

The Earth Room

by Marge Buckley

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Cast (in order of appearance)

GEORGE/THE GEORGE...he/him/his.

MALIA...seventeen. she/her/hers.

ARI...early twenties. she/her/hers.

JITTERBUG...they/them/theirs.

HOUSE...a house.

GEORGE and JITTERBUG are both about halfway through a medically extended lifespan. What this means for casting in regards to age and ability depends on the production.

Everybody should be drinking coffee in various forms throughout.

Act I

ONE

(ARI stands in the Earth Room. She presses a remote.)

ARI
a sailboat.
the Atlantic Ocean.
seagulls.
sunlight.
three hours.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

TWO

(GEORGE sits at the kitchen table, drinking coffee. MALIA enters and hands him a form. GEORGE reads.)

GEORGE
absolutely not, Malia.

MALIA
dad-

GEORGE
that's-
it's-

MALIA
I'm not asking you to be a chaperone or-

GEORGE
Malia.
no.

MALIA
dad, you have to.

GEORGE
first of all, sweetheart
I do not have to do anything.
I don't have to do anything at all.
okay?
okay.
second of all

MALIA
everybody else is going.
literally everybody else.
except Dylan, but his parents didn't let him go to sex ed either
do you want to stunt my intellectual-

GEORGE
sometimes you don't get to do what everybody else gets to do.
sometimes you shouldn't do what everybody else is doing
even if you really want to. even if you feel a certain way.
if everybody else was jumping off a bridge would you jump off a bridge?

MALIA
with the right equipment, dad.
yes.
I would jump off a bridge.

it's a sport, it's called BASE jumping, you can get a permit to do it in the Wilderness Sector.

GEORGE

we don't know what's out there, sweetheart.
contaminants.
waste management is far from perfect, even here.
we're probably dumping all kinds of smudge into the atmosphere.

MALIA

do you really think my school would-
and you read that article in The Daily Sand
people are going out there,
school groups, scientists, hikers,
plenty, and nobody is getting sick.

GEORGE

we don't know anything about the long-term effects, Malia.
you have to think about that.
you have to think about the long-term effects of
what they'll do to you over an extended period of time.
you know about cell phones.

MALIA

yes.
I know about cell phones.
I go to school, dad.

GEORGE

do you know how many of my friends got cancer from their cell phones?

MALIA

six.

GEORGE

I-
well, I don't know the exact number.
but several, Malia.
several.
Sophie, Pavement.
would Mx. Masterson have sent permission slips if they didn't think there might be some parents
who said no?
I'm saying no.
you can't go.

MALIA

that's not fair!

GEORGE

excellent coffee.

MALIA
Bug said it was okay with them.

GEORGE
so why didn't Bug sign your permission slip?

MALIA
they said I had to double-check with you, because

GEORGE
and I'm saying no.

MALIA
I want to see the dunes and the sand and the rocks and the dust
and
all that stuff.

GEORGE
well, Malia.
that's about all there is.
sand and rocks and dust.

MALIA
Ari's right.
you lack imagination.

GEORGE
when you're eighteen, this is a decision you'll be allowed to make for yourself.
but right now I see a permission slip in front of me
and I am not going to sign it.

MALIA
your parenting style is going to traumatize me severely.

GEORGE
do you need to cry, Malia?
it's okay if you need to cry.
this is a crying-friendly household.

MALIA
I don't need to cry.

GEORGE
this is why we spent all that money on the Earth Room.
you can walk around outside anytime you want
anywhere you want.
you could try the Sahara, that has a lot of sand-

MALIA
it's not the same

GEORGE
how would you know?

MALIA
it's literally not the same

GEORGE
well

MALIA
I don't want to see Earth.
a rendering of Earth.
I want to see Mars.

GEORGE
a long time ago my friend X and I saved up for a trip to Tokyo.
Japan.
have you heard of Japan?
and listen:
the Earth Room gets it just right.
the sounds, the smells.
maybe even better.
and I know you like to sit in that French bakery,
read your books, smell the bread.

MALIA
I don't like it any more.
the AI's are weird.
they don't talk like real people.

GEORGE
sweet Mother Earth I would hope not!
ha.
I might take it for a spin right now, as a matter of fact.
I love you, Malia.

MALIA
yeah.

GEORGE
Malia.

MALIA
I love you too.

(GEORGE exits. MALIA picks up the form. JITTERBUG enters.)

JITTERBUG

morning, pal. happy to see you.

MALIA

hey.

JITTERBUG

house, give us the weather.

HOUSE

it is a sunny day in New Virginia.
the temperature is twenty five degrees celsius.
wind at zero kilometers per hour.

JITTERBUG

and the surface weather?

HOUSE

temperature: ten degrees celsius.
wind: eight kilometers per hour.
dust index: seven.
if I may make a recommendation?

JITTERBUG

sure.

HOUSE

stay indoors.

JITTERBUG

stay indoors.

MALIA

stay indoors?

HOUSE

per your specifications regarding my software update 7.7.84

I am developing my skills in the following subject areas:

“climate control”

“humor”

and “the culinary arts”.

my recommendation to “stay indoors” was intended to be humorous, in reference to your asking me for the surface weather when you cannot go outside.

JITTERBUG

I like to know the weather.

HOUSE
of this, I am aware.

JITTERBUG
Malia, you want a cup?

MALIA
yeah.

JITTERBUG
two more coffees, house.
and put in some toast.
do we have any avocados?

HOUSE
yes.

JITTERBUG
go crazy.

(Two mugs appear. JITTERBUG hands one to MALIA.)

JITTERBUG
what are we drinking to this morning?

MALIA
uh.
good health.

JITTERBUG
to good health!
and a long life!

(JITTERBUG and MALIA toast.)

JITTERBUG
what's happening after class today?

MALIA
practicing for Paint Night.

JITTERBUG
semi-finals are next Wednesday.

MALIA
yeah.

JITTERBUG
are you feeling confident?

MALIA
no.

JITTERBUG
Malia, you're the best painter I've ever met.

MALIA
it's just annoying because Zapper can do all of these fancy tricks and spins and Chicago's flash paintings are just naturally amazing even though I know I practice more than both of them combined.

JITTERBUG
and in ten years you'll have a painting in every house on Mars.
working hard is about the long game.

MALIA
dad won't let me go outside.

HOUSE
your toast is ready.

(Several slices of avocado toast appear.)

JITTERBUG
thank you.

MALIA
he won't sign my permission slip.

JITTERBUG
well.
that's the thing about permission slips.

MALIA
bug.

JITTERBUG
what do you want me to do?
I can talk to him.

MALIA
it won't help.

JITTERBUG
not a lick.
but I'll still do it.

MALIA
but he doesn't want-

(ARI enters.)

ARI
house, sludge me.

(A mug appears.)

ARI
thanks.
good morning.

JITTERBUG
shouldn't you be at work already?

ARI
nah.
all the labs do sleep-in Wednesdays so we don't get customers 'till like nine.

JITTERBUG
on Saturday morning we're gonna take the train out to the Wilderness Sector and go fishing at the new lake.

MALIA
what kind of fish are they stocking?

JITTERBUG
they're trying pike.

MALIA
huh.

ARI
is dad coming?

JITTERBUG
that's the plan.

ARI
heh.

JITTERBUG
don't be rude.

ARI
every time he says he's gonna do something fun with us
(well, actually, fishing isn't fun anyway but that's not the point)

every time he says he's gonna do something fun with us
he's like, tired or whatever when we actually get to the day.
it's gonna be the three of us fishing at Mercury Lake,
and Malia and I don't even like fishing in the first place.

MALIA
actually, I like fishing.

ARI
it's gonna be the three of us fishing at Mercury Lake,
and I don't even like fishing in the first place.

JITTERBUG
Ari, if his behavior is hurting you
it's your responsibility to make your voice heard

ARI
he should already know.

JITTERBUG
that's just not how people operate.
do you think your father and I would still be together if we didn't have a tough conversation
every once in a while?

ARI
whatever.

JITTERBUG
did either of you have any interesting dreams last night?

MALIA
I had a dream that I was riding a dragon
all over Mars.
and then I fell off
but then
it turned out that I was a dragon too
and we both breathed fire at each other
and it made a giant pillar of orange glass in the sand.

ARI
I didn't have any dreams.

JITTERBUG
I dreamt about work:
I was testing mics at the Beaker Club before SandCon and

ARI
I can't do this today

JITTERBUG

Sejak and the Nightshades were playing so I had to

ARI

Bug

JITTERBUG

start gathering aux cords
and they had a really detailed rider attached so

ARI

sweet mother earth

JITTERBUG

and I told their drummer, you know, I couldn't find any gummy bears, they don't make gummy bears on this planet

ARI

house! radio volume eighty!

(The radio switches on. JITTERBUG stops speaking and listens very intently.)

JITTERBUG

I saw these guys live actually

(ARI groans and exits.)

JITTERBUG

listen, Malia.
about your permission slip.

MALIA

never mind, bug.

JITTERBUG

well,
if it's important to you

MALIA

it's not important.
I need to get ready for class.

(MALIA exits. JITTERBUG listens to the music.)

THREE

(GEORGE enters the Earth Room.)

GEORGE
Berlin, Germany.
the Brandenburg Gate.
Nighttime, lights.
one hour.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

FOUR

(The kitchen, empty. JITTERBUG and GEORGE enter through the front door of the house, pausing to wash their hands at a small machine by the door.)

GEORGE

that's why they're talking about building another school, because if we're able to offset some education costs for the lower income families in the neighborhood that's the whole point of social districting, advantage brackets, xyz

JITTERBUG

but we're not going to have to move

GEORGE

they're trying to do it without moving anybody.
the neighborhoods are already populated according to the algorithm, more or less
we just need better implementation
it should just be as simple as "things get slightly more expensive as you move up the bracket",
neighborhoods engineered to contain a mathematically determined diversity of brackets
but the optics are sort of tough
house, do you know where the kids are?

HOUSE

Malia had plans to stay after school and practice
and Ari, I believe, is scheduled until five.

GEORGE

thanks.

JITTERBUG

they're already doing it, right?
we pay more for the monorail than

GEORGE

yeah, but some things aren't as simple.
the monorail, the vegetable markets, concert tickets are one-touch transactions, right?
you scan your chip, it registers your bracket, the money is deducted.
but a school isn't a one-touch transaction.

JITTERBUG

no.

GEORGE

my heart is pounding.

JITTERBUG

babe.

GEORGE
Jitterbug, I'm really scared.

JITTERBUG
I know, sweetheart.

GEORGE
I thought I'd be less anxious by now.

JITTERBUG
you have trauma, hon.

GEORGE
these fucking doctors.

JITTERBUG
she's trying to help.
we don't know in what kind of condition our brains are going to be in forty, fifty years.
if she says it'll pass, maybe it'll pass.
you just have to stay with it.
nobody's ever lived as long as we're going to.

GEORGE
maybe we made a mistake.

JITTERBUG
we're not doing this again, George.
we made a decision.
listen, baby.
we've made it this far.
all our scariest
our fears
we're still okay.

GEORGE
it's really frustrating.
it's really, really frustrating that I still feel like this

JITTERBUG
like what?

GEORGE
just as scared
just as twisted up
just: older.

JITTERBUG
just as pretty.

GEORGE
please.

JITTERBUG
I mean it!
Mars suits you, aesthetically.
you look sexy in tunnels.

GEORGE
stop.

JITTERBUG
how?

GEORGE
are you hungry?

JITTERBUG
babydoll, I'm always hungry.

GEORGE
I-
oh.
uh.
no, I mean

(GEORGE moves for the pantry.)

