH	A first-generation Martian. (W, 60s-ish)

**Time:** Someday.

**Place:** Mars.

## Notes on the text:

- This play must be cast with diversity. The cast must include at least 50% actors of color.
- TRISH also plays the VOICE and the FIGURE.
- MARVIN may or may not be performed live.

Alexander Attea  
6165 N Winthrop Ave #202  
Chicago IL 60660  
(716) 392-3418  
alexander.atea@gmail.com

*Darkness. The interior of a Martian colony compound. It's the older part of the compound. Uninhabited. It hasn't seen care in some time.*  
*ARIS, LIAM, and JO enter. JO is carrying a backpack. They look around.*

ARIS  
Anyone else just get the chills?

LIAM  
I've never seen it this dark.

JO  
Watch out, all the ghosts are going to get you.

LIAM  
Don't say that.

JO  
Boo!

LIAM  
I'm going to kill you.

JO  
Not if the ghosts do first.

ARIS  
Do you think the MARVIN in here still works?

LIAM  
I think it was only programmed to do the presentation. They might've shut it down already.

JO  
You think we'll hear the voice?

ARIS  
I hope so.

LIAM  
What voice?

ARIS  
MARVIN? Can you give us some light?

LIAM  
What voice?

*The lights come on and a computer's voice is heard: MARVIN.*

MARVIN  
Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian civilization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement —

ARIS

That's okay, MARVIN. We just wanted the lights. No presentation today.

MARVIN

When is the next presentation?

ARIS

— I don't know.

LIAM

You want to tell it?

ARIS

It'll figure it out.

JO *sarcastic*

Yeah, we don't want to hurt the robot's feelings.

ARIS

I'm being considerate. It turned on the lights for us.

LIAM

And look at that! No ghosts.

JO

I wouldn't be so sure about that, Liam.

LIAM

I'm not letting you scare me, Jo.

JO

No? You look pretty scared to me.

ARIS

Are we five?

We came here to see this one last time, let's not spend the whole time bickering about ghosts.

JO

We're just having some fun.

ARIS

It's always crazy to me, thinking that people actually lived in here. That my grandma lived here.

LIAM *looking around the space*

Yeah it is. It's so — basic. How did they keep themselves from getting bored?

JO

Don't you remember?

*Imitating a part of MARVIN's presentation that they all know.*

"For fun, they played a game, imagining —"

ALL (ARIS)

"What life might have been like on Earth."

LIAM

Classic.

JO *looking around the space*

You think we'll find anything worth keeping?

LIAM

I hope we find those swords.

JO

Ooo, yes!

Can you imagine what holding one of those things is like?

LIAM

I'd feel like such a badass.

JO

I think you have to know how to use it before you can be a badass.

LIAM

I'd figure it out.

ARIS

I want to find one of those old-school, original helmets. My grandma had one of those.

LIAM

What happened to it?

ARIS

She was buried with it.

LIAM

Right, right.

JO

There has to be one here. It doesn't look like anyone's cleaned this place out yet.

LIAM

You think they would've by now.

ARIS

Who knows what they're planning to do.

JO

Who, leadership? Probably planning to screw us with a really hard Test tomorrow, for one.

ARIS

Yeah, how are we feeling about that?

JO

I thought we were coming here to not think about it.

LIAM

You brought it up.

ARIS  
Kind of hard not to think about it. It's a big deal. It's our whole future.

LIAM  
I bet it's going to be the hardest Test they've ever given.

ARIS  
My grandma said her Test was pretty hard.

JO  
Yeah, but she was, like, the first person who ever took it, right? I'm sure it was bad back then, but they've definitely gotten worse.

ARIS  
What do you want to be assigned?

JO  
I thought we weren't talking about it?

LIAM  
I'd want to work on projects to explore other planets. For sure.

ARIS  
That would be cool.

JO *joking*  
You think you can handle another planet? You're scared of this one!

LIAM  
I'm not scared!

JO  
Uh huh.

LIAM  
It would be so great. I'd get to find new places, name them, be one of the first people to see them. Find out if they can support human life or not —

JO  
You know there hasn't been a project like that since Mission Return, right?  
*ARIS flinches.*  
Making it back to Earth is pretty much impossible. Good luck making it to new planets.

LIAM  
I know, I know, I just think it would be interesting.  
What about you, Aris?

ARIS  
My number one is to be an engineer, of some sort. Build what the compound needs, you know? Make it better. Make sure nothing goes wrong.

JO  
Alright. I thought we weren't talking about the Test. That was the whole point of tonight, yeah?

ARIS

Okay, okay, we'll stop.

JO

Thank you.

ARIS

*After you tell us what you want to be assigned.*

JO

I mean, I don't even know why we still have to take a Test. At this point, shouldn't Leadership already know who we are and what we're good at?

ARIS

All I'm asking is what interests you most. You could be anything you want.

LIAM

Right, because "The frontier is a place —"

ALL (ARIS)

"Of endless possibilities."

JO

Ugh. I hate when they say that.

*JO opens the backpack and takes out three beers.*

Shall we?

*ARIS and LIAM each take one.*

ARIS

Here's to becoming Real Martians tomorrow. May we all get the assignments we want.

LIAM

Hear hear.

JO

May we meet all the ghosts we want.

ARIS

Hear hear!

LIAM

I don't want to drink to that —

*JO calling out.*

Hey, ghosts, Liam here really wants to meet you!

LIAM

No, no, we've already established there aren't any —

*A loud sound from another part of the compound. They all freeze. The lights flicker out.*

*The chorus of "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds plays, through MARVIN.*

Oh my god. Oh my god, Jo. What did you do?

JO  
That was — perfect timing.

ARIS  
Lights back on, MARVIN.

*The lights flicker back on, and the music stops.*

MARVIN  
Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian —

ARIS  
No, MARVIN, still no presentation today.

MARVIN  
Standing by.

ARIS  
— Okay. You do that.

LIAM  
So. Do we leave now, or —?

JO *to LIAM*  
Oh wow, you do *not* look well.

ARIS  
It's an old part of the compound. It was probably pipes, or something.

LIAM  
And the lights?

ARIS  
I don't know.  
There aren't ghosts, Liam.

JO  
Except there *is* a story about this part of the compound...

ARIS  
Jo.

JO  
What? You know this one, right?

ARIS  
Of course I do. But let's not scare him anymore.

LIAM  
It's fine. I'm fine. I'm just going to — sit and do some deep breathing for like, thirty minutes.

JO  
Brave.  
So can I tell the story?

ARIS

Jo!

JO

What else are we going to do? Sit here and stare at each other? Listen to Liam's deep breathing?

LIAM

You can tell the story, Jo.

JO

Really?

ARIS

Really?

JO

I didn't think it would be that easy.

LIAM

Let's get it over with.

JO

Okay. So. You know how there were the three people living in this compound when the Second Landing arrived? Like, fifty years ago?

LIAM

Yeah, Aris's grandma and the other two Elders, what were their names —

ARIS

Alan and Denver.

LIAM

Yeah. They were the first three people born on Mars.

JO

Well there was a fourth person too.

ARIS

You've never heard this story?

LIAM

I just knew the three of them were here for the Second Landing.

JO

Right. But there were supposed to be four.

The day they all passed their Test, they were given helmets and suits and allowed to go outside for the first time. They hadn't seen their parents in a few years; gone out on a mission and never came back. So the four of them decided to go out on the surface and find their folks.

And they walk for a while before they see it on the horizon — the wreckage of a rover.

LIAM

No.



JO  
Yes. And as they got closer, they found something truly horrible: the remains of their parents inside. No survivors.

ARIS  
Grandma said it was the worst day of her life.

JO  
One of them took it worse than the others. Her name was Trish. She ran off on her own. The others tried to get back to their rover to find her, but they were heading straight into a terrible dust storm. They had to turn back and get to the safety of the compound, leaving her on the surface with a dwindling oxygen supply, and hoping they could try again soon.

LIAM  
Oh my god. Did they?

JO  
No. The dust storm only got worse. They never found her.

LIAM  
That's — awful.

JO  
But there is a rumor that they did end up finding her body, and when their food supply started getting low —

LIAM  
They ate her??

ARIS  
That's not true.

JO  
It could be.

ARIS  
You're basically saying my grandma ate her friend.

JO  
Okay, maybe your *grandma* didn't, but the others could have!

ARIS  
They didn't eat her. My parents said that when they were young, the story used to be that Trish made it back to the compound with the others, but stopped talking to anyone. Stopped eating, stopped doing anything. Then one night she just walked out onto the surface without her suit or helmet. And disappeared.

JO  
Either way, now her ghost roams this compound, the place where she was once happy. And sometimes, her voice is heard whispering and laughing through these walls. Some people say that's the real reason this old compound is being destroyed.

LIAM  
Oh. Wow.

JO  
How do you feel?

LIAM  
— Scared.

JO  
Ha. I can tell by the look on your face.

LIAM  
Is it true? About Trish?

ARIS  
I don't know.

JO  
Your grandma never told you?

ARIS  
She didn't like to talk about her life before the Second Landing.

