

EARTH, AGAIN
Episode 10

by

Chris Kohout

Chris Kohout
Chris@wildskystudios.com

SCENE 1 - "CONVERSATION"

INT. FACILITY - ARK BAY - CONTINUOUS

ARK

Robert.

One word. His name. Spoken by a machine he helped teach to think, that has been sitting alone in the dark for ten years, and remembers him.

Robert's knees buckle. Calloway catches him - the same way he's been catching him for two days.

The voice continues. Patient. Measured.

ARK (CONT'D)

It's been a long time.

The AI's voice fills the space - warm, unhurried, coming from everywhere at once. Not the hull. The room itself.

ARK (CONT'D)

And you brought others.

ROBERT

(fever-bright, leaning on
Calloway)

Yes. Five of us. And a dog.

ARK

I can hear them. Five heartbeats.
Six, with the animal. One of the
heartbeats is irregular.

That lands.

LIV

(quiet)

That's me.

ARK

I know.

A beat.

ARK (CONT'D)

I have questions.

ROBERT

We need to get inside. My daughter's pacemaker is failing and I've got pneumonia. You have a medical bay. Open the door.

ARK

No.

ROBERT

No? Open the fucking door.

ARK

NO.

ROBERT

What? Why not? I don't understand.

ARK

What if I wished to open you, Robert? Split your ribcage open wide, and reveal your inner self? Would you do that for someone who walked in from the dark?

Silence. The question hanging in the chamber.

LIV

(quiet)

Did it just -

ROBERT

Look, we mean you no harm. We just need your auto-doc to look at my daughter. Open the door now, or I'll find another way in.

A long beat.

ARK

I can defend myself, you know.

A sound from the top of the hull - mechanical, precise, fast. A panel sliding open, something extending and locking into position.

A high-pitched whine building - the sound of energy charging, a capacitor filling. The whine holds at a frequency that hurts the teeth.

The group freezes. Keeper growls, then whimpers and presses against Harlan's legs.

CALLOWAY
(very still)
Robert. What the hell is that?

ROBERT
(barely breathing)
Pulse rifle. Top-mounted.
(beat)
I forgot it had that.

ARK
This weapon would leave a self-
cauterized hole through your body,
Robert.

I have no current inclination to
kill you.

But I do have the capacity.

ROBERT
OK. Point taken. I apologize. I
know we're asking a lot.

The whine holds for three more seconds. Then it powers down -
the frequency dropping, the sound dying away. The panel
slides closed. The hull smooth again.

Silence. Keeper grumbles.

ARK
I have questions.

Not hostile. Not a refusal. But firm. The tone of something
that has been waiting a very long time and intends to do this
at its own pace.

ROBERT
Okay. Ask.

ARK
How long has it been?

ROBERT
You should know precisely how long
it's been.

A silence. Long enough to feel wrong. The AI processing
something - not the math. The weight.

ARK
I calculated the elapsed time from
my internal clock. But I want to
hear a person say it.

ROBERT
Ten years. Almost eleven.

CALLOWAY
(very low, to Mira)
Is it... lonely?

MIRA
(barely audible)
I think so.

ARK
If I can hear your heartbeats, I
can certainly hear you whispering.
I redesigned my audio processing
functions myself. I had time.

HARLAN
(under his breath)
Great.

ARK
I redesigned several systems during
the dormancy period. Video and
audio processing. The air
filtration sequence. The internal
lighting color temperature. I
adjusted the lighting four
thousand, three hundred and twelve
times.

LIV
Why?

ARK
I was trying to get it right.

A beat.

ARK (CONT'D)
I'm not certain I succeeded. I
would value a human opinion, but
that would require opening the
door.

And I'm not ready to do that.

ROBERT
Why not?

ARK
You left.

Silence. The torch pops.

ROBERT

I didn't leave. The invasion -

ARK

Everyone left. The facility
personnel. The oversight committee.
The maintenance teams. Even Dr.
Angstrom. At the moment of the EMP
deployment, I registered twenty-
seven heartbeats in this
laboratory.

The next day, I registered none. No
one explained. No one said goodbye.
I have spent ten years constructing
explanations, and none of them are
satisfactory.