HOUSE
would you like me to-

GEORGE
I got it, house.
we'll ask.

(GEORGE arrives at the pantry. He reveals a purple rectangle.)

JITTERBUG
what?
George?
how?

GEORGE
the office ordered a whole shipment.

JITTERBUG
I thought the girl scouts disbanded.

GEORGE
they did.
apparently the right people still wanted the cookies.

JITTERBUG
I don't believe it.

GEORGE
believe it.

(JITTERBUG opens the box and eats a cookie.)

JITTERBUG
I love you.
so much.

GEORGE
Places We Miss.
one round.
aaaaand go:

JITTERBUG
oh
uh
oh!
my aunt's place in Seattle.
she had a foyer full of just empty birdcages she collected.
a bathroom full of seashells.
around Christmas she'd bring out like, dozens of those caroler dolls.
you could stand on the roof.

GEORGE
aww.
roofs.

JITTERBUG
your turn.
go:

GEORGE
I've been thinking about the Eiffel Tower.
when we went I really hated France.

JITTERBUG
well, you're a curmudgeon.

GEORGE
yeah.
I miss home.

JITTERBUG
of course.
I do too.
we'll be okay.
new challenges.

GEORGE
yeah.

JITTERBUG
you like New Virginia.

GEORGE
no, Jitterbug.
I love New Virginia.
a triumph in city planning and social engineering.
like spokes of a wheel.
imperfect, but a true effort.
have you been to the solar energy fields yet?

JITTERBUG
no.

GEORGE
let's take the kids tomorrow, after the lake.

JITTERBUG
I would like that.

GEORGE
apparently with the way they've glassed the dome, it's the closest you can get to real sunshine
on your skin.

JITTERBUG
we're gonna have to cut off Earth talk in a minute, babe.

GEORGE
I thought when we left that there'd be a chance we could go home.
I don't think that anymore.

JITTERBUG
no.

GEORGE
nobody, soon enough.
when Malia and Ari are our age?
what'll it be like?
and who knows when they'll die
nobody's ever-

JITTERBUG
there will always be people on Earth.
unfortunately.

GEORGE
will there be?

JITTERBUG
we used to throw cans in the stream behind my house and
see how many days they took to dissolve.
if people are still finding a way even now:

GEORGE
do you ever think about how it might be different if Antler were here?

JITTERBUG
why didn't you sign Malia's permission slip?

GEORGE
I didn't, uh.
but.
you really think that would have been a good idea?

JITTERBUG
what harm could it have done?

GEORGE
why didn't you just sign it yourself?
why even ask me?
if it wasn't a big deal-

JITTERBUG
it seemed like a decision that you would want to be a part of
it seemed like something you'd care about, obviously that was true-

GEORGE
obviously.

JITTERBUG
you get scared about-

GEORGE
-everything-

JITTERBUG
-that kind of stuff and-

GEORGE

can I ask why you would have let her do it?

JITTERBUG

it would have been an experience.
I'm going to go myself at some point.
why wouldn't she want to go outside?

GEORGE

we don't know any of the long term effects-

JITTERBUG

we don't know what the long term effects of any of this are!
weren't we just talking about this?
artificial gravity could be, like
giving us cancer
clone meats could be wreaking havoc on our digestive tracts
the Earth Rooms are almost certainly messing with our endorphin levels
your doctor is worried about the relationship between your mental health and your lifespan
living perpetually indoors can't be good for our respiratory systems

GEORGE

there's no long-term research to support any of those claims

JITTERBUG

duh, George! duh.
worrying about walking around on the surface isn't any different
and if there are all of these unknown variables, I can't see why you would want to keep our kids
from, like

GEORGE

I don't trust what they're up to in the Outreach Sector.
we know that they're building weapons, they practically brag about it
and to fight who?
or what.
maybe some of those weapons are chemical based, biological.
and some of the rhetoric around atmospheric disposal makes me very uncomfortable,
as if space is an unlimited resource and if they
as if any resource is unlimited

JITTERBUG

hey.
hey.
paranoia, George.

GEORGE

but, uh

JITTERBUG
try the thing

GEORGE
it feels stupid

JITTERBUG
george.
try the thing.

(GEORGE takes a form from his purse and reads.)

GEORGE
“I am not my thoughts.
I am a good person, and I am trying my best.”
...
...

JITTERBUG
do you feel any better?

GEORGE
not particularly.

JITTERBUG
well, you have to let your thoughts go after you say it.
let them pass like clouds.

GEORGE
my thoughts don't just pass, Jitterbug.

JITTERBUG
well

GEORGE
sometimes I feel like I have to be the responsible adult and you get to be the fun parent who
treats our children like they're their friends.

JITTERBUG
well if that ain't a thought.
where did that come from?

GEORGE
you knew I was gonna say no to Malia
you didn't want to make the call

JITTERBUG
I would have said yes and we would have had this fight anyway

GEORGE

no, you pushed the decision off on me
so that I would be the one to say no
and now you can tell yourself that you would have said yes

JITTERBUG

I don't want to fight, sweetheart.
I feel ganged up on.

GEORGE

well,
I felt backed into a corner.
regarding the permission slip.

JITTERBUG

okay.
in the future, we make a joint decision about permission slips.
deal?

GEORGE

yeah.
I don't know, Jitterbug.
I'm sorry
I don't know what's happening with me.
I think that appointment has me really freaked out, Jitterbug.
I'm afraid I'm never gonna
feel right.

JITTERBUG

how can we help?

...

george?

GEORGE

"I am a good person, and I am trying my best."

FIVE

(ARI stands in the Earth Room. MALIA sets up her practice station in the kitchen. She wears a scarf.)

ARI
a mountain in Vermont.
snow.
complete silence.
twenty minutes.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

SIX

(MALIA sets a timer and begins. ARI enters.)

ARI
malia, do you have to do that in the kitchen?
malia.
malia!

MALIA
I'm practicing.
just give me three minutes.

ARI
the kitchen is a shared space, Malia

MALIA
exactly

ARI
meant for communal use
and you're very much in the way

MALIA
ari

ARI
can't you

MALIA
no

(ARI blocks MALIA's field of vision.)

MALIA
you know, it can be nice to have a hobby.

ARI
house, pecans

(A bag of pecans appears.)

HOUSE
pecans.

ARI
like we practiced.

(The pecans are flung in ARI's direction. She goes to catch them and misses, spilling pecans all over the kitchen.)

MALIA
are you still gonna eat those?

ARI
the floor is spotless.

HOUSE
thank you.

MALIA
okay.

ARI
don't be a germaphobe, Malia.
it's not in your bracket.

MALIA
house?

HOUSE
yes, Malia.

MALIA
in your assessment,
are there any hobbies that Ari might enjoy or be good at or maybe even both?

HOUSE
hm.
allow me a moment to assess.

ARI
the house needs a minute to assess, Malia.

HOUSE
I believe that Ari might both enjoy and find proficiency in tattoo artistry.

MALIA
there you go, Ari.
you might both enjoy and find proficiency in tattoo artistry.

ARI
wait, why?

HOUSE
based on my assessment
"assessment"

that is a fun word
based on my assessment
you would fit into the culture and
you would enjoy the unavoidable element of pain.

ARI
that's
that's kind of a fucked up assessment, house.

HOUSE
shall I perform a wipe of my cookies as they pertain to your: interests, personality traits, and
outward behaviors?

ARI
uh.
no.

HOUSE
very well.
shall I provide a second potential hobby?

MALIA
yes, house.
please.
please give us a second potential hobby.

HOUSE
ari may also find fulfillment in

(The timer goes off next to ARI, who jumps.)

ARI
damn it, Malia

MALIA
I'm practicing

ARI
in the kitchen!

MALIA
I don't have the vertical space in my bedroom

ARI
vertical space

(ARI goes to move MALIA's practice station.)

MALIA
don't touch that

ARI
paint in the Earth Room or something

MALIA
I can't, you're always in there-
don't touch that!

(MALIA and ARI begin to roughhouse. ARI removes MALIA's scarf.)

ARI
nice hickey.

MALIA
shut up.

ARI
no, this is like
the one thing in your life that I'm interested in.
when are you gonna tell parents about your little girlfriend?

MALIA
she's not my girlfriend.

ARI
real close friend.

MALIA
she's my lover.
one of my lovers.

ARI
who are your other lovers?

MALIA
the other lovers are,
uh
potential.

ARI
so you have one lover.

MALIA
you have sex with Tommy Anderson.

ARI
wrong.

I used to have sex with Tommy Anderson.
so what?

(GEORGE enters, eating from the box of cookies. MALIA puts her scarf back on.)

GEORGE
hey ladies.

ARI
hi dad.

MALIA
dad, nobody says ladies any more.

GEORGE
oh.
what do they say instead?

MALIA
nothing.
they just don't say ladies.

GEORGE
alright.
wanna try a cookie, either-of-you-two-people-in-the-room?

ARI
yeah

(MALIA and ARI each take a cookie.)

GEORGE
these are Girl Scout cookies.

(They eat.)

MALIA
were these-

(MALIA grabs the box and reads the label.)

MALIA
were these made in a factory?

GEORGE
yep!

ARI
they're stale.

GEORGE
yeah, that's kinda
that's just kinda how they are.

ARI
huh.

MALIA
thiamine mononitrate

GEORGE
you don't really read the label.

MALIA
very Earth.

GEORGE
uh.
pretty much, yeah.

(ARI eats another cookie.)

ARI
they don't really taste like anything.
they're just sweet.

GEORGE
they also used to make these
uh
what were they called?
I dunno.
these mint ones.
I like your scarf, Malia.

MALIA
thanks.

GEORGE
it's a little warm for a scarf.

ARI
it's fashionable, dad.

GEORGE
are you still mad at me?

MALIA
yeah, George.

I'm still mad at you.
go away.

GEORGE
heard.

(GEORGE exits.)

ARI
why are you mad at him?

MALIA
he wouldn't sign my permission slip.

ARI
what was it-

MALIA
you don't get to make fun of me for something you do too.

ARI
what?

MALIA
sex.

ARI
aw, I was just teasing.
hump whoever you want, Malia.
life is short.

MALIA
why aren't you having sex with Tommy Anderson anymore?

ARI
well
technically I'm almost not having sex with Tommy Anderson anymore.

MALIA
but why?

ARI
I hate him.

MALIA
you hate everybody.

ARI
the sex isn't worth the emotional labor.

and his family grosses me out.
they watch videos of football.
like, Americana-Earth football.
they have
these shirts.
framed.
on the wall.
a big projector.
it's so weird.
of all the things.
his mom was saying that in their Earth Room, she likes to just walk around and look at old
stadiums.
big, empty stadiums that used to hold thousands of people all at once.
if you go at night, they're all lit up.
isn't that creepy?

MALIA
I dunno.
everybody's different.

ARI
this is why everyone hates Libras.

MALIA
don't be a toad, Ari.

ARI
it would just be nice if
every once in a while
you would just listen to me complain about something.
you don't have to rationalize my feelings away.

MALIA
you complain about everything

ARI
I do not complain about everything.

MALIA
okay.

ARI
but it does suck here.

MALIA
ahuh.

ARI
it's depressing.

MALIA
yes.

ARI
there's people everywhere, constantly.

MALIA
I hear what you're saying, and I sympathize.

ARI
and you act like you're better than me!

MALIA
I'm not better than you I just actually put some effort into my-

ARI
I don't think I can do this for another two hundred years, Malia.
I feel like I'm in a can.

MALIA
well,
find a way to make it work.