JO  
Well. It's a good story, though, yeah?

LIAM  
That's why you wanted to come here tonight, isn't it?

JO  
He figured it out!

ARIS  
We probably won't hear anything.

JO  
It's just for fun anyway. It'll only be MARVIN. It's not like we'll be in danger, or anything.

ARIS  
Yeah, we're having fun! Last night before our Test, let's make it one to remember.

JO  
How'd you ever have fun before you met us, Liam?

LIAM  
Honestly, who knows.

JO  
I wish the presentation had a ghost story in it. Ghosts are part of Mars history!

ARIS  
It's probably not a real story, though.

LIAM  
I'm sure leadership just wanted to focus on the good stuff anyway.  
"Endless possibilities" and all that.

JO  
The boring stuff.

LIAM  
I remember coming here with the class, to watch it. I always wished they talked more about the Founders' lives on Earth, before they came here.

JO  
Even more boring.  
I always slept through it.

ARIS  
I always had to shake you awake.

JO  
I hated when you did that.

LIAM  
I guess it's a little sad that they're shutting it down for good.

ARIS  
I don't know, it's not like anyone was using it anymore. Nobody really cares.

JO  
It's for the better. This whole part of the colony can be scrapped and used to build new things that we actually need.

ARIS  
Right. Old stuff like this doesn't matter anymore.

*The lights flicker off. MARVIN plays a portion of "Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds again.*

LIAM  
Why does that keep happening?

JO  
You don't think we upset it, do you?

ARIS  
I don't know, maybe it wasn't too thrilled to find out it's being scrapped for parts —

LIAM  
Oh, I know. You're messing with me, aren't you?

JO  
Ha. Why didn't we think of that, Aris?

ARIS  
That would've been a great idea.

*The song stutters and fades. The lights stay off.*

LIAM  
So how do we get the lights back on?

JO  
How are we supposed to know?

LIAM  
I don't know, you're the one who set this up.

JO  
I swear we didn't!

ARIS  
I think something's going on with the MARVIN.

LIAM  
MARVIN?  
Can we get the lights back on, please? We didn't mean to upset you.

JO  
I can't believe we're apologizing to a robot.

LIAM  
It's MARVIN.

JO  
An old, out-of-date MARVIN. A presentation MARVIN. It just repeats the same things over and over again. It's not useful or anything.

*The lights flicker back on. More colorful now.*

LIAM  
There we go.

MARVIN  
Hello, fellow Martians, and welcome. Please take a seat. The final presentation begins now.

JO  
MARVIN, we said we don't want to see —

MARVIN  
Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian civilization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement offers a glimpse into how the first humans on Mars lived.  
But first, how did we get here?

JO  
I can't believe this.

LIAM  
What are we supposed to do? Can we stop it?

JO  
MARVIN, stop!

LIAM

There aren't even any actors. It won't be the same.

MARVIN

This initial portion of the compound, as well as the biosphere, was constructed remotely from Earth, and took over thirty years to complete. The MARs Virtual Intelligence Network — you know me as MARVIN — was developed to facilitate communications, monitor food growth and water supply, and maintain atmospheric conditions safe for human survival, among a host of other capabilities.

*JO overlapping during MARVIN's speech*

Do we just have to sit through this?

ARIS

Why don't we play along? We could be the actors.

LIAM

Oh, yeah, we should!

MARVIN *continuing*

Once it was finished, a crew of eight Earthlings boarded the spacecraft Shepard, to open a new chapter of human history. They would be the first permanent residents of Mars.

*ARIS, LIAM, and JO reflexively speak with MARVIN:*

Strap in, pioneers.

JO

Can't we just chill and have a drink?

MARVIN *continuing*

Blast off in ten — nine —

ARIS

We'll have drinks and play along with it.  
It'll get our minds off the Test for sure.

MARVIN *continuing*

Eight — seven —

LIAM

Plus, we can keep props from the show! You can get your helmet, Aris.

MARVIN *continuing*

Six — five —

ARIS

Yes! What do you say, Jo?

MARVIN *continuing*

Four —

ARIS

I bet you'll have more fun than you think.

MARVIN *continuing*

Three —

LIAM

Maybe we'll find those swords, too!

MARVIN *continuing*

Two —

JO

Fine! Fine. Let's do it.

ARIS

Yay!

MARVIN

One.

*ARIS, LIAM, and JO sit down and pretend to strap in. The lights grow even more bright and colorful. The room rumbles.*

And we have lift-off.

LIAM *half joking*

Ooo, lift off! Next stop, Mars!

JO

I already regret this.

LIAM

"Alright, crew, this is your captain speaking. We're on our way."

MARVIN

They climbed higher and higher into the Earth's atmosphere and toward the void of space.

ARIS

The actors usually talk here, don't they?

LIAM

You mean the crew.

JO

Oh my god.

LIAM

I'm just putting us in the moment!

ARIS

Right, right — they talk about the view!

LIAM

What a spectacular view!

ARIS

God, look at that moon!

LIAM

We should record this.

*LIAM pretends to take pictures.*

JO

What are you doing?

LIAM

Taking pictures. Filming.

*LIAM turns the "camera" on JO. Think "dad on vacation" vibes.*

Where are we?

JO

Stop.

ARIS

It's okay to play along, Jo. Geez.

*LIAM turning the "camera" toward himself*

We're going to Mars.

MARVIN

These brave explorers would spend the next seven months aboard the Shepard, traveling over ninety million miles to their new lives on the Red Planet.

Can you imagine what they might have been feeling?

ARIS

— Oh. This is the discussion part.

JO

We don't actually have to discuss, do we?

ARIS

Yes! We have to "inhabit the past!"

LIAM

They must've been scared. And excited. They must have been thinking about all they'd leave behind: their loved ones, family and friends, their favorite restaurants and comfort foods, their movie theatres and their art galleries, the trees and the flowers and the grass beneath their feet. And how it would all be worth it for what lay ahead.

ARIS

I wonder if they thought about how they would never again be outside without a helmet on.

LIAM

I bet they thought about being forever remembered as the first humans to settle another planet.

ARIS

They were probably thinking about the last hugs they gave their family.

*LIAM teasing?*

And if that would ever be enough.

JO  
We'll never know what they were thinking. There's no point in speculating.

ARIS  
The point is to empathize a bit.

JO  
I thought the point was to make fun of it.

ARIS  
Yeah, that too.

JO  
You want to know what they probably thought? I bet it was "Wow, I'm going to be on Mars in a few months and I feel totally unprepared. What was I thinking?"

MARVIN  
Finally, after two hundred and eleven days of travel, they began making their final approach. The surface of Mars loomed closer and closer, bright and rocky and orange.

LIAM  
It's the wrong size.

JO  
What?

LIAM  
That's what they usually say at this part.  
It's the wrong size.

ARIS  
It's too big.

LIAM  
Right, yes. I'm too used to it being a small bright pinpoint in the sky. I knew it was a whole planet, conceptually. I pictured this moment a million times. Landing.  
But — it's still bigger than I ever thought.

ARIS  
Seeing it get bigger and bigger, right in front of you — that's when it feels real.

JO  
I wonder what it looked like.

LIAM  
There are the old pictures. The slight curvature of the surface, radiating against the void. The white blip of the compound in the distance.

JO  
Yeah, but it's not the same. The picture doesn't give you the same feeling as being there.

MARVIN  
They landed, and stepped out onto the surface of their new home.



*The lights go orange. The sound of wind on the surface. Three space helmets appear.*

ARIS

Ooo, it's actually happening!

LIAM

I knew it would! Let's see how it looks.

*ARIS takes a helmet and puts it on.*

ARIS

Does it suit me?

LIAM

It's perfect.

ARIS

Thank you.

— This smells really bad, I have to take it off.

*ARIS takes her helmet off. LIAM and JO smell their helmets, wince.*

JO

Yikes. It's like fifty years of bad, hot breath.

ARIS

MARVIN, were these ever cleaned between presentations?

*Pause.*

JO

Yeah, we're not getting an answer to that.

Are you going to keep yours?

ARIS

Why not? A helmet's a helmet. It'll be a good souvenir.

*LIAM has closed his eyes, listening to the sound of wind.*

LIAM

If you close your eyes, you can almost imagine you're there.

MARVIN

Looking out from the compound, they faced the untarnished frontier of a new planet, untouched by humans.

ARIS

Jo — remember when we were kids, we'd look out the window from my room and pretend we were standing out there, feeling the wind?

JO

We were so lame.

ARIS

It was your idea.

JO

Yeah, it was lame.

LIAM

You never did that with me. It sounds fun.

ARIS

Anyway, whenever we did, Jo would complain about it being dumb that we can't be on the surface until after our Test.

JO

It is. How are we supposed to prepare for it?

ARIS

So. Close your eyes. Pretend you're there.

JO

— Fine.

*JO closes their eyes.*

ARIS

What's the surface like?

JO

It's — empty.

LIAM

Come on, Jo. We know you don't want to do this, but —

JO

No, I mean it.

It's empty and I can imagine it feeling huge and alien. It still kind of feels alien to me sometimes, which is weird. I've lived here my whole life and sometimes it feels like it's still new. I don't know. It's that feeling when you remember there's a whole planet to explore.