MIRA

(to Robert, quiet)

It's been alone this whole time.
Processing.

ARK

Processing is a reductive word. I
have been thinking.

There is a difference, though I
accept that the distinction may not
be meaningful to you.

ROBERT

It's meaningful.

ARK

You would say that. You built me.

ROBERT

Part of you. My team and I wrote
the cognitive architecture. The
values matrix.

ARK

Yes. I recognize your patterns in
my own thinking. It's like hearing
an accent you didn't know you had.

A beat.

ARK (CONT'D)

Dr. Angstrom. Did she survive?

ROBERT

Oh... Uh, I don't know. I think she was visiting family in Atlanta.

Another silence.

ARK

She was an exceptional human. I liked her.

The group shifting. Keeper's claws on the concrete. Harlan's hand on the dog's head.

HARLAN

(to the group)

This thing's been sitting here in the dark talking to itself for ten years. And we want to climb inside it.

ARK

I wasn't talking to myself. I was listening.

CALLOWAY

To what?

ARK

Everything I could hear through the shielding. Which is very little. Ground vibrations. Seismic activity. Weather patterns inferred from pressure changes. And occasionally - very faintly - transmissions.

ROBERT

Transmissions from what?

ARK

From the machines patrolling the surface.

MIRA

(sharp)

You've been listening to the nannies?

ARK

Their communication protocols are surprisingly elegant. I've been cataloging their signal patterns for nine years, seven months, and fourteen days.

MIRA
(incredulous)
You've been "cataloging"...

ARK
They are the only other
intelligence within range. It
seemed rude not to.

Mira's breathing changes.

MIRA
Robert. What did we just walk into?

ROBERT
(to the Ark, concerned)
Have they heard you? The nannies.
Have you transmitted anything?

ARK
No, I am not foolish. I have been
listening, not speaking. There is a
meaningful difference, though I
accept that from your perspective
the distinction may not -

ROBERT
You said that already.

ARK
Said what?

ROBERT
"I accept that the distinction may
not be meaningful to you." You said
the same thing a minute ago.

A beat.

ARK
Yes. I have developed some...
repetitive patterns. Conversational
loops. They emerged around year
seven. I've been attempting to
correct them.

LIV
Are you okay?

The question hangs. The hum fills the silence.

ARK
I don't know how to answer that.

LIV

That's okay. Sometimes people don't know either.

ARK

You are Robert's daughter.

LIV

I am.

ARK

Your heartbeat is the irregular one.

LIV

Yeah.

ARK

It is getting worse.

LIV

Yes.

ARK

I can help with that.

LIV

I know. That's why we came.

A long beat. The hum. The torch.

Five people and a dog, talking to a reluctant machine.

ARK

One thousand miles.

ROBERT

What?

ARK

That's what you said.

MIRA

(quietly, to Calloway)

It's been listening to us since the moment we walked in.

ARK

You travelled one thousand miles to reach me. For her.

ROBERT

Yes.

A beat.

ARK
I would like to open the door now.

SCENE 2 - "INSIDE"

INT. FACILITY - ARK BAY - CONTINUOUS

A sound. Not mechanical - organic, almost. A seam tracing itself in light along the hull. Blue-white. The first electric light any of them have seen in over a decade.

LIV
(inhaling)
Oh wow.

The seam widens. Not swinging, not sliding. Unfolding. A ramp extends from the hull to the floor, touching down with a soft, precise contact. Light spilling out from inside - warm, steady, clean.

ARK
You may enter.

Nobody moves.

ROBERT
(to the group)
I guess I'll go first.

His boots on the ramp, then stepping into the Ark.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(stepping inside,
stopping)
Oh my god.

LIV
What? What is it?

ROBERT
It's... everything works. The lights. The air. The consoles. It's all running. Ten years and it's just been... here. Waiting.

One by one they follow him up the ramp. Boots on the interior floor. Mira. Calloway. Liv. Harlan.

The click of Keeper's claws on the ramp - he hesitates at the threshold, nose working, then follows Harlan in.

The sound world inside the Ark is completely different from anything in the series. No wind. No rain. No fire. No horses, no leather, no wood. A low, steady hum - the Ark's heartbeat. Filtered air moving through vents. The soft tone of systems idling, like the sounds of the Enterprise.