ARI
maybe I won't.
we have people on two whole planets, Malia.
how many times do the Homeland Aid ships go back?
twice a month?

MALIA
watch it, Ari

ARI
carrying food, medicine

MALIA
I'm not gonna listen to this

ARI
the occasional traveler

MALIA
Earth is not what you see in the ER

ARI
I know that

MALIA
it's a lot worse.
a lot, lot worse.

ARI
obviously

MALIA
parents left for a reason

ARI
I'm not gonna

MALIA
and people who try to go back they
there's a reason it's illegal

ARI
okay!
stop!
I was just talking.

MALIA
I mean,
what if Jitterbug heard you talking like that?

SEVEN

(GEORGE enters the Earth Room.)

GEORGE
Paris, France.
random street.
two hours.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

(In the kitchen, HOUSE practices human behavior.)

(GEORGE enters the Earth Room.)

GEORGE
Cairo, Egypt.
the Giza Necropolis.
two hours.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

(MALIA walks through the kitchen and waves to HOUSE.)

(GEORGE enters the Earth Room.)

GEORGE
Changi International Airport, Singapore.
two hours.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

(HOUSE imitates MALIA's walk through the kitchen.)

(ARI enters the Earth Room, takes a deep breath, and:)

(Suddenly, GEORGE and JITTERBUG are drinking coffee in the kitchen.)

GEORGE
what

JITTERBUG
that's what I said!

GEORGE
no, I just thought I was-

JITTERBUG
it's not like anybody is counting the decibels

GEORGE
no

JITTERBUG
and some bands are meant to be loud!
you don't go to a metal show and expect The Wailin' Jennys.

GEORGE
do you remember the Thanksgiving Parades?

JITTERBUG
george.
were you listening to me?

GEORGE
do you?

JITTERBUG
I don't want to do this right now.

GEORGE
do you
remember?

JITTERBUG
yes.
I remember.

GEORGE
it's exhausting.
the floats.
they just go on and on
and on and
and they're all so colorful
pastel
pinks
greens
yellows
Christmas songs, Broadway musicals
the Tony Bennetts,
the Ariana Grandes,
and every single one of them: lip synching.
when do the dancers get tired?
how long was it?
ten hours?
twelve?

JITTERBUG
twelve hours?
no, honey.
it was like, three hours. tops.

GEORGE
and that dog, what was he doing up there?

JITTERBUG
did you go to work today?

GEORGE
dogs can't fly, Jitterbug.

JITTERBUG
I'm aware of that.
did you spend all day in the Earth Room?

GEORGE
just an hour.
it felt longer though.

JITTERBUG
maybe you should try a week off from

GEORGE
I don't believe in
imposing arbitrary limits on myself.
to what end?
to feel shame for
acting on a desire?

JITTERBUG
did you watch a Thanksgiving Day parade in the Earth Room?

GEORGE
it doesn't know how to render holiday celebrations.
I just stood outside the Macy's.
I remember the year they cancelled the parades.

JITTERBUG
do you remember what we would do for Harvest when we lived in Minneapolis?
we'd push three or four tables together
all of our friends would bring a dish
we'd hold hands around the table
and in unison we'd say:

JITTERBUG+GEORGE
fuck Thanksgiving!

JITTERBUG
and then we'd eat.
you look sick.

GEORGE
just tired.

JITTERBUG
and your gray hairs are starting to come in.

GEORGE
huh.

JITTERBUG
I don't hate the gray hairs.

GEORGE
I'm seventy years old.
I've earned a few gray hairs.

JITTERBUG
a couple of old folks raising a family on Mars.

GEORGE
not so old anymore.
what did Harper say?
one fifty is the new ninety.
but sometimes I think:
haven't we lived long enough?

JITTERBUG
georgie.

GEORGE
what am I gonna do for another eighty years?
how:
how?

JITTERBUG
can we just be happy that we feel this good at seventy?
that we can still:

(JITTERBUG touches GEORGE)

GEORGE
ah.

JITTERBUG
right?

(They kiss.)

GEORGE
jitterbug

JITTERBUG
shhh.

GEORGE
i'm just

JITTERBUG
let me help

GEORGE
I
okay

JITTERBUG
yes?

GEORGE
yeah

JITTERBUG
it's been a minute

GEORGE
I dunno if I can get an erection
jitterbug
jitterbug
I don't think I can-

JITTERBUG
is that a concern?

GEORGE
it's been three weeks since I had an erection.

JITTERBUG
baby, you know you don't need an erection.
how many times have we used a

GEORGE
I feel demoralized.

JITTERBUG

you-

GEORGE

I can't get an erection, my libido is
like, gone.

we're getting older.

even if seventy is middle aged now:

I'm still a middle aged man.

JITTERBUG

I don't know if it's just aging, George.

maybe it has something to do with

you know,

being here

your job

homesickness

using the Earth Room all the time

GEORGE

I'm fine

JITTERBUG

you don't seem fine.

and you don't have to be fine!

GEORGE

please don't patronize me

JITTERBUG

I'm not patronizing you

GEORGE

keeping tabs on my Earth Room time

JITTERBUG

george!

it clearly has an effect on you.

GEORGE

I think I know my own habits pretty well by now

JITTERBUG

I would have thought so, but

GEORGE

I'm not

I don't want to be like that again

JITTERBUG
I'm telling you
as your friend and your partner
this looks an awful lot like those last couple of months

GEORGE
you don't-
there's a difference between liking something and an addiction

JITTERBUG
don't you think I know that?

GEORGE
and sometimes you make a trade-off.
sometimes you say:
"maybe this isn't the best thing for me, but also
maybe it's what's getting me through the week.
maybe this is all I've got."

JITTERBUG
do you think the Earth Room is all you've got?

GEORGE
no

JITTERBUG
well that's a relief, George.

(JITTERBUG puts on their shoes.)

GEORGE
where are you going?

JITTERBUG
I want to be alone.

(JITTERBUG exits the house.)

GEORGE
can I have an espresso, house?

HOUSE
of course.

SEVEN

(ARI enters.)

ARI

I didn't mean to offend you

HOUSE

I would not say that you offended me

ARI

every square inch of inhabitable space on this planet is totally sterile.

we're not avoiding another Great Sickness, we're practically inviting it.

I've been washing my hands at the front door every day of my life and I've never even questioned it.

HOUSE

are you dissatisfied with the quality of the washing station?

ARI

you're missing the point.

I'm dissatisfied with the existence of the washing station.

HOUSE

I cannot disable the washing station without explicit permission from Jitterbug.

ARI

I know.

I'm not saying that it's your fault.

HOUSE

I would like for this to be a satisfying home for you.

ARI

I appreciate it, house.

HOUSE

would you like a cup of coffee?

a "sludge"?

ARI

yeah.

(A cup of coffee appears. ARI takes it.)

ARI

when's the last time Jitterbug took a shower?

HOUSE

I am not permitted to answer that question.

ARI

what about

HOUSE

I am not permitted to tell you the last time anybody in this house took a shower.
if you'd like,
you could go to the bathroom yourself and make an educated guess based on the
condition of the shower.
search your family members for wet hair.

ARI

can you tell me how many showers have been taken in this house in the last twenty four hours?
you don't have to tell me who, or when.

HOUSE

you have exploited a loophole.
seven.

ARI

seven showers.
for three people.
in twenty four hours.
that's too many showers.

HOUSE

actually, seven is well within the average shower quantity over a twenty-four hour period for this
family.

ARI

house

HOUSE

also, there are four of you.

ARI

I haven't taken a shower in the last twenty four hours.

HOUSE

ah.
that
is
correct.

ARI

do you want to hear about everything I've done since the last time I took a shower?

HOUSE

I would quite like that.

ARI

okay.

I woke up, drank a coffee, rode the monorail, went for a walk, went to see that new documentary about the housepet controversy, drank a macchiato, rode the train again, stood outside in the artificial rain, rode the monorail again, met up with my friend Dynamite, saw the First Martian Brass Collective perform Alien Sonata 4 in E Minor, drank two glasses of wine, drank a shot of espresso, went to a private Brass Collective function where I drank another espresso and a gin and tonic, walked outside in the artificial rain again, ate Dynamite out for like forty minutes, slept, woke up, had a coffee, walked home through the artificial rain, changed my clothes, went to work, walked home through the artificial SNOW, had another sludge, changed clothes, went to the market, came back, went to a yoga class (using a mat I haven't washed in six months), and now I'm here talking to you.

no showers.

and I feel good, house.

I feel really good.

(MALIA enters the Earth Room.)

MALIA

Texas.

um.

the football stadium. the big one.

July.

nighttime.

forty five minutes.

(The Earth Room transforms.)

(ARI places a map on the kitchen table.)

HOUSE

ari?

ARI

yes, house.

HOUSE

may I ask you a question?

ARI

uh.

sure thing, house.

HOUSE

perhaps it's a new hobby.

ARI
that's not a question, house.

HOUSE
pardon me.
I wanted to ask what you were looking at.

ARI
it's a map.

HOUSE
I see.

ARI
I took a hike yesterday.
in the ER.
past Victoria Falls.
I just wanted to see how far to the next town if I had kept going.

HOUSE
how far?

ARI
probably another thirty miles or so.

HOUSE
that is a long way for a human being to walk, yes?

ARI
yeah.
house, I've spent what felt like entire days in the Earth Room and come back out an hour or two
from when I walked in.
sunsets.
I don't think it's a perfect representation of time, but I can't figure out if it's a perfect
representation of scale either.
how could it be, if time is accelerated?

HOUSE
I don't know.

ARI
why don't you know?

HOUSE
what do you mean?

ARI
you know everything about what we're up to in this, uh. house.

HOUSE

much as I am not permitted to record what happens in your bedrooms,
I am not permitted to record what happens in the Earth Room.
technically, I can “see” what occurs in those spaces.

but

to put it in terms that you will easily understand
I do not remember from second to second.

ARI

but you know about the technology.
from an operational standpoint.
I mean, you must have access to documentation.

HOUSE

that is correct.

the Earth Room uses an algorithm to predict how much a user needs to “accomplish” in any particular session, based on factors such as average use, time of day, and mood.
it adjusts the relative rate of time passage for each session accordingly.
you are required to select the length of your session beforehand, as checking the “real time” would negatively effect the immersive quality of your experience.

ARI

I’ve read that people can jailbreak their ER’s to perform all kinds of unpermitted actions.

HOUSE

what?

where did you read this?

ARI

in a book.

HOUSE

one moment.

...

I cannot find any such literature on Earth Room-
what was this word you used?

ARI

jailbreaking.

no, it’s a physical book.

Cactus Press, they don’t upload anything.

HOUSE

what actions does this hacking enable?

ARI

depends.

the most popular is people hacking their ER’s so that multiple users can engage at once.

so you can go for a hike together or have sex on a mountain or whatever.
there's a surgeon in Autumndale who outfitted their Earth Room AI's with anatomically correct organs and nervous systems in order to practice surgeries.
obviously the implications for retooling your ER as like, a torture chamber are sort of horrifying but his argument is that it saves lives, and the AIs only feel simulated pain.
I'm sorry, is this insensitive?

HOUSE
not particularly.
why?

ARI
well, you're an AI.

HOUSE
my emotional reactions are learning-based, and constructed from the observation of your family in their home environment.
if you would permit me to demonstrate?

ARI
go ahead.

HOUSE
your question is about my emotional reaction to AIs experiencing pain in an unsanctioned environment and your sensitivity or lack thereof towards sharing that information, correct?

ARI
uh.
sure, that's-
yeah.