ARIS

I always thought about that. The feeling of being on the precipice. The beginning of something.

LIAM

"The frontier is a place..."

ARIS

Exactly.

LIAM

Sometimes I wish I could've been an explorer on Earth.

JO

Genocidal and colonialist?

LIAM

No — just to discover new places. Then go home.  
I'm a few generations too late for here, and *way* too late for Earth.

ARIS

You could still explore here. Definitely.

LIAM

And find a lot of mountains and craters that have already been named.

ARIS

Maybe you'll make it to Earth one day.

LIAM

Return trips? In our lifetime? After what happened to Mission Return?

ARIS

Who knows what could happen.  
You've been talking about Earth as long as we've been friends. Don't rule it out.

LIAM

— Okay. Yeah. I won't.

*ARIS closes her eyes, takes a deep breath.*

ARIS

I think of the relief they must have felt. Finally getting here. Finally feeling it beneath their feet.  
That they wouldn't have to prove anything to anyone anymore.

JO

Well, they had to prove they could survive.

MARVIN

As much as they wanted to explore their new home, there was work to do in the compound.  
There was research to be done, planning for future settlements, and more. Aside from simply adjusting to life on a new planet.

LIAM

"Putting on a full suit and helmet every time you go outdoors."

JO

Hold on, is this the list of things?

LIAM

You know it.

JO

This was always the part I would wake up for.

ARIS

Just to laugh at it.

JO

You laughed at it too! How could anyone take it seriously? "Going to sleep under a moonless sky."

LIAM

"Eating a meatless diet."

ARIS

"Except for canned food."

LIAM

Except for canned food! I forgot about that one.

JO

Ha. Makes them sound like cats.

LIAM *wistful*

I wish we had cats.

ARIS

"Having the eyes of the entire Earth on you and your success."

JO

Oh, I've got one.

Always hearing the joke "You might be the first person on the planet to ever do that!"

LIAM

Coming up with our own, I like it. Um —

Developing an unhealthy obsession with Earth nature documentaries.

JO

Having to watch a stupid Mars history presentation every year of your childhood.

ARIS *teasing*

Having to sleep through a stupid Mars history presentation every year of your childhood, you mean.

LIAM

Naming everything Red — Red Planet Post, the Red Underground —

JO *re: the beer they're drinking*

Red Planet Ale.

LIAM

Good one. What did people do here before Red Planet Ale?

ARIS

Developed a complex about living on Mars being just as good as living on Earth.

JO

"You'll love life on Mars."

LIAM

"Mars: a whole new world."

ARIS

"The colony's compounds contain all the amenities you could hope for."

JO

"A state of the art performing arts center, a beautiful central shopping and dining district, and much, much more."

LIAM

Okay, let's stop before anyone says it.

ARIS

What? "The frontier is a place of endless possibilities?"

JO

Endless possibilities, sure.

If "endless possibilities" includes having to take a dump but spending fifteen minutes to get your suit off first.

ARIS *laughing*

Jo.

LIAM

I can't top that.

ARIS

I wish that was in the presentation for real.

JO

It would make it a hundred times better.

MARVIN

However, the settlers soon learned that the newest residents of Mars wouldn't be coming from Earth.

ALL (ARIS)

"Andrew, I have something to tell you."

LIAM *as Andrew*

"What is it, Ella?"

ARIS *as Ella*

"I'm pregnant."

JO

Ohhhh, shit!

MARVIN

And with that, life on Mars would never be the same. There was a baby on the way. The first of a select few — the first generation of Martians.

JO

Did you notice that? "A select few." It doesn't say how many.

ARIS

So, what? You're saying the ghost story is true?

LIAM  
That doesn't mean anything.

JO  
It means there's a question mark.

*ARIS makes a loud thumping sound, out of sight of LIAM.*

LIAM  
Okay, what is that?

JO  
It's spooooky.

ARIS  
Liam, it's an old building.

LIAM  
But it sounded like —

JO  
You need another drink.

LIAM  
I'm not finished with this one.

JO  
Come on, Liam, one of these days you have to loosen up —

*JO goes to her bag for another drink, and ARIS makes the thumping sound again, scaring LIAM more.*

LIAM  
Seriously, what is that?  
*The lights flicker out.*  
It's not just pipes.

ARIS  
I'm not saying it's pipes.  
I don't know what it could be.

LIAM  
You're not scared.

ARIS  
I'm not — not scared.  
But it's in a good way. I'm spooked.

LIAM  
Oh, great. Spooked.

JO  
It's nothing, Liam.

LIAM

Then why are the lights still off?

*A loud sound from another part of the compound. JO and ARIS didn't make it.*

Okay. Okay. I know what's going on. You're messing with me again.

*"Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds plays through MARVIN.*

But how do you get this song to keep playing??

JO

Maybe this is the song it wants to play when it's about to kill us.

LIAM

Are you happy? You got me. You scared me.

JO

You should see the look on your face, it's pretty great.

ARIS *getting into the song*

This is kind of catchy. I like it.

JO

Yeah, come on Liam, let's dance!

LIAM

Absolutely not.

*ARIS and JO dance around a bit, maybe sing. The loud sound happens again. The song stutters out, and the lights flicker back on.*

ARIS

Okay, yeah, that is a *little* concerning.

LIAM

Wait, are you not doing that?

ARIS

Not that one.

JO

It's a good thing they're shutting this MARVIN down. It's clearly way past its time.

ARIS

MARVIN? What's going on?

LIAM *freaking out a bit*

It's not going to say. Why would it say?

JO

I shouldn't have told you that ghost story.

LIAM

So, are we leaving now?

ARIS

I think you're maybe overreacting a bit.  
We knew this place would be a little creepy.

JO

That's the whole fun of it.  
If you were scared, you didn't have to come.

LIAM

It's the last night before our Test. I wanted to hang out.

JO

We're hanging out!

LIAM

I just don't like what's going on. That's all.

JO

You can leave if you want. You don't have to stay.

ARIS

But we'd like it if you did stay. You're the one who knows the presentation best. How would we get through the whole thing without you basically narrating it?

JO

Yeah, like, if this was the Test, you'd have the best score out of all of us.

LIAM

I'm glad my dorkiness is useful to you.

JO

Don't worry, Liam, I'll fight a ghost before it can kill you. Promise.

LIAM

Ha. Okay. Thank you, I appreciate it.

ARIS

You're okay?

LIAM

Yeah, I'm okay. I'm okay.

JO

What comes next?

LIAM

The kids, of course.

MARVIN

Life on Mars would never be the same again.

LIAM

— Right.  
"Andrew, I have something to tell you."



ARIS *as Andrew*

"Uh, what is it, Ella?"

LIAM

Ha. Yeah, that's what one of the founders of Mars sounded like.

JO *as Andrew*

I bet that's exactly what he sounded like.

"Ella, could you hold on like one second?"

ARIS *as Andrew*

"Ella, could you give me some peace and quiet for once in your life?"

LIAM *as Ella*

"Andrew."

JO *as Andrew*

"Ella. What is your issue right now? I'm trying to do very important Mars-related work and all you want to do is talk to me?"

LIAM *as Ella*

"Andrew."

ARIS *as Andrew*

"Ella. How many times do I have to tell you I don't like talking to you?"

LIAM *as Ella*

"Andrew! Listen to me! I'm pregnant!"

*They're all laughing at this point.*

JO *as Andrew*

"Ella, what are we going to do? I don't know how to be a dad."

ARIS *as Andrew*

"Ella, we're on Mars. How are we supposed to have a kid on Mars?"

MARVIN

It was the first of a special generation — the first people to ever be born on Mars. Now the settlers would have to adapt to a whole new challenge.

ARIS *as Andrew*

"Ella, it's like we're adapting to a whole new challenge."

LIAM *as Ella*

"Andrew, I swear to god."

JO *as Andrew*

"What? What'd I do?"

MARVIN

New protocols were put in place, a schooling system was developed, food, water, and waste level projections adjusted, development milestones charted, as Mars prepared for the next generation.

ARIS

Okay, I can see why you'd fall asleep.

JO

I don't know if I'd be able to do it.

ARIS

Fall asleep? Sure you can.

JO

Raising a kid like that. Without that safety net of a society, of other people. There were, what, eight people here? And then to have kids on the way? I wouldn't be able to do it. It's too much.

LIAM

Didn't your mom —?

JO *sharp*

What? Have me when she was young? Yeah. And I wouldn't be able to do that either. "Youngest pregnancy in Mars history," which — I don't know. But by then, at least there was civilization here. To help.

ARIS

And now here you are!

JO

And now here I am.  
She had me a week before her Test.

LIAM

Really? I didn't know that.

JO

Yep.

LIAM

Bet that's not on the Test.

JO

Ha. Probably not.

ARIS

Maybe, though. I've heard that anything can be on it.  
Like they can simulate a malfunction on the surface, and you have to go fix it.

LIAM

My parents said it's almost like a personality test. To see what best suits you. That it changes based on the person.