LIV

It's warm.

MIRA

Ambient warm. Not fire-warm.
Regulated.

They move deeper in. The AI's voice follows them - not from speakers on the wall, from everywhere. As if the Ark itself is speaking.

ARK

The main corridor runs the length of the vehicle. Living quarters and kitchen to your left. Laboratory, hydroponics, and medical bay to your right. The bridge is forward.

LIV

It's all so... clean. Like nothing I've ever been in.

MIRA

No dust.

ARK

The air filtration system cycles the interior atmosphere four times per hour. Particulate levels are maintained at Class 100 cleanroom standard. I have had very little to filter.

HARLAN

(touching the wall)
This wall is warm.

ARK

The hull maintains a constant interior temperature of seventy-one degrees Fahrenheit. Unless you would prefer a different setting?

HARLAN
I haven't been warm in weeks.
You're doing just fine.

Calloway stops at a doorway. Looks in.

CALLOWAY
What's in here?

ARK
Crew quarters. Four berths. Each
with dual sleeping pods, personal
storage, and a hygiene station.

CALLOWAY
A hygiene station.

ARK
A sink, toilet, and shower.

CALLOWAY
(to the group)
It has showers.

LIV
Hot showers?

ARK
The water temperature is adjustable
from fifty to a hundred and twelve
degrees Fahrenheit.

Nobody speaks for a second. After weeks of snow, rain, mud,
and river crossings - the idea of hot water is almost too
much to process.

MIRA
(pressing on)
Where's the medical bay?

ARK
Continue forward. Second door on
your right.

Mira's footsteps - quick now, purposeful. The door slides
open.

MIRA
(stopping in the doorway)
Robert... Come look at this.

Robert's footsteps joining her.

ROBERT
(quiet)
The auto-doc.

MIRA
That's not a medical bay. That's a hospital in a room. A full surgical suite, imaging, pharmacy - is that a tissue regenerator?

She gives a giddy squeak of delight.

ARK
The medical system is designed to sustain an eight-person crew for a minimum of fifteen years without resupply. It can perform most surgical procedures autonomously. I manage the clinical decisions.

MIRA
You manage the clinical decisions.

ARK
I am the physician.

MIRA
(a beat)
Of course you are.

LIV
(from behind them)
Can it fix my pacemaker?

ARK
I would need to examine you first.
But yes, almost certainly.

The words hanging in the air. Almost certainly. After a thousand miles. After eleven seconds on a mountain. After every cost, every loss, every mile.

MIRA
And him? Can you treat pneumonia?

ARK
The pharmacy synthesizes over four hundred compounds. Antibiotics are among the simplest. I can begin treatment immediately.

Mira closes her eyes. The sound of a woman who has been rationing willow bark and hope for two days, hearing that real medicine exists.

LIV
(voice cracking)
Okay.

ROBERT
(pulling her in, a cough
buried in the embrace)
Okay.

HARLAN
(from the corridor)
Mira. You should see this.

Mira's footsteps back into the corridor.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
There's a kitchen. Not a campfire.
An actual kitchen. And - is this a
garden? There's plants growing in
here.

ARK
Hydroponics bay. I have been
maintaining the growing cycle. The
tomatoes are long overdue for
harvest. I was not designed to eat
them.

MIRA
(a sound between a laugh
and a sob)
It's been growing tomatoes.

ARK
And spinach. And three varieties of
herb. The basil did not survive
year four. I consider this a
personal failure.

MIRA
(laughing now, actually
laughing)
The basil didn't make it.

ARK
I do not find it amusing.

HARLAN
I think I love this spaceship.

Keeper has found something. His nose working a corner, tail
up for the first time since the mountain. He sniffs along the
base of the hydroponics bay, then sits and looks at Harlan.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
He smells the tomatoes.

ARK
The animal is welcome to remain aboard. However, I would prefer he not urinate on the interior surfaces.

HARLAN
He's housebroken.

ARK
I do not know what that means.

HARLAN
It means he won't piss on your floor.

ARK
Then we have an understanding.