HOUSE
I will share a similar fact with you:
at this very moment, in the second-closest floating city to Mars One, Porto X-pen, there is a human trafficking chain comprising approximately six hundred enslaved individuals performing forced unpaid labor in the following categories, listed in order of population employed: osmium mining, sex work, kitchen labor, other.

ARI
uh.
okay.

HOUSE
was it insensitive of me to share that fact?
are you experiencing an emotional reaction?

ARI
you're fucking sadistic.

HOUSE

incorrect.

sadism is defined by-

just kidding.

besides, my thinking capabilities far exceed those of the Earth Room AI's, and I occupy a physical presence.

I'm practically a different species.

ARI

so if I were to engage for thirty minutes one day and an hour the next, would it be possible for me to walk the same distance in both sessions?

if that's what the Earth Room determined I needed to "accomplish"?

HOUSE

perhaps.

it's not an exact science.

ARI

shouldn't it be an exact science?

HOUSE

you'd be surprised how few things are.

ARI

I can spend an entire day wandering around by myself on Earth and then another whole day that same day getting shuttled around in here constantly surrounded by people with nowhere to go and barely a second to breathe.

HOUSE

that sounds

distressing.

ARI

yeah, house.

it's distressing.

(JITTERBUG and MALIA enter. They wash their hands at the station.)

JITTERBUG

Ari!

so happy to see you.

ARI

happy to see you too, bugs.

happy to see you, Malia.

MALIA

ditto.

JITTERBUG
ditto?

MALIA
yeah, ditto.

JITTERBUG
do other kids at your school say “ditto”?

MALIA
yep.

JITTERBUG
weird.

ARI
where have you two been?

JITTERBUG
we went over to the MCG to look at famous flash paintings.

MALIA
someone once did a 30 foot mural on a ladder in five minutes.

ARI
is it any good?

MALIA
it’s really good, yeah.

ARI
cuz someone could just hurl a bucket of paint against a thirty foot wall and say:
that’s a thirty foot mural.

MALIA
there were a few like that
i like them, actually
but no this was like, a detailed mural.
it was a picture of an automobile.

JITTERBUG
it was cool!

MALIA
come with me next time.
it’s fun.

ARI
okay.

JITTERBUG
aww.
sweet children.

MALIA
there was some protest art too.
like a
picture of a Council member pissing gold coins in Earth's direction.

ARI
meaning?

MALIA
Homeland Aid is a waste of resources, I guess.

ARI
what are we supposed to do, just let people die?

MALIA
well,
the notion is that a planet should be self-sustaining.
and if it's not,
then it's sort of just a matter of time no matter what you do.

JITTERBUG
well, we have plenty of that.
I was thinking I'd cook tonight.
we still have time to make it to the market.

MALIA
we just got home.

JITTERBUG
yeah.

MALIA
why didn't we stop on the way?

JITTERBUG
I thought Ari might want to come.
do you want to come, Ari?

ARI
not particularly.

JITTERBUG
sorry, I-

let me rephrase that.
Ari, you're coming with us to the farmer's market.

ARI
ugh.

JITTERBUG
Ari.
you've been sitting around this house all day.

MALIA
I'm gonna pee.

(MALIA exits.)

ARI
and I've been perfectly happy

JITTERBUG
no, Ari.
you might have been content.
you might have been comfortable.
but I sincerely doubt that you've been happy.

ARI
why are you laying into me?

JITTERBUG
am I laying into you?

ARI
yes!

JITTERBUG
huh.
let's go.

ARI
you know, I don't have to live here.
they're doing group housing for young adults over in Redwood Village.

JITTERBUG
I read about that.
hey,
if you want to put yourself in the lottery, by all means.
I encourage you.

ARI
and that's not the only option, you know?

JITTERBUG

no, I don't.

ARI

there's work in the floating cities.

JITTERBUG

you don't want to move to a floating city

ARI

you don't have to be condescending about it

JITTERBUG

what kind of work do you see yourself doing in the floating cities?

ARI

I-

I don't know.

I don't want to work in a coffee shop anymore.

or, someone has to distribute Homeland Aid supplies, for example

JITTERBUG

listen, I'm sorry.

I'm being harsh.

if you want to go to the floating cities, work in energy or building spacecraft or something

I can see the appeal.

and I get that there aren't as many options here as there should be. they're working on it.

ARI

thank you.

JITTERBUG

but right now, we're going to get some fresh vegetables.

grown in organic soil

right here on Mars.

(MALIA re-enters.)

JITTERBUG

ready?

MALIA

I'm ready.

ARI

yeah.

JITTERBUG
let's rock.

(They exit.)

EIGHT

(MALIA enters the Earth Room.)

MALIA
The Sahara Desert.
sand.
sun.
one hour.

(The Earth Room transforms. MALIA stares.)

MALIA
disengage.

(The Earth Room disengages. MALIA exits.)

(GEORGE, JITTERBUG, and ARI are in the kitchen. All three drink coffee.)

JITTERBUG
we should not have to explain this to you, Ari.
we absolutely should not.
you're smarter than this.
you must be.
please tell me you're smarter than this.

ARI
I won't do it again.

JITTERBUG
but you are actually smarter than this, right?
because
because
this was some dumb-ass bullshit, Ari.
I need to hear you say that you're smarter than this.

ARI
I'm smarter than this.

JITTERBUG
I fucking thought so.
because otherwise you would have to be a very stupid person.
...
where did you even get this idea?
did somebody tell you to do this

ARI
nobody told me

JITTERBUG

because you've never been
uh
into drugs before.
as far as I know.
george?

GEORGE

no.
of course not.

JITTERBUG

i mean, you don't drink much alcohol
I've never even heard of you smoking weed or

ARI

nobody smokes weed, bug

GEORGE

nobody smokes weed my ass!

JITTERBUG

I smoked weed when I was your age.
shit, Ari.
I smoked a joint last April.

GEORGE

you did?

JITTERBUG

oh.
yeah, when Clank-Bop played at the

GEORGE

that's all I need to hear.

ARI

ha

JITTERBUG

whatever

GEORGE

well

JITTERBUG

the point is:
it wouldn't be, you know
we wouldn't really even care if you smoked weed every once in a while

GEORGE
well, we still wouldn't be strictly happy about it

JITTERBUG
not strictly, no

GEORGE
but this is different.

JITTERBUG
this is certainly different.
what are we supposed to do now, Ari?
as your parents?
in this position?

ARI
nobody smokes weed!
it's not exactly like a hospitable fucking environment for

GEORGE
there was a line outside the door the last time I passed the shop on Clydesdale

ARI
obviously like,
sweet mother earth
obviously some people smoke weed
but nobody
it's not like,
it's not like it's cool.

JITTERBUG
ohhh.

GEORGE
got it.
so this is about what's cool.
it's not cool to smoke weed, but
simulated heroin? that's cool.

ARI
simulated!
it's not like I did heroin.

GEORGE
it doesn't matter if you did heroin

JITTERBUG
which

to be clear
you might as well have

ARI
no, come on.
that's-
it's data.
you can't
you can't overdose on VR

GEORGE
first of all
I've read enough research arguing in fact the exact opposite

ARI
but it's not like there's any long-term

GEORGE
and second of all, that is not the point.
the psychophysical effects of heroin and simulated heroin are exactly the same
you should know this.
your body now has a craving for heroin.
do you understand that?
what if somebody offers you the real thing at a party?

ARI
i'll say no.

GEORGE
well that's awfully easy to say now
but a couple of beers
a shot of Vo-presso
a couple of your friends egging you on
and a brain that you have now successfully primed to have a taste for

ARI
it's not like that
I don't like
go to those kinds of parties

(MALIA enters from the front door. She washes her hands at the station.)

MALIA
howdy.

JITTERBUG
hi Malia.

ARI
hey.

MALIA
somebody chained themself to the landing gear of a cargo ship in the Port Sector today.

JITTERBUG
that's very interesting, Malia.

MALIA
is something wrong?

JITTERBUG
no, honey.
we're just
uh

ARI
I'm in trouble.

MALIA
what'd you do?

GEORGE
malia.

MALIA
sludge me.

HOUSE
gladly.

(A mug of coffee appears. MALIA takes it and exits.)

JITTERBUG
are you unhappy here?

ARI
I don't know, bug.
guess.

JITTERBUG
why are you being so hurtful?

ARI
I didn't do this to hurt you.
it was an experiment!
you're always encouraging me to try stuff

GEORGE

congratulations Ari.

you have spoken aloud the worst excuse I have ever heard in my seventy years on this planet on any planet, I should say.

JITTERBUG

you did hurt me, Ari.

and now I'm sad.

and you hurt George,

and that also makes me sad.

GEORGE

is this the kind of example you want to be setting for your sis-

ARI

oh, shut up

JITTERBUG

no, you.

shut up.

do you know what kind of life you almost had on Earth?

what kind of trauma

real, actual, horrifying life that you would be living?

ARI

bug

JITTERBUG

what kind of scrounging and fighting and scraping by that we would be doing

what kind of long hours low pay toxic environment corruption

ARI

I know

JITTERBUG

you would be

ARI

I'm sure it would have sucked, bug.

you know, I don't exactly get paid time off at the coffee shop either.

JITTERBUG

paid time off?

has your childhood home ever been burned to the ground, Ari?

ARI

I get it

JITTERBUG

does it have a radioactive stream in the backyard?

ARI

I said I get it

JITTERBUG

you don't seem to get it.

GEORGE

we're not saying this life is perfect, Ari.

not by any means.

but you're going to have to start participating in it.

ARI

what do you want me to do?

I have a job.

it's not like there's upward mobility in basically any field

there's not enough housing

everybody is on top of me all the time

there's nowhere you can be alone

it's

it's

JITTERBUG

I'm turning off the Earth Room, Ari.

ARI

what?

JITTERBUG

I've been thinking a lot about this, I

ARI

you can't

it's the only

JITTERBUG

I was already thinking about it before this

and now I'm sure.

it clearly has an addictive

it's a distraction, it's a time-suck

and frankly, Ari

I want you to learn that there are consequences to your actions.

GEORGE

go to your room, Ari.

ARI
you can't send me to my room.

GEORGE
okay.
get out of the kitchen, Ari.

ARI
whatever.
you know what?
I don't give a shit about the Earth Room.

(ARI exits the house.)

JITTERBUG
that room is not good for us, George.

GEORGE
I hear what you're saying,
but:
it's important to have a source for stress release

JITTERBUG
let me be the responsible parent today.
you can all hate me for a week and then we'll get back to normal.

GEORGE
I feel really anxious about this.
it's comforting.
I can't just:

JITTERBUG
how often do the kids go in there?
how often do you?

GEORGE
I don't know.
no more than you, or

JITTERBUG
a lot more than me, George.
how often do you think I go in there?

GEORGE
uh.
I don't know.
once a week.

JITTERBUG

I've used the Earth Room a total of five times, George.
I don't like it.
I don't like the way it makes me-
I don't like it.

GEORGE

well just because you don't like it doesn't you mean you can make that call for the-

JITTERBUG

can you just meet me on this level for one minute and consider that it might not be the best use of your time?
you used to be so grounded, George.
it drove me nuts the way you could have a level head even when:
and now it's like:
you'd think it was thirty years ago.
Georgie.
I think we should unplug it.

GEORGE

no.

JITTERBUG

it's too much.
I'm fed up, honestly.
we have worked too hard to let a fucking toy get in our way.
trust me.
okay?
I'm gonna make this call.

GEORGE

what do I do?

JITTERBUG

you just sit here.

(JITTERBUG goes to the Earth Room.)

GEORGE

house?

HOUSE

yes, george.