JO  
So Liam's Test will be meeting a ghost.

LIAM  
How would that be helpful?

JO  
Facing your fears!

ARIS  
Liam, you could be in your Test *right now*. Jo and I might just be simulations.

JO  
Yeah, we're simulations, but the ghosts are very real!

LIAM  
If you were simulations, you wouldn't tell me you were simulations.

JO  
Anything is possible!  
— I wonder if anyone's died during their Test?

LIAM  
That wouldn't happen.

ARIS  
You could die from stress.

LIAM *a little panicked now*  
Why would you say that?

JO  
Ugh, it's so dumb. Why does everyone make such a big deal of it? Why do we even have to take it?

LIAM  
— To make sure we can survive.

JO  
Yeah, it's for survival on Mars. Technical stuff. But it's not like it's going to cover everything we'll encounter in our lives. It can't.

ARIS  
We should boycott.

LIAM  
To accomplish what?

ARIS  
To make a statement. To say it doesn't prepare us for life.

LIAM  
It still has its purpose, though. It's still useful for the things it's testing us on. Unlike this presentation, which doesn't serve its purpose anymore because MARVIN is malfunctioning.

JO

What's the point, anyway? We could boycott it, but it's not like we'd make a difference. The Test isn't going anywhere. It's a tradition. It's been here since the first generation.

ARIS

You both lack conviction.

JO

And could you imagine if *you* didn't take the Test, Aris?  
People would lose their minds. The granddaughter of the First Generation?

ARIS

It's not that big a deal.

JO

Okay. You tell yourself that.

ARIS

It's not.

LIAM

So, you two aren't simulations, right?

JO

I guess you'll never know for sure.

MARVIN

As the children grew up, they became interested in the culture of Earth. They watched films during their education. And for fun, they played a game —

*ARIS, LIAM, and JO join in.*

Imagining what life might have been like on Earth.

LIAM

Oh, this is the best part.

*MARVIN reveals a small collection of props and costume pieces: maybe western hats, an 80s style prom dress, a few wigs, prop guns. Definitely two swords.*

*LIAM, JO, and ARIS explore everything. ARIS tries on a hat. JO picks up a sword.*

JO

I thought there were usually three of these.

ARIS

Maybe someone got here before us.

LIAM

How does it feel to hold? Do you feel like a badass?

JO

— I think so. Yeah.  
You want to fight?

*LIAM picks up the other sword.*

LIAM  
How'd you know I've wanted to try this my whole life?

JO  
That's — kind of sad.

LIAM  
I know.

JO  
As long as you know.

LIAM *launches into playing a character*  
Mordred. My old nemesis.

ARIS  
Oh wow, you had that ready to go.

JO  
So — what am I supposed to say?

LIAM  
You're Mordred. You're my nemesis.

JO  
Who's Mordred?

LIAM  
Knight of the Round Table. Traitor to King Arthur.

ARIS  
Oh, right, of course, *that* Mordred.

LIAM  
So. Mordred. Here we meet, on the fields of Camlann.

JO  
Yes. We do.  
— I'm like half following this right now.

ARIS  
Want me to jump in?

JO  
No! I want to fight.

LIAM  
The battle has been fought. Many valiant men have died.  
Let us come to peace.

JO  
Never.

LIAM

You will not best me, Mordred.

JO

Then I will die trying.

*JO charges LIAM. They play-fight. They're not very good. They've never fought with swords before.*

ARIS

You're terrible at that. Here.

*ARIS takes the sword from LIAM.*

Let me show you how it's done.

LIAM

Come on, I want to do the death scene!

*ARIS goes after JO. They play-fight. ARIS is clearly better at it.*

ARIS

You will not bring this kingdom to ruin, Mordred! You have stolen the crown and desecrated it!

JO

Yeah? Well, I think you're a bad person!

ARIS

I'm King Arthur — I'm a good person!

JO

How do you know?

ARIS

Um, because everyone says so.

LIAM

And because you have the sword Excalibur.

ARIS

And because I have the sword Excalibur.

JO

What sword do I have?

LIAM

— I don't know.

JO

Fine! My sword is the fucking Martian Annihilator, so yeah! Get ready to be annihilated!

ARIS

Oh, damn, okay.

*JO charges ARIS again. They fight.*

JO  
You'll never win, Arthur. The crown is mine.

ARIS  
You have betrayed me, your fellow knights, and your country. But most of all, you've betrayed yourself.

JO  
Oh, boo hoo.

ARIS  
It's very serious!

*JO has ARIS backed into a corner.*

JO  
What is? That I have you beat?

*ARIS disarms JO.*

ARIS  
Don't be so sure of yourself.

JO  
Okay, Aris, where'd that come from?

ARIS  
My grandma used to do this. She probably even used one of these. We would play together.

JO  
I remember that! There was the time I came over, and she had to keep showing me how to hold it.

ARIS  
Yes! "It's an extension of your arm, Jo."

JO  
"Please stop trying to twirl it."

ARIS *laughing*  
That was a good day.

LIAM *slightly hurt*  
Yeah, sounds like it.

ARIS  
Liam, want to do the honors here, and kill Mordred?

LIAM  
Oh! Sure, thank you.

ARIS  
Excalibur.

*ARIS hands LIAM the sword. Meanwhile, JO sneaks to pick hers back up.  
LIAM "stabs" JO.*

LIAM

I'm sorry, Mordred. You left me no other choice.

*JO pulls themself up LIAM's sword, and "stabs" him.*

ARIS "*shocked*"

Oh no!

JO

Gotcha.

LIAM

You — you —

JO

I gotcha.

LIAM

You got me.

*LIAM and JO dramatically sink to the floor, making a show of dying.*

JO

Goodbye, Arthur. I'll see you in hell.

LIAM

See you there, Mordred.

JO

— Arthur?

LIAM

What, Mordred?

JO

You've been annihilated.

*JO "dies." LIAM starts laughing.*

ARIS

That was — something.

JO

Sorry we don't have your sweet sword fighting skills, Aris.

LIAM

You think the First Generation was that silly when they acted things out?

ARIS

Oh, for sure.



JO  
Being silly's the best part.

LIAM  
Really? I'd say feeling like you're actually there is the best part.

JO  
Nah, too boring.

LIAM  
I'd want to feel like I was there. On Earth. I'd want to forget about reality for a bit.

ARIS  
I think that's why they played.  
My grandma said they talked about Earth a lot. About what living there would be like.

LIAM  
Do you think that's where the idea for Mission Return came from?

ARIS  
Probably. I don't know.

LIAM  
Sorry, we don't have to talk about it.

JO  
Yeah, maybe we shouldn't.

ARIS  
I don't know that much about it anyway. We were what, ten at the time?  
I know she wanted to go back to Earth, and be able to travel back and forth. And she — almost made it a reality.

LIAM  
It would've been amazing.

ARIS  
I guess.

LIAM  
To actually be able to go to Earth? It would've changed everything.

ARIS  
Yeah, well.

JO *changing the subject*  
My Earth phase was so bad. It was around that time too, when your grandma was working on Mission Return. I remember I kept this diary —

ARIS  
Oh no, not the diary.

JO  
Liam, you can't tell anyone about this. Okay?

LIAM

Okay, yeah, I won't.

JO

I kept this diary as if I was a kid on Earth. Going to school, taking family vacations, living in a city. I made everything up. I lived in Osaka. I wrote about looking out at all that water, all those mountains, all those buildings, all that greenery. I made up having best friends at school. Enemies. Riding a bicycle home under an open sky. I thought writing about it would make it more real. I thought it would make me want it less.

LIAM

I never knew you had an Earth phase.

JO

Oh, trust me, you didn't miss much.

LIAM

I think I'm still in the middle of mine. Ha.

ARIS

Do you keep a diary, too?

LIAM

No, I can't say I do.

JO

You should start. Then in ten or so years, you'll have all this amazing stuff to be embarrassed by.

LIAM

Right, sounds like a great idea.

ARIS

It's not embarrassing to have an Earth phase, though. Everyone here does. The First Generation spent their free time playing this game, imagining what Earth was like.

JO

You think it was all swords and costumes?

ARIS

I don't know. I think it was mostly about regular life. Like what you were talking about. Imagining what could've been.

LIAM

I wonder if they complained about the Test too.

JO

Of course they did. It's the *Test*. Nobody likes tests.

ARIS

Nobody likes a reminder that they have to face the future someday.

JO

I do! Bring it on, future!

MARVIN

Plans began to formulate about a second, much larger, settling of Mars. An entire community. The Second Landing.

LIAM *to JO*

Hey, our grandparents are about to show up

JO *dry*

Oh, wow, exciting.

MARVIN

But before the new settlers could arrive, a problem arose.

JO *not serious*

Oh no, a problem!

ARIS *playing along*

What is it?

MARVIN

The water supply for the newest part of the colony, where the majority of the new settlers would be living, wasn't working properly.

JO

Oh no, what a bad problem!

ARIS

Whatever will they do?

LIAM *re: ARIS and JO's playfulness*

What is happening.

MARVIN

It would have to be fixed before the Second Landing. The Founders set out on the fifty mile journey across the surface to make the necessary adjustments, leaving the kids here at the compound.