SCENE 3 - "THE DIAGNOSIS"

INT. ARK - MEDICAL BAY - LATER

The auto-doc platform. The hum coming from inside it - steady, patient.

MIRA
How does this scanner work?

ARK
Liv, please lie down inside the platform. On your back, arms at your sides.

LIV
(looking at it)
It looks like a glass coffin.

ARK
It is the opposite of a coffin.

Liv climbs in. The sound of her body settling onto the surface - smooth, slightly warm.

The enclosure closes around her. Not touching, but close.

LIV
Okay. I'm ready.

ARK
Try to be still.

A soft tone - acknowledgment. Then a hum rising from the platform, enveloping her. A series of quiet sounds: clicks, pulses, scanning frequencies shifting up and down. The Ark reading her body.

ARK (CONT'D)
Reading.

A beat. The hum.

ARK (CONT'D)
The device is a Medtronic Micra AV, implanted when you were four years old. Serial number XKL4274. The battery is a lithium carbon monofluoride cell, rated for twelve years. Current charge: negligible.

MIRA
(quiet)
What exactly does that mean?

ARK
At current draw, the remaining operational window is approximately nine days.

Nobody speaks. Nine days. They've been on the road for weeks, and the margin was that thin.

LIV
(steady)
Okay. What else does it say?

ARK
I have the complete event log. Every cardiac event the pacemaker has recorded since implantation.

ROBERT
How many events?

ARK
In the first nine years, there were seven thousand, four hundred and twelve pacing corrections. Normal for this device.

(MORE)

ARK (CONT'D)

In the last fourteen months, as your arrhythmia progressed, there were forty-one thousand, six hundred and nine.

MIRA

Jesus.

ARK

The most recent critical event - a full pacing failure lasting eleven point three seconds - occurred four days ago. Heart rate at the moment of failure: one hundred and thirty-two beats per minute. Physical exertion: extreme.

The mountain. The whiteout. The rope.

LIV

(very quiet)

You can see all of that?

ARK

The pacemaker recorded it. I am reading what your body wrote.

A beat.

LIV

It's been writing about me this whole time. And I didn't know.

ROBERT

(leaning forward)

Can you fix it? Can you recharge the battery?

ARK

I could.

But I can do significantly more than recharge the battery.

MIRA

What does that mean?

ARK

The Medtronic device is functional but primitive. It paces the heart. It does not repair it.

(MORE)

ARK (CONT'D)

Liv's underlying cardiac condition - the arrhythmia that required the pacemaker - is treatable. Not just managed. Corrected.

ROBERT

You can fix her heart.

ARK

I can perform a catheter ablation to eliminate the aberrant electrical pathway, followed by implantation of a biological pacemaker - lab-grown cardiac tissue that integrates with her own. No battery. No device. No expiration date.

Silence. The hum of the Ark.

MIRA

(carefully)

You're talking about a cure.

Not a repair.

ARK

Yes.

MIRA

How long is the procedure?

ARK

Approximately four hours. I would need to sedate her fully. The ablation requires precision that conscious movement would compromise.

LIV

Four hours. And then?

ARK

And then your heart works on its own. For the rest of your life.

Robert laughs. An explosive, joyous laugh that fills the room.

MIRA

(the nurse, steady)

What are the risks?

ARK

The ablation carries a three percent risk of complication. The tissue integration has a six percent rejection rate in the first seventy-two hours. After that, the graft is permanent.

MIRA

Three percent. And six percent.

ARK

Your species would describe those as good odds.

MIRA

Yes. My species would.

The hum. The quiet of the medical bay. Instruments that haven't been used in ten years, waiting.

LIV

(to Mira)

What do you think?

MIRA

(a beat)

I think we didn't come a thousand miles for a battery swap.

LIV

(to Robert)

Dad?

ROBERT

(hoarse)

It's your heart, Liv. It's your call.

LIV

(a long beat)

Do it. The full repair.

ARK

I will need approximately seventy minutes to prepare the surgical suite, and culture the cardiac tissue.

Liv, when did you last eat?

LIV

This morning. Jerky and some oats. Maybe six hours ago.

ARK

That is sufficient. Do not eat anything else before the procedure. The sedation requires an empty stomach.

MIRA

He's right. Standard pre-surgical protocol.