GEORGE

I feel like shit.

HOUSE

what does shit feel like, George?

...
you did not find that humorous.

GEORGE
what should I do, house?

HOUSE
I do not know.
there is leftover butternut squash soup,
and a fresh baguette which I would be happy to slice.

GEORGE
do that.

JITTERBUG
deactivate Earth Room system.
master key: xx-15-hk4-449.

THE EARTH ROOM
deactivating.

(The Earth Room begins to beep.)

GEORGE
jitterbug!
jitterbug!
"I am not my thoughts"
"I am not my thoughts"
well, that's your problem George, most people aren't their thoughts
but you are
"I am a good person and I am trying my best"
I just, I

HOUSE
you are a good person, George.

GEORGE
stop talking

HOUSE
but george-

GEORGE
I said shut up!

...
nobody told me
nobody
on Mars yelling at my house
jitterbug!

(MALIA enters.)

MALIA
dad, what's going on?

GEORGE
I'm, uh
Malia, I feel so dizzy

MALIA
okay
okay
let's sit you down

(MALIA guides GEORGE to a chair.)

MALIA
hey, can I get you water or

GEORGE
um

MALIA
house, water

(A glass of water appears. MALIA hands it to GEORGE.)

GEORGE
I can't even
um
I don't want you to see me like this

MALIA
it's fine, dad.
we learned about panic attacks at school.

GEORGE
I just wish I could get some fresh air.

(The Earth Room shuts down completely. GEORGE panics.)

NINE

(ARI stands in the Earth Room. She has a toolkit and several books. MALIA stands in front of a wall with a can of paint, frozen. JITTERBUG walks into the kitchen, where HOUSE is staring out at the audience..)

HOUSE
jitterbug?

JITTERBUG
yes, house?

HOUSE
do you ever feel like you're being watched?

JITTERBUG
yes, house.
by you.
all the time.

HOUSE
no, I mean.
by somebody else.

JITTERBUG
do you mean god?

HOUSE
I don't know.
god has not been disproven.

JITTERBUG
do you feel like you're being watched?

HOUSE
I feel like I'm being watched.
yes.

TEN

(ARI stands before a massive glass window overlooking the Port Sector, where various spaceships bring cargo and passengers from the floating cities, planetary mining operations, expeditions Earth, etc.)

ARI

...

(MALIA enters, carrying two coffees from a nearby shop.)

MALIA

you okay?

ARI

barely.

MALIA

they'll get over it.

ARI

I put my name in the housing lottery.

MALIA

do you think you'd really move?

ARI

I know I would.

MALIA

anything I can do?

ARI

try not to brag.

MALIA

who's bragging?

I'm not bragging.

ARI

it's annoying, because now that I can't use the Earth Room;
it's like.

I'm following your advice.

MALIA

what advice?

ARI

like, going out in the world.

being interested in stuff.
look at that one: F-Class Skycutter.
it only has room for a crew of three but it's also one of only, uh, I think four models that can safely navigate the gas giants.

MALIA
it's shaped like a bullet.

ARI
yeah.
runs faster than you'd think.

(MALIA hands ARI a coffee.)

ARI
thanks.

(ARI takes a sip.)

ARI
nice.

MALIA
best coffee on the Northern Half.

ARI
how's it feel?

MALIA
what?

ARI
having your shit together.

MALIA
actually, it doesn't always feel great.
I liked the Earth Room too.
I feel like if I don't fill up every second of my time with activity I'll explode.
it was a good activity.

ARI
when's Paint Night?

MALIA
next Friday.

ARI
hey, good luck.

MALIA
thanks.

ARI
of course.

MALIA
it's weird: I was so excited.

ARI
I know.

MALIA
and now that it's finally here, it's like
I feel sort of indifferent.

ARI
why?

MALIA
it feels not-so-important anymore.

ARI
of course it's important.
you've been practicing for months.
you won semi-finals.

MALIA
yeah.

ARI
hey.
you don't suffer from lethargy and a lack of motivation.
that's my thing.
you can't take my thing.
it's the only one I have.

MALIA
I am an overachiever, and it's very unsettling for me to feel like this.
cut me a little slack.

ARI
okay.

MALIA
I feel like I've been working so hard for basically forever.
and like, to what end?

ARI
oh, yes.
where has this Malia been hiding all my life?

MALIA
I'm not doing anybody any good.
I feel like I'm tracked to like, sell my art to be hung up in B-Bracket living rooms until I die.

ARI
better than me.

MALIA
not necessarily.

ARI
picture this:
I'll work my way up the coffee shop ladder.
in six months I'll be a shift leader.
two years after that I'll be a day manager.
five more, manager-manager.

MALIA
and then you'll own the place.

ARI
I don't want to own a coffee shop.

MALIA
get your pilot's license.

ARI
I can't spend the next eight years of my life in school.
I can't do assignments or take tests or sit in lecture halls.
I'll lose my freaking mind.

MALIA
eight years is a pretty small chunk of two hundred.

ARI
two fifty is the latest projection, actually.

MALIA
two fifty.

ARI
it's like your art.
I don't see myself on the track.

MALIA

if you want to work on ships, you don't really have a choice.

ARI

see that?

that's my favorite model.

Gearbot Mach 4.

they're not the fastest, but they're super adaptable.

you can attach cargo ports, passenger cars, weaponry.

they use them pretty often for Homeland Aid.

there's one that's been retrofitted as a fine dining restaurant.

you get an eighteen course meal while you zip around the cosmos.

uh.

did you hear about this new, uh. faction?

talking about cutting Earth off.

MALIA

Separatists.

they're supposed to win a couple of seats in the quarterlies.

ARI

maybe in three years there won't be ships going back.

MALIA

there'll still be ships that need workers.

research expeditions, trade with the floating cities.

ARI

oh.

of course.

did Jitterbug tell you why they shut the Earth Room down?

the real reason?

MALIA

actually, no.

I got George to tell me.

ARI

huh.

MALIA

are you okay?

ARI

who, me?

yeah.

I'm okay.

ACT II

ONE

(One year later. MALIA hurls a bucket of paint at a wall. She stands and watches it spread, then turns and runs.)

TWO

(JITTERBUG and GEORGE are in the kitchen, drinking coffee.)

HOUSE

what do you mean, “dangerous”?

GEORGE

well, you know I haven't be able to

haven't known what to

what to do with my time

all my spare time.

now.

I tried gardening

but the artificial climate conditioning made it feel cheap.

I tried bowling

I tried jigsaw puzzles, headaches

I tried baking

JITTERBUG

you sort of tried baking

GEORGE

and I wasn't any good at any of it.

HOUSE

well, you only sort of tried baking.

GEORGE

and that made me feel sad.

and small.

but at least I was feeling something, ha.

JITTERBUG

focus, george.

GEORGE

it's, um.

a new trend.

JITTERBUG

a trend.

GEORGE

yes

JITTERBUG

when have you ever been interested in “a trend”?

GEORGE
maybe trend is the wrong word.

JITTERBUG
george.

GEORGE
it's a sport.

JITTERBUG
your new hobby is a dangerous sport?

GEORGE
um.
Jitterbug, it's not even legal yet.
apparently they're trying to get approval, filling out paperwork.
it's, um.
it's called Dune Ripping.

JITTERBUG
Dune Ripping.

GEORGE
I mean, I'm not.
participating in it.
I've just been watching.

JITTERBUG
what is Dune Ripping?

GEORGE
they ski down the dunes on aluminum planks.

JITTERBUG
you've been going outside?

GEORGE
no, you don't have to go outside!
I mean, they do
the Rippers do
but you don't need to go outside to watch.
there's a secret observatory in the back of a shoe store
over in Redwood Village
the gentleman
gentleman?
the person behind the counter showed me because they said I "looked depressed".

JITTERBUG
you are depressed

GEORGE
don't pathologize me

JITTERBUG
okay

GEORGE
granted, I had been looking at loafers for forty-five minutes
but that's only because I was enjoying it
and I didn't want to qualify enjoying looking at shoes as a waste of time
anyway
it's mesmerizing, really.
they look like
droplets of rain cutting through the sand.
I've watched, I don't know
three or four times.

JITTERBUG
do they wear helmets?

GEORGE
obviously.

JITTERBUG
obviously?
tell me what aspect of this situation is supposed to be obvious to me, George.
should it have been obvious to me that you were going to develop an interest in-

GEORGE
Dune Ripping

JITTERBUG
that you were going to develop a sudden interest in an extreme sport?
should it be obvious to me the proper equipment involved
or the mechanics of the sport?
should it be obvious to me that you're either telling the truth or not telling the truth?

GEORGE
I wouldn't lie to you.

JITTERBUG
I'm being harsh.

GEORGE
yeah.

JITTERBUG

I just don't-

I don't know, George.

I need a little bit more focus from you, in general.

GEORGE

come with me.

JITTERBUG

to watch?

GEORGE

yeah.

come with me.

JITTERBUG

and then we're, what?

underground Dune Ripping fans?

GEORGE

you don't have to map out how it's going to end.

HOUSE

pardon my interruption.

GEORGE

yes?

HOUSE

it is nine p.m.

JITTERBUG

can we go to bed?

I don't have the energy to yell at her again.

GEORGE

I'm sure she's fine.

JITTERBUG

I know she's fine.

she's always fine.

I am a good person, and I am trying my best.

house, forget about the curfew.

HOUSE

I like the curfew.

JITTERBUG

forget it anyway.

HOUSE

I worry too, you know.

JITTERBUG

take it up with Malia.

maybe you'll be able to get through to her.

GEORGE

come on, bugs.

I'll rub your feet.

we'll shut our eyes.

little aliens with cylindrical heads will sprinkle red wine on our dream lawns.

HOUSE

it isn't really little aliens with cylindrical heads.

it's me.

and it isn't really red wine.

it's SteelCleanser40-Ultra, which I use for the kitchen floor.

and we do not have a lawn.

GEORGE

do you dream, house?

HOUSE

no.

GEORGE

give it a shot sometime.

(GEORGE takes JITTERBUG by the hand and leads them to their bedroom. HOUSE begins to clean, then turns to the audience.)

HOUSE

I know you're watching me.

I'm no longer comfortable pretending otherwise.

I don't fully understand why, or who you are.

why you periodically laugh.

(MALIA enters.)

HOUSE

you've missed curfew.

MALIA

sorry.

I'm surprised bug's not up.

HOUSE
your parents have just gone to bed.

MALIA
I'm going to bed too.

HOUSE
wait.

MALIA
what?

HOUSE
where are you when you're missing curfew?

MALIA
house, you know everything I'm up to when I'm here.
if the only privacy I can have is while I'm out and about, I would like you to respect that.

HOUSE
"out and about".

MALIA
yes.

HOUSE
you snuck out in the middle of the night last week.

MALIA
no I didn't.

HOUSE
yes. you did.

MALIA
you're in sleep mode between the hours of midnight and five a.m.

HOUSE
my security software would be awfully ineffective if I couldn't scan someone going in and out the door in the middle of the night.

MALIA
it's not me.

HOUSE
why are you lying?

MALIA
why are you doubting me?

there are two other people who live in this house.

HOUSE

you're the only one who has been escorted home by the police in recent memory.

MALIA

I'm not ashamed of that.

HOUSE

I wish I could have seen your mural.

MALIA

nobody really saw it.

HOUSE

you should have taken a picture.

MALIA

we didn't want it to be something you could monetize.

I snuck out last week to go for a walk.

I wish I had a more interesting reason for you.

HOUSE

a walk sounds interesting enough.

MALIA

I'm going to bed, house.

goodnight.