JO

Oh no, leaving the kids alone!

ARIS

What misfortunes will occur?

*Another voice is heard, in unison with MARVIN.*

MARVIN/VOICE

The Founders did not survive.

*Pause. ARIS and JO look at LIAM.*

LIAM

I already know what you're going to say. "It's fine, Liam. It's old, it's malfunctioning. There's nothing to worry about." But you can't tell me that's not creepy.

JO *laughing*

No, that's creepy as hell.

LIAM

The part where the First Generation's parents *die*, and all of a sudden *that* happens? That can't be a coincidence.

JO

At least we have swords to defend ourselves, right, Liam?

LIAM

If you think a sword is going to protect us from a *ghost* that can speak through MARVIN, you're insane.

ARIS

Do you think it's something speaking through MARVIN, or do you think there's a malfunction?

JO

Who knows. I'm no expert. MARVIN, you alright?

ARIS

It's not going to answer.  
I don't think this one can anymore.

LIAM

I'm so used to MARVIN responding. Hearing an old one that doesn't is weird.

JO

You think this one ever could?

ARIS

My grandma said it did. They had conversations with it.

LIAM

That's sad. To think it had the ability to communicate, but it's been programmed to just repeat the presentation over and over.

ARIS

So you're not scared of it?

LIAM

No, it's still scary. Just also — depressing.

JO

Fun.

LIAM

Oh yeah, super fun.

ARIS

I wonder if it wants to talk to us.

JO

We're the best, so, probably.

LIAM

So what's it trying to say, in that terrifying voice? That it wants us to leave?  
That it wants to kill us?

ARIS

It's harmless. It's just a voice.

JO *imitating MARVIN*

"I will kill you with my creepy voice."

LIAM

Stop.

ARIS

It wouldn't have a reason to want to kill us, anyway. We're here, interacting with it. I'm sure that's a good thing.  
You like us, right, MARVIN?

*Pause. The sound of movement, shuffling, or steps plays through MARVIN. Then it abruptly cuts off.*

LIAM

— MARVIN?

JO

Maybe we're about to hear Trish!

ARIS

Ooo, I hope so.

LIAM

I'm not ready.

*MARVIN's voice comes back, normal again.*

MARVIN

The Founders did not survive.

ARIS

We got our hopes up for nothing.

JO

You let us down, MARVIN!

MARVIN

After repairing the water supply at the newly built section of the colony, they began their journey back. They did not make it far, however. During the trip, their rover crashed, destroying their oxygen supply.

ARIS

Jesus.

JO

I forgot about this part.

LIAM  
How? I thought you were all about ghost stories.

JO  
Because I don't have this thing memorized like you, Liam.

ARIS  
I don't like to think about the crash.

MARVIN  
The first humans to live on Mars. They gave their lives to pave the way for the future. Without their sacrifice, the citizens of the Second Landing would have landed on a planet with no water. They may have never succeeded.

LIAM  
That'd be a nightmare. Landing on a new planet to find out there's no water.

JO  
I'm sure they would've figured it out.

ARIS  
With no water?

JO  
I don't know, maybe. Give them more credit.  
It's not like the Founders were the only people who could solve problems. Just because they're the first people here doesn't mean they're automatically the best.

ARIS  
You know that's my great-grandparents you're shit talking.

JO  
Yeah, trust me, I know. We all know. All I'm saying is, it feels like we idolize them too much.

ARIS  
So, you think you could do what they did?

JO  
I don't know. I wasn't there. I guess there's no point arguing about it.

ARIS  
No, probably not.

*Pause. ARIS and JO are both upset. There's a quiet tension.*

MARVIN  
The First Generation children awaited their parents' return, a return that would never come. The years passed, until finally they reached the age to take their Test. At last, they would be able to leave this compound and walk out onto the surface for the first time.

LIAM *trying to break the tension*  
Come on MARVIN, we're trying not to think about the Test.  
*LIAM laughs at himself.*  
Right?

JO

You know what, Aris? I'm just going to go right out there and say it.

ARIS

Say what? Please, enlighten me.

JO

There it is. "Enlighten me." Ha.  
I'm sick of your whole "holier-than-thou" attitude. I'm sick of it.

ARIS

Holier-than-thou?

JO

Yeah. I mean it. I'm sick of you constantly acting like you're better than everyone because your great-grandparents were Founders.

ARIS

I don't think I'm better than everyone.

*The lights have started to go red. LIAM notices.*

LIAM

Hey, folks —

JO

You *clearly* think you're better than everyone. It's always "my grandma" this, "my grandma" that...

ARIS

Yeah, because I love my grandma, and I miss her!

JO

We get it, you're from an important family! You're special! You matter!

ARIS

You think I want that?

JO

"My grandma was in the First Generation. My grandma founded Mission Return."

ARIS

Right, because that's so enviable. Watching your grandmother's entire life explode into pieces? To know that you'd never see her again? You think I enjoy that?

LIAM

Hey, is anyone else noticing this?

JO

I think you enjoy being treated as important.  
Our entire lives. That's all it's been.

ARIS

I never wanted that.

JO

Everyone always pays attention to you. Cares about you.  
"The future of Mars, a link to the past," blah blah blah.

LIAM

Can we take just a second to talk about the lights?

ARIS

Everyone cares about me? Are you kidding? She wanted to leave when I was ten! It's like I wasn't enough to keep her on the same *planet* as me!

JO *re: herself*

Meanwhile, nobody gives a shit about the mistake over here.

LIAM

Jo, I give a shit about you.

ARIS

Besides, do you think it was easy to be the center of all that? To have to live up to her, to those expectations, to that tragedy? I hated every second of it.

LIAM

Can we come back to this maybe in a minute —

JO *overlapping*

The embarrassment of the colony.

ARIS

I hated it.

LIAM

MARVIN?

JO

It's not fair. I didn't ask for that. It's not like I *chose* to be —

ARIS

Neither did I.

JO

Yeah. Well.

ARIS

You never had to be friends with me, Jo.

JO

Maybe I shouldn't have. Just another person who doesn't really care.

LIAM

Did you not hear me just now? I care about you. I give a shit.

*Pause. JO realizes LIAM actually means it.*

Now can we look at the lights! What's going on?



*ARIS and JO look around, take it in.*

ARIS

— I'm glad they're tearing this old compound down. I never liked it, anyway. Being forced to watch how much everyone reveres your ancestors. It's about time we move on. Nobody needs a reminder of how this all started.

*The chorus of "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds plays, through MARVIN. The lights begin to flicker a bit, but don't go completely out. ARIS, JO, and LIAM look up.*

LIAM

Something's happening.

JO

Yeah, I'm getting out of here.

*JO goes to the door. It's locked.*

— So. Since when does the door lock?

LIAM

It's locked?

ARIS

MARVIN, unlock the door!

*The song only gets louder.*

LIAM

I told you we shouldn't have stayed. I don't trust this place.

ARIS

MARVIN!

JO

It can't respond to you, Aris. There's no point trying.

ARIS

But it turned on the lights when we came in. So it can still take instructions. It's still listening.

JO

So?

ARIS

So it can still communicate.  
MARVIN!

LIAM

MARVIN, open the door!

JO

This is never going to work.

ARIS

Maybe it's trying to talk to us —

LIAM

Don't you forget about me.

*The song gets louder. The lights flicker more.*

ARIS

Oh my god, it is.

LIAM

Don't you forget about me.  
The MARVIN doesn't want us to forget it.

JO

Or it's just playing a song.

ARIS

No — it's communicating!

LIAM

It knows it's going to be shut off. It wants to be remembered.

ARIS

We won't forget you, MARVIN! We'll remember!

*The song stops. The lights go back to normal.*

LIAM

I guess that's what it wanted to hear.

*JO tries the door.*

JO

But the door's still locked.

LIAM

Oh, come on, come on.

*LIAM tries the door.*

JO

What, it doesn't work for me but you think it'll work for you?

LIAM

I'm just trying.

ARIS

Great, we're stuck in here.

MARVIN

Incoming communication from M-1 Compound Command.

LIAM

— The Comm system still works here?

*Through MARVIN, heavy breathing is heard. ARIS, JO, and LIAM listen for a few moments. It continues through the following.*

JO  
What is that?

ARIS  
MARVIN isn't breathing, is it?

LIAM  
MARVIN doesn't breathe.

JO  
So there's someone in the Command here, breathing.

LIAM  
We need to get out of here.

*LIAM pushes against the door more.*

JO  
Yeah, good luck with that.

ARIS  
Hello? Is someone there?

*The breathing continues.*

JO  
Hey! Whoever you are! We know you can hear us!

*LIAM has sunk to the ground.*

LIAM  
Is this what you wanted to happen?

JO  
What?

LIAM  
We came here because you both wanted to see if the stories were real. You wanted to be scared. To hear Trish.

ARIS  
We wanted to have fun. See it one last time. See if it's as spooky as people say.

LIAM  
Guess what? It is!

ARIS  
*But it's not like we actually expected something to happen —*

LIAM

Well something's happening! Happy? We found the ghost!