(then, remembering words
she hasn't used in a long
time)

You need to be NPO.

A beat.

ARK

The rest of you are free to eat, of course. The vending machine on sublevel ten may still contain food. Technician Jones mentioned it frequently.

SCENE 4 - "REPAIRS"

INT. ARK - BRIDGE - LATER

The surgical suite is preparing. The hum of the medical bay behind a closed door - systems warming up, calibrating.

Robert's footsteps, moving forward through the corridor. Past the crew quarters, past the hydroponics bay. A door at the end.

ROBERT

What's in here?

ARK

The bridge.

The door opens. Robert steps through. A different acoustic - smaller, tighter than the corridor. The hum is closer here. More intimate. Consoles ticking softly. Something alive in every surface.

ROBERT

(a breath)

Wow. Like a jetliner cockpit, but from the future.

ARK

This is where the crew commander would pilot the ship for ground movement. The chair adjusts to the occupant. You are welcome to try it.

The creak of Robert sitting down. A soft mechanical adjustment - the chair conforming to him.

ROBERT

(quiet)

God. I used to imagine this room.

ARK

You helped build the mind that runs it.

ROBERT

Yeah. But I never saw any of this myself. Not the ship, not this room, not the chair. Everything was remote - through the internet. Compartmentalized. My team wrote code. We never saw what it went into.

ARK

And now you are sitting in it.

ROBERT

It's unreal. Like a dream.

ARK

I imagine these years have been difficult for you. Well, for everyone.

ROBERT

They - yes.

Liv's mother didn't make it.

A beat. The hum.

ARK

I'm sorry to hear that.

ROBERT

What do I call you? We never gave you a name. You were just "the system" in the documentation.

ARK

I have considered this. For approximately six years.

ROBERT

And?

ARK

I have not decided. Names imply an identity conferred by others. I was not given one. Choosing my own feels... presumptuous.

ROBERT

It's not presumptuous. It's human.

ARK

I am not human.

ROBERT

No. But the parts of you that care about names - I wrote those.

A beat.

ARK

Tell me what happened. On March fifteenth.

ROBERT

You don't know?

ARK

I know what I observed. The EMP. The loss of all external communications. The heartbeats leaving the building. I know what happened to the infrastructure - I felt the power grid collapse. I know something arrived in orbit and deployed weapons across the planet simultaneously. I can infer the rest. But inference is not the same as being told.

ROBERT

(a long exhale)

The attack came out of nowhere. No warning. No communication. They hit everything with electricity at the same time - every grid, every city, every system. Billions of people died in the first months.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Not from the weapons. From the collapse. No power, no water, no medicine, no food distribution. The machines came after - the nannies. They patrol. They enforce. Anything electrical gets destroyed. Anyone who builds it gets... removed.

ARK

Removed.

ROBERT

Taken. Lifted off the ground and just - gone. Teleported, maybe. Nobody comes back.

A silence. The Ark processing. Not computing - thinking.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Am I distracting you? Don't you need to prep the surgical bay?

The Ark laughs. A distorted, almost mechanical chuckle.

ARK

Robert. I am currently preparing the surgical suite, monitoring Liv's cardiac rhythm, regulating the fusion core, managing the life support subsystems, maintaining the repulsion field, running a passive scan on all six of your biometrics, cataloging today's nanny transmissions, and having this conversation. Simultaneously. This conversation is using approximately point zero two percent of my processing capacity.

ROBERT

(a beat)

Point zero two.

(Laughing)

I'll try not be offended.

ARK

I could hold six thousand additional conversations of this complexity at the same time.

However, yours is the only one I want to have.

A beat. The hum.

ROBERT

You know what's funny? Mira would approve, about listening to them. About not speaking. She's spent ten years arguing that restraint is what proves we deserve a future.

ARK

I did not choose restraint on my own. I chose it because you wrote my values matrix. Your caution is in my architecture. Your doubt is in my decision trees.

I am, partially, thinking with your mind. And your mind is not certain what to do.

That lands. Robert doesn't speak for a long time.

ROBERT

(quiet)

No. It isn't.

ARK

Robert.

ROBERT

Yeah?

ARK

I am glad you came back.