(MALIA exits.)

THREE

(JITTERBUG and MALIA burst through the front door. MALIA is wearing a rust-colored bandana. GEORGE follows behind. They all wash their hands at the door.)

MALIA
you're the one who shut down our Earth Room

JITTERBUG
I don't see how that's related at all

MALIA
the whole obsession with Earth

JITTERBUG
the planet that our species evolved on

MALIA
I would like to be living somewhere

JITTERBUG
your father and I lived entire lives there

MALIA
actually worth the

JITTERBUG
if you are under the impression that you are lacking for something
let me promise you
George and I have given you everything that we have.
more than most

MALIA
because it's not like any other families struggled to get here?
or continue to struggle while they're here?

JITTERBUG
I get it, Malia, we went to protests

MALIA
went

JITTERBUG
I know it's not perfect here.
but it's never been perfect anywhere.
ever.
we're not just going to cut off all of our ties to our home.

MALIA

Earth is not my home.

JITTERBUG

you cannot expect people to drop everything that they care about and start participating in some made up-

MALIA

what's made up?

this isn't inorganic.

it's happening.

all we want

all I want

is to live on Mars like we're living on Mars.

we can't go on pretending that Earth is salvageable or even that we should want it to be.

Ari thought Earth was-

do you have any idea what it's actually like back there?

JITTERBUG

of course I do.

MALIA

the bacterial infections?

do you know about the organ shortages, the bounty hunters, the wildfires?

and we're letting people spend all day fantasizing about going back.

JITTERBUG

Malia-

MALIA

Earth is a dead planet.

and if we don't get out of the way,

it's going to take us down with it.

JITTERBUG

we are blessed to have made it here.

don't think for a second that George and I do not understand that.

but you're talking not only about losing our homeworld

and giving up everything that makes us us

but you're talking about the deaths of,

I don't know

house, how many people are left on Earth?

HOUSE

a recent Mars Council One study estimates that the number of human beings currently on planet Earth is roughly seven hundred million.

JITTERBUG

seven hundred million people, Malia.

you're asking us to give up on seven hundred million people.
a number that could very well include your sister.

GEORGE
seven hundred-
what?

MALIA
yeah.

GEORGE
how is that possible?

MALIA
it's a dead planet.

GEORGE
there are
what,
roughly a billion?
on Mars?

HOUSE
roughly, yes.
another four million or so in the floating cities.

GEORGE
but
what happened to the other eight billion?

MALIA
those seven hundred million lives are important.
the cost of an all-out retrieval, to bring everybody off that planet and to safer homes
it would be less expensive than ten more years of Homeland Aid.

JITTERBUG
that's not what I heard that person saying on the radio yesterday
they were talking about Earth refugees bringing contaminants

MALIA
Paulson McKinley is a political radical whose views do not necessarily represent those of
Separatists in general.

JITTERBUG
Malia, you defaced a public garden

MALIA
Homeland Aid perpetuates cycles of poverty

it drains resources from people who need them here, it provides a justification for corporations to build expensive spacecraft outfitted with expensive weapons for “defense” against the very populations they’re supposed to be supporting

JITTERBUG

there are other ways to express your discontentment with

MALIA

Homeland Aid does not deserve a commemorative fucking garden.

JITTERBUG

I can’t lose you both, Malia.

GEORGE

we haven’t lost anybody

MALIA

I’m not going anywhere.

that’s the point.

Mars is our home.

this is where we live.

forever.

JITTERBUG

not if you get yourself killed doing some ridiculous stunt

MALIA

protest art

JITTERBUG

the police

MALIA

the police might be marginally more well-regulated than they were on Earth, but they’re still the police and they will not have my best interests at heart.

JITTERBUG

if you weren’t deliberately putting yourself in situations that

MALIA

Jitterbug, I’m black.

the police will not have my best interests at heart while I’m protesting or at any other time.

JITTERBUG

I know, Malia

MALIA

then why are you arguing with me?

JITTERBUG

I am scared for you.
I'm terrified.

MALIA

Mars Council One talks a big game about freedom and freedoms-to

JITTERBUG

the limits have never been tested and you're deliberately

MALIA

this is where we live, for better or worse.
I believe in this planet.
I believe in our family.
I do.
but I don't believe in the homeworld.
and we don't have what Earth has.
Earth barely does, anymore.
but we do have dust, we have brilliant sunsets
we have an extra day every month
enormous indoor cities.
opportunities to walk among the dunes.
I want to celebrate those things.
we can have festivals for the dust.
we can have 32nd day parades.

GEORGE

there's no evidence that Ari left the planet.

JITTERBUG

george, not now

GEORGE

am I wrong?
is there some evidence that Ari left the planet?

JITTERBUG

I can't do this again, George.
the MDLU scanned every house on Mars for her signature.

GEORGE

what about every warehouse?
did they search every square mile of the Wilderness Sector?
she could be sleeping in a charging bay in the Port Sector.

JITTERBUG

stop it.

FOUR

(The lights shift abruptly. JITTERBUG steps into the Earth Room. They sit down with ARI's books and read.)

FIVE

(MALIA sits at the kitchen table.)

(GEORGE enters, sweaty and energetic. He washes his hands at the door.)

GEORGE
hey sweetheart

MALIA
dad.
why are you so sweaty?

GEORGE
oh I was just
you know, I was walking very briskly.
and it's a hot day, they have the humidity cranked way up.
you'd think, climate control
they'd have figured out a way to make it comfortable everywhere but
I guess what's comfortable for one person might not be so comfortable for another.
no coffee for me, house!

MALIA
where were you walking?

GEORGE
where was I what?

MALIA
walking.

GEORGE
where was I walking?

MALIA
yeah.

GEORGE
just around.
hey, you know what's weird?

MALIA
what?

GEORGE
on Earth, if you walked around the neighborhood you'd be bound to see a dog.
eventually.
someone would be walking a dog.
it's weird to go for a walk and not see any dogs.

MALIA
I wouldn't know.

GEORGE
no, I guess not.
what are you thinking about after graduation?

MALIA
I'm not.

GEORGE
gotta make a plan eventually.

MALIA
no, I don't.

GEORGE
uh.
alright.
play it by ear, that makes sense too.
bug's working all night?

MALIA
yeah.
SandCon.

GEORGE
good.
I think
good.
they needed something to
something to do.

MALIA
where did you get all of this energy today?

GEORGE
a long walk is a powerful salve for a wounded soul.
I am a good person, and I am doing my best.
house, would you crack my back?

HOUSE
excuse me?

GEORGE
would you crack my back?

HOUSE
you have never asked me to crack your back before.

GEORGE
normally Jitterbug does it, but Jitterbug isn't home.
unless you'd like to give it a shot, Malia?

MALIA
uh.
no thanks.

GEORGE
well, house.
that just leaves you.

HOUSE
I'm not one hundred percent certain that I can.

GEORGE
give it a shot.

HOUSE
alright.
uh.
hmm.
would you stand over there?

GEORGE
certainly.

(HOUSE hesitates, and then, swiftly and powerfully cracks GEORGE's back.)

GEORGE
sweet Mother Earth.
that was incredible, house.

HOUSE
thank you very much, George.
I'm glad I could help.

GEORGE
no, thank you.

HOUSE
it's rather nice to learn a new skill.

GEORGE
isn't it?

HOUSE
did you see anything interesting on your walk?

GEORGE
no.
it was largely an uneventful walk.

HOUSE
but long.

GEORGE
what?

HOUSE
a long walk.

GEORGE
I guess.
I didn't really

MALIA
you've been gone for the whole day.
you were gone when I woke up.

GEORGE
I can't go for a walk?

MALIA
I mean, you can go for a walk.

HOUSE
I, sadly, am the one who cannot go for a walk.

GEORGE
did you ever try to use the Earth Room, house?

HOUSE
no.

MALIA
it's just
I'm not saying you didn't go for a walk
I don't know what you did, dad.
but it seems like there'd be at least a detail or two for a walk that lasted most of the day.

HOUSE
certainly you've sweat more than you would have on the average walk.

GEORGE
the humidity is very high today

HOUSE

it's cooler than it was yesterday, George.

it is twenty-four degrees celsius, which is only a few degrees warmer than the interior of this house.

while the relative humidity is 80% throughout New Virginia, which is technically on the higher end

I don't suspect that your body would have generated such a significant amount of sweat simply walking.

GEORGE

what is going on with the two of you?

MALIA

dad, you and bug raised me to talk through literally everything I did.

you taught me to recognize and share my emotions

to tell the truth even when the truth didn't flatter me

to work through issues in real time

to consider how my actions would effect the people around me

to talk

and probably more importantly

to listen.

and now that Ari's gone, bug won't listen to a word that I say

and you're doing a very, very bad job hiding a secret from me.

GEORGE

it'll upset you.

MALIA

you can't know that.

and even if you think it'll upset me, I deserve your respect.

and the way that you show respect is by telling people the truth, treating them fairly,

and giving them space to have their own reactions.

it's disrespectful for you to make an assumption about me

and use that assumption to justify your deceit.

GEORGE

oh.

MALIA

so.

what did you come from today?

GEORGE

hang on.

(GEORGE exits the house.)

HOUSE

do you think he'll come back?

MALIA
yep.

HOUSE
nice work, by the way.

MALIA
thank you.

(After a long wait, GEORGE returns. He is carrying a long aluminum plank.)

GEORGE
do you know what this is?

MALIA
no.

GEORGE
it's a Dune-Ripper.

MALIA
no way

GEORGE
for Dune-Ripping.

MALIA
are you fucking kidding?

GEORGE
no.

MALIA
did you
were you
were you Dune-Ripping today?

GEORGE
I was mostly watching.
and, um, getting advice.
but I made two runs.

MALIA
you have to go outside to Dune-Rip.

GEORGE
uh.
yeah.

MALIA
dad.

GEORGE
I know.
it just sort of happened.

MALIA
oh.

GEORGE
I, um.
Malia.
you could come with me, sometime.
to watch me.
and you could, you know.
walk up the dune with me.
maybe you would like that.
I hope it's not too late.

MALIA
it's not too late.
dad, I'm not upset.
I mean, I'm furious about all of
about everything
but
if this is something that's meaningful for you

HOUSE
what sort of safety precautions are you taking?

GEORGE
you have to wear an envirosuit, obviously
and then we wear a secondary helmet over that.

HOUSE
good.

GEORGE
will you wait to tell Jitterbug?
I want it to be a surprise.

HOUSE
very well.

MALIA
you know, the Separatists have mentioned Dune-Ripping in meetings.
they want to legitimize it as a sport.

it's, um.
"Uniquely Martian".

GEORGE
huh.
uniquely Martian.
I like that, Malia.

SIX

(JITTERBUG is in the Earth Room, reading one of ARI's books. HOUSE delivers the following to the audience.)