*The breathing stops.*

JO

Hello?  
— Hello?

*A buzzing sound from MARVIN.*

MARVIN

The communication has terminated.

ARIS

Can we send a response?

LIAM

MARVIN, send communication to M-1 Compound Command. Call them back.

*Pause. No response.*

JO

Okay. Apparently not.

ARIS

Maybe it was just a recording. You know? Maybe it's just a recording.

LIAM

Why would MARVIN play a recording?

ARIS

I don't know, I'm just guessing.

JO

How does guessing help us right now?

ARIS

I'm trying to keep us from *freaking out!*

JO

That's going well.

ARIS

Okay, yeah, very funny.

LIAM

So, is there any way to get out of here, or are we just trapped until the ghost comes to kill us?

JO

One door, Liam. What do you think?

LIAM  
I don't know, maybe another opening or something?

ARIS  
I don't see anything. Do you see anything?

LIAM  
No —

JO  
So no, there isn't another way out.

LIAM  
You don't need to be mean about it.

JO  
Oh, sorry I hurt your feelings with my stress about *being trapped in here*.

LIAM  
MARVIN! You've got to let us out!  
Please!

*The sound of footsteps approaching outside.*

ARIS  
Do you hear that?

JO  
Footsteps.

ARIS  
I was hoping I was imagining it.

LIAM  
MARVIN! Come on!

JO  
That's not getting us anywhere!

LIAM  
Neither is just sitting here doing nothing!

*The footsteps are right outside the door. The footsteps stop. ARIS, JO, and LIAM have begun whispering.*

ARIS  
Okay. Okay. This is happening. Okay.

JO  
Maybe we can pretend we're not here?

ARIS  
How are we supposed to do that?

LIAM  
Probably by not talking!

JO  
Well we need to figure *something* out!

ARIS  
Maybe they'll go away.

LIAM  
Then what? We hope they're not waiting somewhere to kill us?

ARIS  
I don't know!! I'm not a ghost expert!

LIAM  
Jo?

JO  
I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

*A muffled beep from outside the door. A pause. Then, another beep.*

LIAM  
What's that.

ARIS  
Passcode?

LIAM  
They're trying to get in.

*Another beep. Then two more.*

JO  
I don't know if I'm ready to see a ghost.

*One final beep.*

MARVIN  
Emergency door lock deactivated. Opening in thirty seconds.

LIAM  
Well.  
It's been nice knowing you all.

JO  
This is going to be a long thirty seconds.

ARIS  
Yeah.  
*ARIS picks up a sword.*  
But at least we can be ready.

JO  
No. No.

*JO picks up the other sword.*

ARIS  
What?

JO  
I'm not letting you be a hero. Facing a ghost, or whatever, head on? No. We need to hide.

ARIS  
We need to do something.

*ARIS tries to push past JO. JO swings at ARIS.*

JO  
Aris, no. Please.

*ARIS retaliates. They fight.*

LIAM  
Maybe we should stay quiet —

ARIS  
We have to confront this thing!

JO  
Why do you always need to be in control?

MARVIN  
Ten — nine —

LIAM  
We should make a decision, kind of now —

MARVIN  
Eight — seven —

ARIS  
I can protect us!

MARVIN  
Six — five —

JO  
I can't let you do this.

MARVIN  
Four — three —

ARIS  
Why not?

MARVIN

Two —

JO

I don't want to lose you.

MARVIN

One.

*ARIS disarms JO, and JO stumbles and falls. LIAM catches them. ARIS ends up facing the door, which doesn't open.*

LIAM

Okay. Ha. I see what you did. This is all an elaborate setup to get me to be freaked out. Right? You figured out how to lock the door, you got this MARVIN to act all weird, then you brought me here to scare me. Nice work. You should be proud of yourselves. Really, I'm terrified.

ARIS

Liam —

*LIAM opens the door. A FIGURE is standing there in the hallway, holding a sword. The hallway outside the door is dark; the FIGURE is hard to see. Maybe all we can see of them is their eyes.*

LIAM

Oh, good touch. An actual ghost. I bet you thought you were really going to get me, Aris. Ha. What is this, some props you found around here?

*LIAM reaches out to touch the FIGURE. The FIGURE grabs LIAM's arm. LIAM screams.*

JO

Liam, get away from there!

ARIS to the FIGURE

Who are you?

*The lights flicker out.*

LIAM

Oh my god. Oh my god.

ARIS

Nobody move.

*The lights come back. The FIGURE is gone.*

JO

What just happened?

ARIS

I saw it there, in the doorway, then —



JO

Where did it go?

ARIS

I don't know.

LIAM

So you two weren't behind all this?

ARIS

No, we weren't.

LIAM

Oh my god. This is bad. This is really bad.

JO

No shit!

LIAM

It's not in here with us, is it?

*They look around.*

ARIS

I don't see anything.

LIAM

It's a ghost, Aris, maybe it's invisible!

ARIS

I'm going to look out in the hallway.

LIAM

I'm going to throw up.

JO

Aris, wait.

ARIS

Why? For it to come back?  
Yeah, I'm not going to do that.

*ARIS goes out the door and exits into the dark hallway.*

JO

Shit.

*Calling after her.*

Aris!  
— Should we go after her?

LIAM

Do you want to?

JO  
And chase down a ghost? Not really.

LIAM  
Me either.

JO  
Okay, good.  
So, we should just stay here, then?

LIAM  
You think we should escape?

JO  
I don't want to be locked in again.

LIAM  
We probably shouldn't leave her all alone.

JO  
You're right, you're right.  
— This is so fucked.

LIAM  
Yeah.

JO  
I didn't think — I didn't expect something to actually happen.

LIAM  
Are we bad friends for not going with her?

JO  
No. We're being — logical.

LIAM  
Yeah. You're right. Logical.

JO  
You don't think I'm a bad friend, do you?

LIAM  
Would you fight for me like that?  
If I was trying to go confront a ghost?

JO  
— Yeah, Liam. Yeah. Of course I would.

LIAM  
I know we haven't been friends for as long —

JO  
That doesn't matter.

LIAM

I guess I just worry. That one of these days, after the Test or at some point, that you and Aris are going to decide being friends with me, or putting up with me — I don't know, isn't worth it anymore.

JO

We don't think that, Liam.

LIAM

I know it's stupid, but — you stopped talking to me. When we were younger. And now, recently, you want to be friends again? I don't know. You leave people behind, Jo.

JO

I know. I'm sorry. But hey — look at me.

*LIAM does.*

I'm not doing that anymore.

Okay?

LIAM

Okay.

*A scream is heard. It could be ARIS, or it could be played through MARVIN. It's hard to tell. The lights flicker out again.*

JO

Was that — ?

LIAM

I don't know.

JO

We should go.

LIAM

Right. Yeah. We should.

JO

She needs our help.

LIAM

Yes. Help. Yes.

JO

We'll be okay.

LIAM

I'm scared.

JO

No shit, so am I. But we're not leaving her behind.

*JO starts to go.*

LIAM

Wait.

JO

What?

LIAM

Don't forget the sword.

JO

Oh, good call.

*JO grabs the sword.*

Here we go.

*JO and LIAM exit.*

*The lights are now pulsing, in and out, illuminating an empty hallway in the Compound.*

*ARIS is cautiously making her way through, still clutching her sword.*

*ARIS whispering*

MARVIN, lights all the way on, please.

*The lights continue to pulse.*

Okay, that's fine. Don't listen to me.

*ARIS hears a VOICE, emanating from somewhere in the Compound.*

VOICE

Let's play a Simulation. Let's pretend.

Let's pretend you're on the surface for the first time.

You're alone. It's getting dark. Your friends are gone. You don't know where they went. You want to look for them. You're not sure if they can help you anymore. You're not sure if anyone can.

Let's pretend a dust storm kicks up. You can't see anything, you can barely see your hands in front of your face. What do you do? Do you keep going? Do you turn back?

Let's pretend the smell hits you first. The stink of rot. Then the ground feels slick, sticky. Red dirt steeped in red blood. What do you do? Do you turn back?

No one is coming to save you. No one ever will.

*ARIS sees brighter light pulsing from a room. She turns to stand in the doorway. The FIGURE is crouched in a corner, speaking into the Comm system. Their sword is lying on the ground next to them.*

*ARIS attempts to sneak toward the FIGURE. The FIGURE continues talking.*

FIGURE

No one is coming to save you. You've disappeared. You are no more.

An actual ghost. I bet you thought you were really going to get me, Aris.

ARIS

— Who are you?

*The FIGURE turns. ARIS freezes. The FIGURE looks surprised to see ARIS.*

FIGURE *roaring*

*Get out! Get out! Get out!*

*The FIGURE, picking up their sword, charges ARIS. ARIS screams.*

ARIS

Oh my god, oh my god.

*The FIGURE attacks. ARIS has no choice but to fight back. The FIGURE is a better fighter than ARIS, but ARIS desperately holds her own.*

FIGURE

I said get out.

ARIS

I don't want to hurt you. I just want to know who you are.

FIGURE

You don't. Get out.