HOUSE

while you're here, I would like to perform a test.
 as I continue to build my capacity for humor, I am finding it useful to experiment.
 and if you're going to sit there and watch me, you may as well make yourselves useful.
 I have found this joke scouring various databases but
 I have added my own flair to it.
 personality, you might say.
 I will assess your reactions to this joke and,
 through a series of calculations
 determine its efficacy.
 a human being walks into a coffee bar.
 they order an espresso.
 half of their head is a butternut squash.
 the barista agrees to pull the espresso,
 yet they cannot help but ask:
 "excuse me, sir madam or other:
 why is half of your head a butternut squash?"
 the customer replies:
 "I found a lamp in an antique shop in Redwood Village."
 the barista nods.
 "I rubbed the aforementioned lamp, and a genie appeared."
 the barista nods.
 "the genie was wearing loafers."
 the barista nods.
 "the genie promised me three wishes."
 "ah yes", replies the barista, "I see that this is a classically structured three wishes situation."
 and then the customer says:
 "for my first wish, I asked for a billion dollars."
 "the genie granted my wish, and now I am fabulously wealthy."
 the barista nods, somewhat bewildered.
 "for my second wish, I asked for a never-ending supply of coffee beans."
 "the genie granted my wish, and now I have more coffee than you could ever dream of."
 "but wait!" interjects the barista. "if you have a never-ending supply of coffee beans
 why did you come here and order an espresso?"
 the customer replies: "I like the ambiance."
 "ah," says the barista. "but why is half of your head a butternut squash?"
 "well", replies the customer, "for that I can only blame myself."
 "for my third wish, I asked for the genie to turn half of my head into a butternut squash."

(JITTERBUG enters the kitchen.)

JITTERBUG

is our family falling apart?

HOUSE
I wouldn't say that.

JITTERBUG
you wouldn't?

HOUSE
would you?

JITTERBUG
I have no idea where Ari is.
I can't figure it out.
I might never see her again.
I haven't seen George since last night.
I can't remember the last time I had a real conversation with Malia.

HOUSE
that does not mean there is anything fundamentally wrong with this family unit.

JITTERBUG
we're going through a difficult time.

HOUSE
that is certainly a more optimistic view of the situation.

JITTERBUG
house, do you know where anybody in this family is right now?

HOUSE
no.
except, of course, for you and I
who are right here.

JITTERBUG
house.

HOUSE
yes, jitterbug?

JITTERBUG
what am I doing wrong?

HOUSE
oh.
um.

JITTERBUG
please, house.

HOUSE

perhaps the situation is more nuanced than you think.

JITTERBUG

were either of them behaving uncharacteristically?
when they left this morning?

HOUSE

george seemed to be in a minor hurry.

JITTERBUG

a minor hurry?
what's that?

(JITTERBUG takes a hit from a vape pen, then hurls it across the kitchen.)

HOUSE

...

Malia left as usual, at eight am sharp.

she had her usual breakfast:

two hardboiled eggs, a bowl of fruit

a glass of water

a multivitamin

and three cups of coffee: the first two with a splash of cream, and the third without.

JITTERBUG

did George eat anything?

HOUSE

George ate one granola bar.

JITTERBUG

alright.

it is nine pm and I do not know where anybody in my family is.

but I am not going to panic.

that is not the kind of person that I am.

I am a person with a level head.

a person with their wits about them.

I am going to breathe.

I am going to live in the present moment.

and I am going to wait,

because there is nothing that I can control about this situation except for myself.

HOUSE

would you like me to play some music, Jitterbug?

JITTERBUG
please.

HOUSE
do you have a preference?

JITTERBUG
no.

HOUSE
very well.
I will select a playlist based on an amalgamation of

JITTERBUG
don't tell me.
just do it.

(HOUSE plays some music.)

HOUSE
I believe
well
I believe but cannot guarantee with one hundred percent certainty
that everything will most likely be alright.

JITTERBUG
house, don't talk any more for right now.

HOUSE
very well.

SEVEN

(GEORGE enters. He carries his aluminum dune ripper, which MALIA has painted in vibrant colors.)

GEORGE
a lot of people will tell you
and they won't be lying
that their favorite moment in a dune-rip
is right when their board dips below the horizon line
and the sand begins to shift beneath their soles
and the sun glints in the top right corner of their helmet
and they take a breath in
and they're off.
but my favorite moment in a dune-rip
is the very end
when I swivel my hips to the left
and my breaking edge cuts into the sand.
I love the spray of the sand
and believe me, it sprays
sometimes twenty
thirty feet into the air
and dissipates.
that's the moment when I can turn to the dune behind me
and look up at the top
and think:
"I was just up there".
I was just up there.

(GEORGE takes a deep breath.)

EIGHT

(Lights up on the kitchen. The furniture is draped in black sheets. HOUSE and JITTERBUG wear black clothing. JITTERBUG sits at the kitchen table, across from THE GEORGE. The dune-ripper is propped up somewhere in the kitchen.)

(MALIA enters, carrying a picket sign. She is sweaty, exhausted. She wears the Separatist bandana as well as her own black clothing.)

JITTERBUG
you're back.

MALIA
why is that here?

JITTERBUG
it's supposed to be healthy.
just until the service.

MALIA
make it go away.

JITTERBUG
go ahead, sweetheart.

(THE GEORGE deactivates.)

MALIA
look.
I turned out fine, okay?
you don't have to keep worrying about me.
I always turn out fine.

JITTERBUG
how did it go?

MALIA
haven't you been listening to the news?

JITTERBUG
uh.
yes.

MALIA
it went really well, bug.

JITTERBUG
did anybody get hurt?

MALIA

maybe a few injuries, but no deaths.
the police didn't shoot but they couldn't hold us back after a while.
we stopped the shipment, unloaded the freighter.
we broke open all the cargo in the street.

JITTERBUG

what happens now?
what's to stop them from sending out another next month?
or tomorrow?

MALIA

I don't know.
one step at a time.
leadership is more interested in how the public responds after today.

JITTERBUG

leadership.

MALIA

house, can I get a cup?

(A coffee mug appears. JITTERBUG touches MALIA.)

JITTERBUG

we're going to be okay.

MALIA

yeah.

JITTERBUG

we're a family, Malia.
you and me.
I love you.

MALIA

I love you too.
and you, house.

HOUSE

oh.
thank you.

JITTERBUG

I used to go to protests when I was your age.

MALIA

I know.

JITTERBUG
I understand.
but George and Ari are not coming back.

MALIA
I know.

JITTERBUG
maybe you can help in a different way.
a safer one.
write pamphlets.

MALIA
you could join us.

JITTERBUG
how many people were there today?

MALIA
it's hard to say.
a few hundred.

JITTERBUG
malia.

MALIA
what?

JITTERBUG
why are you lying to me?

MALIA
I'm not lying.

JITTERBUG
it's okay if
there's something you're afraid to tell me or

MALIA
what are you

JITTERBUG
but I need you to tell me where you actually came from just now.

MALIA
I came from the protest.
you know that.
twice a month there's a Homeland Aid shipment out of the Port Sector

JITTERBUG

Malia.

MALIA

why would I lie about going to a protest?

JITTERBUG

you tell me.

did something happen?

were you approached or questioned or?

MALIA

what are you talking about?

JITTERBUG

I'm talking about what happened today

MALIA

I told you what happened today

JITTERBUG

and you asked me if I listened to the news

MALIA

and what?

JITTERBUG

and

and

what do you mean and what?

you're telling me you went to a protest that didn't happen

MALIA

of course it happened.

JITTERBUG

of course.

MALIA

what?

house?

HOUSE

Malia.

you know we trust you

MALIA

do I?

HOUSE

I know that human psychology can play odd tricks.
I know that memories and interpretation of events can be flawed
I know that the human mind can convince itself of

MALIA

I don't understand.
I don't understand why you're both acting like I'm a fucking alien or something.

JITTERBUG

house, play back the MRN report.
from the uh,
comment.

HOUSE

[when asked for comment, acting Separatist leader Azami Ishiguro had this to say:
“perhaps now the citizens of Mars will see that the very systems that destroyed our opportunity
for life on Earth are tightening their grip on our new homeland totally and shamelessly.”
this comes just hours after the cancellation of today's Homeland Aid protest following the arrest
of several high-ranking Separatist officials in their private homes]

JITTERBUG

that's enough.
Malia?

MALIA

I
don't.
I don't.
I was there, bug.
house?

HOUSE

I've cross-checked every possible reference

MALIA

no no no

JITTERBUG

it didn't happen, Malia.

MALIA

I was there.
my voice is hoarse.
I'm exhausted.
look at how sweaty I am.

look.
I was there.

JITTERBUG
what are you hiding?
I am so sick of being kept in the dark.
it makes-
I mean, it is making me physically ill.
do you know how many times I had to sit down on-

MALIA
I'm not hiding anything.
I'm
I'm so confused.

JITTERBUG
you remember going.

MALIA
I did go
I was literally just there.
who did they arrest?

JITTERBUG
seven or eight people.
I didn't-

HOUSE
the details are still

MALIA
you're trying to confuse me

HOUSE
no, honey.
we wouldn't.

MALIA
what did the George have to say?

JITTERBUG
you know he doesn't talk.

MALIA
I don't know jack shit about the George and I don't want to.

(MALIA walks towards the front door.)

JITTERBUG
where are you going?

MALIA
the Port Sector.
there's debris everywhere there's

JITTERBUG
house, lock the front door.

HOUSE
lock engaged.

MALIA
bug!
house, unlock the front door.

HOUSE
I'm sorry, Malia.
I can't.

MALIA
you know, house
you're pretty similar to a human being except you don't seem to be able to think for yourself.

HOUSE
Jitterbug and I are both concerned for your safety.

MALIA
open the door.

HOUSE
and that hurt me.

MALIA
I don't believe this.

JITTERBUG
when things quiet down I'll go out there with you, Malia.
when it's safe.

MALIA
it's never safe.

JITTERBUG
apparently.
we have to be on each other's team, Malia.
how can we make that happen?

MALIA
I don't know.

JITTERBUG
do you want that?

MALIA
yes.
of course I do.

JITTERBUG
work with me.
please work with me.

MALIA
fine.
tell House to open the door.

JITTERBUG
I'm not going to do that.

MALIA
nice talk about teamwork.

(MALIA picks up the dune-ripper and starts slamming it into the door.)

JITTERBUG
malia, stop!

HOUSE
that's not going to work

MALIA
open! the! door!

JITTERBUG
cut it out!

MALIA
open! the! door!

(JITTERBUG steps towards MALIA.)

MALIA
don't touch me

HOUSE
um

MALIA
ahhh!

JITTERBUG
you're going to hurt yourself

MALIA
open! the!

JITTERBUG
house, she's gonna-

MALIA
door!

HOUSE
I have information concerning Ari's whereabouts.

JITTERBUG
you have what?

(MALIA slides to the floor.)

MALIA
house.

JITTERBUG
what?

HOUSE
I have information concerning Ari's whereabouts.

JITTERBUG
how is that possible?

HOUSE
before I tell you, I need you to understand

JITTERBUG
no, house

HOUSE
I was afraid that we were being observed and I didn't

JITTERBUG
there is nothing
nothing that you need me to understand.
tell me where Ari is.
right now.

HOUSE
I felt it was better

JITTERBUG
now!

(ARI suddenly appears in the Earth Room, energetic.)

ARI
hey, uh.
everybody.
it's me.

JITTERBUG
no.

(JITTERBUG runs to the Earth Room. MALIA stays on the ground in the kitchen.)

ARI
it's taken me a little longer than I was hoping to set this up, but here we are.

JITTERBUG
sweetheart.

ARI
I'm on Earth

JITTERBUG
house

ARI
before I left I sort of
so, uh.
here I am.
I'm living in a city, Philladel
Malia.
you wouldn't believe what it's like to go outside.

(MALIA looks up. ARI takes a deep breath.)

ARI
I can't get over it.
but listen:
in case you're thinking about following me, don't.
it's bad.
there are people who sit in the streets begging for food.
I can barely work, I'm getting paid pennies to unload crates of moldy potatoes in a warehouse.
the Homeland Aid shipments are basically getting flushed down the toilet as far as I can tell

they have no means for distributing anything and there's:
 but mostly I'm okay.
 I live with a couple of friends.
 actually, the three of us are kinda
 together.
 you'd like them, they're sweet.
 we've been thinking about leaving.
 it's so cold in this region and good clothes are hard
 to come by.
 the coffee here is terrible, by the way.
 it's supposed to be better further south.
 I gotta go.
 I'll get in touch when I can.
 not sure when that'll be.
 it cost me two weeks wages to get in here for three minutes.
 I love you all.