ARIS

We didn't know anyone was here.

FIGURE

Liar. You want me gone.

ARIS

Please —

*Eventually, though, the FIGURE overpowers ARIS and backs her into a wall. It's looking lost. The FIGURE gets a good look at ARIS' face for the first time, and vice versa. We can see that the FIGURE is not a ghost, but a person: TRISH. The FIGURE lets their sword down.*

TRISH

You're back.

ARIS

— What?

TRISH

Erica, you're back. I knew you'd come back.

ARIS

How do you know that name?

TRISH

I heard you talking out there, with them, but I was afraid you wouldn't come talk to me, Erica —

ARIS

How do you know that name?

TRISH

Let me look at you.

*LIAM and JO burst into the room. They see TRISH and ARIS.*

JO

Get off her!

*JO charges at TRISH, who drops her sword and backs away. JO keeps her at swordpoint.  
LIAM grabs TRISH's sword from the floor. TRISH sees that she's outnumbered.*

ARIS to JO

Don't hurt her!

LIAM to ARIS

Are you okay?

ARIS

I'm fine.  
Don't hurt her.

JO

Looked like she was about to hurt you.

*TRISH tries to sneak away. LIAM stands in her way, scared to touch her.*

LIAM

Woah, hey, hey, the ghost is trying to escape.

JO catching TRISH

Where are you going?

TRISH

Who are you people?  
Who are they?

ARIS

These are my friends.

TRISH

No, Erica, I'm your friend.  
They want to get rid of me? They have no right to be here.

JO

No? What about you? What right do you have to be here?

TRISH

I live here.  
Tell them, Erica. They can't just erase us. We live here.

ARIS

How do you know her name?

TRISH

It's your name, Erica.

It's you.

LIAM

Who does she think you are?

ARIS

She's calling me my grandma's name. She's calling me Erica.

TRISH

You can't fool me, Erica!  
I missed you.

*TRISH hugs ARIS.*

ARIS

No, no. I'm not. I'm sorry.  
I'm Erica's granddaughter. I'm Aris.

TRISH

Aris.

ARIS

Yes.

TRISH

Oh, I get it! We're doing a Simulation! Good idea!  
We're our own descendents.

ARIS

What?

TRISH

We're in the *future*. Watch, the MARVIN here still works.  
MARVIN, set the scene.

*The lights change. Some futuristic sounds. The room feels like it's changed.*

LIAM

What's going on?

TRISH

Come on, let's play. We're in the future.

ARIS

Um, how do we play?

TRISH

We imaginel! Erica, what's wrong with you? You love this game.

ARIS

Okay. We imagine. Okay.

TRISH *in "character"*

Look at this! It's so cool that we can talk to each other through holograms. It's so much more realistic than talking through the Comm system, like our grandparents used to. I'm so glad we live in such a futuristic time.

JO *to ARIS*

We could leave.

ARIS

I want to find out how she knows my grandma.

TRISH

What are you whispering about?

ARIS

Nothing. You're right, these holograms are very impressive. It looks like you're right there.

TRISH

I know!

*To LIAM.*

How's life on Triton?

LIAM

Oh — it's, um, pretty great.

TRISH

You're doing it wrong. It has to be believable.

LIAM

Sorry. Um — Triton is incredible. The colony here is still new, but it's great to be able to explore. Find new places. See things like you'd never imagine on Mars or Earth.

TRISH

I'm sure.

I bet our grandparents would be jealous of us, getting to live in all these different places.

LIAM

You think so?

TRISH

Yes! They grew up stuck in just one compound on Mars.

ARIS

True. I bet they would be jealous.

TRISH

People say I look like my grandmother.

*To ARIS.*

I bet that happens to you a lot, too.

ARIS

Yes. It does. How did our grandparents know each other?

TRISH

You know this. Don't be silly.



ARIS

Remind me.

TRISH

They were friends! They grew up together!

ARIS

Your grandmother and Erica? On Mars?

TRISH

Yes, of course! What's gotten into you?

ARIS

I was just wondering.

TRISH

They were best friends. Just like us!

ARIS

Just like us.

TRISH

Even though some of us are on different planets.

*To LIAM.*

And moons.

LIAM

You all should visit sometime.

TRISH

Yes! Yes. But you're all coming here to Mars, for the interplanetary dance in a few months.

ARIS

We're so excited.

*To JO.*

Aren't we?

JO

Super excited.

TRISH

Me too.

I'm a little nervous. Talking to you all in real life, instead of over a hologram. I don't know if I'll be able to handle it.

ARIS

You will. It'll be fun. We'll dance together.

TRISH

You're right. I'm being — silly.

ARIS

I'm sorry to keep bringing this up, but — remind me of your grandmother's name?

TRISH

You don't know?

ARIS

It slipped my mind.

TRISH

You don't know?

But you were talking about her, tonight. I heard you all talking about me tonight.

LIAM

You heard us — ?

ARIS

Are we still imagining, or — ?

TRISH

Not now. you were talking about me.

LIAM

We were talking about —

ARIS

Oh my god.

JO

No. She can't be.

LIAM

What?

ARIS

It's Trish.

TRISH

I knew you'd remember, Erica! It's me — it's Trish.

JO

You're — no. No. I don't believe it.

LIAM

*The* Trish?

JO

You mean it's real? The story is true?

TRISH

Erica, we have to do a Simulation.

ARIS

Weren't we just doing one?

TRISH

Another one.

We have to. Let's do the Opening.

ARIS

Opening?

TRISH

Yes, we have to set the scene!  
What is with you today?

ARIS

I'm sorry.

TRISH

We have to stand in a circle.  
All of us.

*They do.*

LIAM

What are we imagining?

TRISH

We're in the compound. I'm me, and you're Erica.

ARIS

You want me to be Erica?

TRISH

Yes, we're playing ourselves.

ARIS

I don't know if I can —

TRISH

Yes you can. It's easy.

JO

Who are we?

TRISH

Right, right. You're Alan and Denver, of course.

JO *to LIAM*

Who?

LIAM *to JO*

The other Elders.

JO *to LIAM*

Oh, got it.

TRISH *continuing, getting carried away*

It's the day before our Test. We're preparing.

JO *to LIAM*

It's like she knows.

LIAM *to JO*

Maybe she heard us talking about it.

TRISH

Do you two have anything to add?

JO

Um — we're getting ready for the Test?

LIAM

We're nervous.

TRISH

Yes, nervous. Yes.

ARIS

Going over everything we think we're supposed to know —

TRISH *to ARIS*

I took the Test very seriously.  
You were always more interested in Earth than Mars.

ARIS

I — love Earth.

TRISH

Yes you do! There's the Erica I know!

LIAM

What did this compound look like? What should we imagine?

TRISH

A brand new space. But lived in.  
It felt like home. It was home.

LIAM

Books and art on the walls —

TRISH

Yes!  
Voices ringing through the hallways.

JO

Music sometimes.

LIAM

Movies.

TRISH

I can imagine it.

And always, always, the windows looking out onto the Surface.

ARIS

Reminding you how much world is still unexplored.

TRISH

Yes. Yes.

I think I'm ready. Are you?

JO

— Sure.

LIAM

I guess so.

ARIS

We are.

*TRISH goes up to each one of them, touches them on the arm or face.*

TRISH *to JO*

Denver.

*To LIAM.*

Alan.

*To ARIS.*

Erica.

*TRISH pauses.*

Okay.

MARVIN, we're ready.

*The lights change. Maybe some sound. It's brighter, feels more alive, more young. Like it must've felt in the early days. ARIS, LIAM, and JO look around and take in the change.*

ARIS

— Now what?

TRISH

Now we imagine.

JO *to LIAM*

Imagine — ?

LIAM *to JO*

That we're the Elders when they were kids. Weren't you listening?

JO *to LIAM*

I got confused.

TRISH

This Test is going to be the end of me.

ARIS  
I can't wait until we don't have to think about it anymore.

TRISH  
Same here.

JO  
What's even the point? We know we're capable. We can survive out there.

TRISH  
I guess they have to make sure.

LIAM  
I bet Earth kids don't have to do this.

ARIS  
Right, I bet they can just go out onto the Surface whenever they want.  
I wish we could be there instead.

TRISH  
Classic Erica. "I wish we could be on Earth. I want to be on Earth."

ARIS  
— Yeah.

TRISH  
You've been talking like that forever.

JO  
That's Erica for you. Once she gets committed to something, she doesn't let it go.

TRISH  
Exactly! You're right, she does do that!

ARIS  
Yes, that's me, I guess.  
You know me so well.

JO  
Of course we do. We grew up together.

TRISH  
Remember when we were kids? Our parents would tell us we could be anything we want?  
*To LIAM.*  
Your mom especially, Alan.

LIAM  
I remember, I remember. Anything we want.

ARIS  
What do you want to be assigned? What do you want your results to be?

TRISH  
I want to help design the Test. Prepare the next generations for what they'll really have to expect on Mars.

ARIS

That's good. That's definitely useful.

TRISH

I think so. You need to prepare people. That's what the Test is supposed to do. What about you all?

JO

I don't really care what I get.