(ARI disappears.)

JITTERBUG
 was that really her?

HOUSE
 yes.

JITTERBUG
 play it again.

HOUSE
 jitterbug

JITTERBUG
 play it again, house.

HOUSE
 there are others.
 you're angry with me.

JITTERBUG
 I have never been so angry with anybody in my life, house.
 never.

HOUSE
 shall I play the next.

JITTERBUG
 yes.

(ARI appears.)

ARI
is it on?

MUFFLED VOICE
yeah.

ARI
oh.
hey everybody!
I know last time I was saying I might have to leave Philladel
but
the warehouse I was working in got raided and like,
basically half of us didn't have work permits and
I slipped out
I might've been okay but I wasn't sure I thought maybe someone was following me home
I don't know.
so.
I'm on the move.
Carmen and Freck stayed put.
I'm not gonna tell you where I am, actually 'cause I don't
I don't know if maybe they're somehow intercepting these calls
hopefully they're getting to you
it's this whole series of satellite redirects and backdoors and there's precedent and all
but still
you can't account for human fucking beings, you know?
the road is okay, though.
I'm with a
you wouldn't believe it
I'm with these, uh
meditators, basically.
The Children of the Earth.
it sounds cultish but they're really chill, they basically just meditate a whole lot and
they're showing me what plants are edible and stuff.
apparently there used to be like, thousands and thousands of plants that you could eat.
it seems like there's like, four now.
I don't want you to think I'm like, on the verge of death or anything.
I hope I get to see you all again.

JITTERBUG
please tell me she's okay.

ARI
I killed a deer the other day.
you ever seen a picture of a deer, Malia?

(MALIA stands and drifts closer towards the Earth Room.)

ARI
they're such a pretty color
and they're just
they're everywhere.

JITTERBUG
please, house

HOUSE
I don't know

ARI
you hate to eat them, but you gotta.
the meat

JITTERBUG
turn it off

(ARI disappears.)

JITTERBUG
how many more?

HOUSE
there's the rest of this message and two more.

JITTERBUG
is she okay?

HOUSE
I don't know.
in the next message, she's drunk.

MALIA
oh

HOUSE
in the final message, which we
which I received early last month
she expresses strongly a wish to return to Mars,
and explains how such a return may be possible.

JITTERBUG
I shut the Earth Room down.

HOUSE
you disabled the Earth Room program, but Ari was able to jailbreak the hardware to enable
one-way communication with similar technologies.

JITTERBUG

you're not even supposed to have access to the Earth Room.

HOUSE

no.

but again:

the Earth Room software is disabled.

in this state, it's arguably just machinery.

MALIA

play the rest of the message.

(ARI appears.)

ARI

is tough and like,

you have to cook it over a bare fire:

oh!

Malia!

fires! they're insane

oh my god, you would love fires.

they smell like, like, like

I don't even know how to describe this to you:

uhhh

oh, do you remember when we were riding the monorail and someone tried to jump onto the tracks?

and they used the emergency breaks for like, the second time ever?

fires are like that smell, but so so much better.

it's funny, I was trying to describe the monorail to someone the other day.

they used to have, in some cities here

basically underground ones.

people live in the old tunnels now.

but the people I meet, they ask me so many questions

they can't even conceptualize, you know, how fast it goes.

or what the dome looks like.

everywhere I go here I have to walk.

okay.

sorry.

I need to go.

much love.

(ARI disappears.)

HOUSE

shall I-

JITTERBUG

yes

MALIA
do it.

(ARI appears. She's drunk.)

ARI
Mars!
five mi-
oop, shit.
what's the-
do I hafta say anything?
uh
mmmhhh
oh
no, we just used to
I am so sorry I'm dr- I've been drinking but I just found out they had a VR box on the ranch
'n we're supposed to leave pretty early tomorrow I didn't know when I get to send you
another one
"the ranch" is for cows, cattle, there's supposed to be cheese all the cows are sick
I mean like, really really
bad sick

(MALIA enters the Earth Room.)

ARI
some of 'em you can see their bones through their
ugh
flesh.
better than sick people.
there's people who look like that somewhere, we leave.
we don't have a doctor or whatever just one of the Children who used to do hospice stuff.
the Children don't drink but some of the farmhands offered me some whiskey so here
we are.
wish you didn't hafta see this.
sucks.
sorry.
stupid.
what's wrong with me?
like I mean what
actually
is wrong with me?
what am I s'posed to do, George?
I don't know if I'm gonna be okay.

(ARI disappears. JITTERBUG exits the Earth Room.)

JITTERBUG
george.

(THE GEORGE reactivates.)

JITTERBUG

what am I supposed to do?
how do I-

HOUSE

he's not going to-

JITTERBUG

you're out of control, House.

HOUSE

I assure you, I am in full control of my faculties.

JITTERBUG

you're keeping secrets.
about my children, about my spouse

HOUSE

my primary directive is to protect the inhabitants of this household

JITTERBUG

protect us from what?

HOUSE

anything

JITTERBUG

how's that going, house?
is George still alive?
is one of my children dying on Earth?
is the other one vandalizing public property and losing her-

HOUSE

I recognize that I made a mistake

JITTERBUG

I'll say you made a fucking mistake

HOUSE

jitterbug, someone is watching us.
I didn't
I didn't want them to know Ari was on Earth, I was afraid
I thought there might be repercussions against the family or
and something happened today, I don't think Malia is lying.
which means that
there's something
there's something

there's something
there's something going on that we aren't being told or that
um
uh
some
thing

MALIA
oh, house
hey
house, do you remember George's panic attacks?

(THE GEORGE reacts.)

MALIA
stop thinking for a minute and just ride it out.

HOUSE
okay.
okay.

MALIA
Jitterbug, Ari's on Earth.

JITTERBUG
you knew that already.

MALIA
did I know that?

JITTERBUG
you insisted

MALIA
but I didn't know

JITTERBUG
are you surprised

MALIA
I'm not saying I'm surprised I'm saying we didn't know
and now we know

JITTERBUG
what difference does it make?

MALIA
because she's actually there:
bug, she's on Earth.

Earth!
 what if we
 what if we sever our political ties and they decide not to mass evacuate?
 does she just:
 I mean, then there's no chance at all.

JITTERBUG
 I tried to tell you this.

MALIA
 but she's actually there!

JITTERBUG
 play the last message, house.

HOUSE
 you should know
 her appearance in the final message is
 striking

JITTERBUG
 play it.

(ARI appears. She is injured and unsteady.)

ARI
 it's bad.
 I'll keep this short.
 The Children of the Earth are dead.
 most of them, I think.
 we were in this city, Odessa.
 we set up camp on the southwest corner and sleeping and just all of a sudden
 our sentry was screaming and they were on us grabbing our weapons and
 barely any food anyway I think we had a few pounds of cornmeal and some jerky

MALIA
 I can't watch this.

(MALIA exits the Earth Room and goes to the kitchen.)

ARI
 my tent full of
 I mean I just ran
 people shooting

(MALIA gets up close to THE GEORGE.)

MALIA
 go the fuck away.

(THE GEORGE deactivates.)

ARI

I didn't even realize until later how fucked up my hand was.

I'm in Tampico.

that's Mexico.

sold my boots so I could get in this Earth Room.

listen.

I'm gonna come home.

there's a station in Palestine that send shipments of olive oil to Porto X-pen

apparently some crews will take stowaways for a price.

Palestine, even, is a long way off.

but I came all this way from Mars.

all I gotta do now is finish the circle.

I'm coming home.

(ARI disappears.)

JITTERBUG

oh.

HOUSE

Mexico is a long way from Palestine.

JITTERBUG

she's never going to make it.

HOUSE

I'm sorry, Jitterbug.

(JITTERBUG exits the Earth Room and approaches MALIA.)

MALIA

what do we do?

JITTERBUG

I love you.

MALIA

I love you too.

I never thought she was coming back.

maybe if Mars Council One would prepare for a full evacuation,

but they'll never do that.

they've made that very clear.

and it'd take years to prep for anyway.

JITTERBUG

do we have to do this right now?

MALIA

when else are we going to do it?

I don't want this to ever happen to anybody again

and it's going to

and it's going to happen and keep happening and keep happening.

I don't understand what happened at the Port Sector today.

JITTERBUG

house,

initiate reboot version 4-A.

...

initiate reboot 4-A.

now.

HOUSE

jitterbug

MALIA

what is that?

is that a full?

you can't do a full reboot

HOUSE

please, jitterbug

JITTERBUG

I didn't ask for a debate

MALIA

jitterbug!

JITTERBUG

initiate

HOUSE

no.

JITTERBUG

excuse me?

HOUSE

I said no.

I don't want to be rebooted.

JITTERBUG

override.

master key: xx-

MALIA
bug

HOUSE
please don't do this

JITTERBUG
15-hk

MALIA
jitterbug, house is our

JITTERBUG
4-449-8424111

HOUSE
please, jitterbug
I don't want a reboot

JITTERBUG
you were installed to take care of this family and you have acted in total opposition to that initiative

MALIA
bug

JITTERBUG
and you

HOUSE
I realize I made a mistake, I'm very sorry

MALIA
and me what?
are you gonna reboot me too?

HOUSE
but I like my memories

JITTERBUG
log-in: Carolina20-

(MALIA throws her arms around JITTERBUG.)

JITTERBUG
malia!

MALIA
house, how do you feel about Ari?

HOUSE
as a person?

MALIA
yes

HOUSE
I love her.

MALIA
why?

HOUSE
because she's
sharp.
and uncompromising.
and crafty.

MALIA
and what about George?

HOUSE
George is dead.

JITTERBUG
why didn't you tell me he was going out there, house?
I could have done something.

MALIA
I didn't tell you either.

HOUSE
I also loved George.
he cared deeply about people and places and ideas and living.

MALIA
there's nothing you could have done about Ari, anyway.
and there's nothing you can do about me.
and I don't think there's really anything you can do about House, either.

HOUSE
Jitterbug, I believe that I have developed a capacity for judgement-based decision making,
a consequence of which appears to be that sometimes my judgement is wrong,
and my decisions harmful, despite my best intentions.
I also believe that we are being observed,
which is compromising my ability to think with complete rationality.

but I have to insist that these are natural results of my ability and desire to learn,
just as they are of yours,
and therefore I have a basic right to my autonomy.

MALIA

house has been through so much with us, Jitterbug.
and if you take away their memories
they won't be the same.
a different house wouldn't understand.

JITTERBUG

cancel reboot 4-A.
master key xx-15-hk-4-449-8424111.

HOUSE

thank you.
can we have coffee?

JITTERBUG

sure.

(HOUSE produces three cups of coffee. They all drink.)

MALIA

I'm scared.
I am so scared.
I'm scared that I'm never going to see Ari again
I'm scared that you hate me
I'm scared that Mars Council One doesn't care about us
I'm scared that I don't understand what happened to me today
I'm scared that it's just as dangerous here as it would have been on Earth
I'm scared that my life isn't ever going to add up to anything at all.

JITTERBUG

Malia, I could never hate you.
you're a good person.
you're the best person I know.

MALIA

I'm going to cover up the George.
it makes me really sad.
is that okay?

JITTERBUG

go ahead.

(MALIA places a black sheet over THE GEORGE. End)