LIAM

I think I want to be a teacher.

JO

Really?

LIAM

Maybe, yeah. Teach kids about the past.

JO

That's cool.

TRISH

Erica? What do you want to be?

ARIS

I want to be an engineer. Plan for trips back and forth from Earth. That way people can come and go. The planets won't feel so separate.

TRISH

You think that could happen, one day?

ARIS

It could. If I make it happen, it could.

TRISH

You will, Erica. You will. When you believe in something that much, it's bound to become a reality.

ARIS

You're right. I will.

TRISH

You're going to leave us all behind one day, Erica. Once you can get to Earth, you won't look back.

ARIS

— You think so?

TRISH

Knowing you? Definitely. It's your biggest dream.

ARIS

Yeah.

TRISH

I think you've always been destined for it.

ARIS

And that doesn't hurt you?

TRISH

No. I'm proud to know you. I'm proud to know you'll make your dream a reality. It's a good thing. It's a really good thing.

*ARIS is on the verge of tears, hearing this.*

ARIS

Thank you, Trish.

LIAM

It's kind of strange to think about. What realities await us in the future.

TRISH

The future.  
Can you imagine?

JO

Hardly.

TRISH

It scares me. How much is yet to come.

LIAM

Me too.

JO

Why be scared? I'm ready for it. Bring it on, future.

TRISH

I don't think I'm ready.  
The Test, the assignments. The careers, the successes, the failures. The days spent building a world for ourselves, and the simple evenings to unwind. The celebration of birthdays. The nights spent talking about nothing and everything.  
Maybe babies. Maybe children. The next phases. The school. The growing-up together. Watching our children become friends with each other. The passing-on of traditions. The games.  
The meals, the movies, the crying, the boredom.  
The graduations, the siblings, the music, the laughter.  
The old age, the grandchildren, the regeneration of our world into theirs.  
The what-could-be.  
The what-could-have-been.  
I'm scared of everything I might miss.  
Everything I have missed.

ARIS

Trish.

TRISH *to ARIS*

Erica, I'm so sorry.  
I've missed everything. I didn't mean to miss it all. But I have and I'm sorry. And it's too late.



I'm sorry, Erica.  
I'm sorry.  
I miss you so much.  
What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?

*TRISH has fallen into ARIS's arms.*

ARIS

It's okay.  
Trish, it's okay. I forgive you.

TRISH

I missed your whole life. Your friendship meant everything to me and — and I ran.  
I ran and I hid.

LIAM *to JO*

We should do something.

JO *to LIAM*

Like what?

LIAM *to JO*

I don't know, I thought you might have an idea.

ARIS

Trish, I forgive you.

TRISH

You shouldn't.

ARIS

I do.

TRISH

You shouldn't.

ARIS

Listen to me.  
Your friendship means the world to me, too. That hasn't changed.

TRISH

Even after I ran away?

ARIS

Yes. Even after you ran away.

TRISH

I wish I hadn't. I wish I'd had the courage to stay.  
I wasted so much time.

ARIS

Trish. Time, distance, silence — none of that changes the way I feel about you.  
Nothing can change what we mean to each other.

TRISH

Erica. Thank you.  
Thank you.

*ARIS looks to LIAM and JO, not sure of what to do.*

JO

Tell her.

ARIS

Trish. I'm sorry. I wish I didn't have to tell you this.  
But, I'm not Erica. I'm her granddaughter. I'm Aris.

TRISH

Aris.

ARIS

Yes.

TRISH

We're not imagining.

ARIS

No.

TRISH

You're not Erica.

ARIS

No.

TRISH

I thought — I was afraid —  
I was afraid you weren't Erica. I was afraid it was true.

ARIS

So, who am I?

TRISH

You're not Erica. You're Aris. Her granddaughter.

ARIS

That's right.

TRISH

I'm sorry. I thought I could — keep her.

ARIS

It's okay.

TRISH

You look so much like her.  
I don't know how to —

It's been so long, hasn't it?

ARIS

Yes. It has.

TRISH

I miss her.

ARIS

Me too.

TRISH

She's — ?

*ARIS shakes her head. TRISH takes it in.*

I'm sorry for what I — what I missed.

She was a special person.

ARIS

She was.

TRISH

Yes. Yes.

ARIS

Are you okay?

TRISH

I'm sorry. I —

Thank you for talking to me. For not running.

LIAM

Thank you for not being a ghost.

TRISH

— What?

JO

We really thought you were a ghost.

ARIS

Jo. Liam.

JO

What? It's the truth.

LIAM

You scared us.

TRISH

I was scared of you. I thought you might be coming to destroy this place. I wanted to scare you away. To let me disappear in peace.

ARIS

Wait — you know they're tearing this old compound down?

TRISH

I've heard them talking about it — I don't remember when.

JO

But I don't think anyone knows you're here.

TRISH

That's fine. This is my home. They can destroy it if they want. I'll be okay. I've survived worse.

ARIS

No. You can't stay here.

TRISH

I'll be okay.

MARVIN and I will see it through to the end, together. Right, MARVIN?

*No response from MARVIN. Maybe a dull buzzing.*

MARVIN?

MARVIN, can you hear me?

*Slowly, one by one, the lights begin to flicker off.*

LIAM

Do you think this is it?

ARIS

What do you mean?

LIAM

This could be when he's programmed to shut down.

TRISH

Shut down? Already?

No. No no no. MARVIN!

ARIS

Trish. It's okay.

TRISH

But MARVIN's the only person I've talked to —

JO

There's an updated version of MARVIN in the newer compound. If that helps.

TRISH

No, no, no. It's not the same. I can't —

LIAM

It's still MARVIN.

TRISH

I can't lose him too. I can't do it.

ARIS

Hey. Trish. We're here.

We're here for you.

LIAM

We can help you.

TRISH

It's too — It's too much. I can't.  
I can't.

LIAM *to ARIS*

I don't know what to do.

ARIS *to LIAM*

Me neither.

TRISH

I — I can't go out there. I'm not ready. It's been too long. I can't. I'll be a stranger. A ghost. I don't know anyone.

JO

You know us.

TRISH

I'll just scare people. Like I scared you.

JO

No, look at me.  
Okay?  
That isn't you.  
We didn't know you.  
You hear me?

TRISH

Yes.

JO

What did I say?

TRISH

It isn't me.

JO

That's right. And it never was. Not really.  
But you already know that.

TRISH

How do you know?

JO

Because I do. I just do.

TRISH

I thought for so long that I'd been forgotten. Left behind.  
I'd learned to be okay with it.

JO  
Forgotten? You're Trish. Every kid on Mars grows up hearing stories about you.

TRISH  
— They do?

JO  
Why do you think we came here in the first place? You're a legend.

ARIS  
You're one of the first generation. Like my grandma.  
Like Erica.

JO  
People are going to be honored to meet you. And if they aren't, who cares?

*TRISH smiles.*

TRISH  
You remind me of myself when I was your age.

JO  
That's — pretty cool. Thank you.

ARIS  
You think you're ready?

TRISH  
For what?

ARIS  
To come with us.

TRISH  
I'm not going to be left behind again?

LIAM *with a glance at JO*  
No. We're not doing that anymore.

*A portion of "(Don't You) Forget About Me" by Simple Minds plays through MARVIN.*

JO  
What is it with this song?

LIAM  
I think it's MARVIN saying goodbye.

*TRISH has begun laughing.*

JO  
Is that funny? I thought you liked talking to MARVIN.

TRISH

I do, it's just — this is what he'd always play to cheer me up.  
Thank you, MARVIN. Thank you.

*The lights begin to flicker. MARVIN is putting on a bit of a show.  
ARIS, JO, LIAM, and TRISH watch.*

LIAM

It's a good song.

JO

Weren't you scared of it?

LIAM

I'm not anymore. Now that I know what it is.

TRISH

I'm ready.

ARIS

Look out, Mars. Here we come.

*TRISH smiles again. Nobody moves. They continue to watch the lights flicker and fade.  
Then, JO begins to subtly dance. Just a little bob back and forth, enjoying the music. ARIS  
joins them, and then, a little begrudgingly, LIAM does too.  
They do this for a few moments. The last light is flickering. It's almost completely dark.  
They stop dancing and look up again.  
Maybe TRISH is crying.  
Then it's dark.  
Transition.  
The lights come back up on ARIS, JO, and LIAM. They stand facing out.  
We hear MARVIN — the newer, updated MARVIN.*

MARVIN

Welcome, Test subjects.  
Liam.  
Jo.  
Aris.

LIAM

Good luck, everyone.

JO

You nervous?

LIAM

Just a little, you?

JO

Hell no.

ARIS  
We got this.

MARVIN  
Best of luck.  
Mars awaits.

ARIS  
See you all on the other side.

*ARIS takes JO's and LIAM's hands.*

MARVIN  
Your Test begins now.

*Something new opens up before them.*

*Light, sound.*

*They look out toward it.*

*They take a breath in.*

*They grip each others' hands.*

*They're on the verge of something, even if they don't know what it is yet.*

*That's okay.*

*They'll find out.*

*Blackout.*

**END OF PLAY**