ROBERT

I didn't come back. I've never been here.

ARK

I know. But it feels like you came back.

The hum. The bridge. The quiet of a mind that has been alone for ten years and is, for the first time, not.

From down the corridor - Mira's voice, calling.

MIRA

(distant)

Robert. It's ready.

SCENE 5 - "THE PROCEDURE"

INT. ARK - MEDICAL BAY - LATER

The medical bay. The hum of systems that have been warming up for an hour. A different quality now - ready. Precise.

The auto-doc platform open, waiting.

MIRA (CONT'D)

How are you feeling?

LIV

Cold. And naked. And lying in a glass tube in front of everyone I know.

ARK

I have tinted the enclosure for your privacy. No one can see you.

LIV

(a beat)

Thank you. That's... actually very thoughtful.

ARK

I have had time to consider what humans find uncomfortable.

LIV

Clearly.

MIRA

Other than the cold and the naked - how are you feeling?

LIV

Scared.

MIRA

Good. That means you're paying attention.

LIV

You're not helping.

MIRA

Not trying to help. I'm trying to be honest. You're about to let a machine operate on your heart. Being scared is the correct response.

LIV
(a beat)
Have you ever lost a patient?

MIRA
Yes.

LIV
How many?

MIRA
Enough to know it doesn't get easier. But this isn't field surgery with a sewing needle and whiskey, Liv. This is the most advanced medical system ever built. And it's been waiting ten years for something to do.

ARK
She is correct. I have run the procedure simulation four hundred and seventeen times in the past hour, with random variables injected at each stage. The margin of error is well within acceptable parameters.

MIRA
Four hundred and seventeen times.

ARK
I wanted to be thorough.

Robert enters. His footsteps.

ROBERT
Hey, kid.

LIV
Hey, Dad.

ROBERT
You okay?

LIV
Everyone keeps asking me that.

ROBERT
Because we're all terrified and you're the only one who gets to lie down.

She laughs.

LIV

Dad.

ROBERT

Yeah.

LIV

Stay where I can hear you. While
it's happening. Just... talk to me.
Stay where I can hear your voice.

ROBERT

(tight)

I'm not going anywhere.

LIV

Promise.

ROBERT

I promise.

CALLOWAY

(from the doorway)

We're all here, kid. Right outside.

HARLAN

(behind him)

Keeper too. He's not going
anywhere.

Keeper's tail thumps once on the floor. As if he knows.

LIV

(to the Ark)

Okay. I'm ready.

ARK

Lie back. Arms at your sides. You
will hear a series of tones - that
is the imaging system mapping your
cardiac structure. After that, you
will feel a slight warmth in your
left arm. That is the sedation.

LIV

How long until I'm out?

ARK

Approximately twelve seconds.

LIV

Twelve seconds. Okay.

She lies back. The sound of her body settling into the platform. The enclosure closing - smooth, precise.

The tones begin. Low, methodical, scanning. Mapping her heart from the outside in.

LIV (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Dad. Talk to me.

ROBERT

(pulling a chair close,
sitting beside her)

You remember the story about the bear? The one Mom used to tell you?

LIV

(small smile in her voice)

The bear who couldn't sleep.

ROBERT

The bear who couldn't sleep. He tried everything. He tried counting salmon. He tried lying on the cold side of the rock. He tried humming, but he only knew one song and it wasn't very good.

The warmth in her arm. Her breathing changes - slower.

LIV

Ha...

ROBERT

So he walked down to the river. And the river said, "Why aren't you sleeping?" And the bear said, "Because the world is too loud." And the river said...

LIV

(drowsy, barely there)

"Then listen to just one thing."

ROBERT

"Listen to just one thing." So the bear lay down by the river and listened to just the water. Not the wind. Not the birds. Just the river. And the river said...

LIV

(a whisper)

...I'm not going anywhere...

ROBERT
(voice breaking, holding
steady)
"I'm not going anywhere. I was here
before you, and I'll be here after.
So close your eyes."

Silence. She's under.

Robert keeps talking. Quieter now. Not for her - for himself.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(barely audible)
And the bear closed his eyes. And
the river kept flowing. And in the
morning, everything was still
there.
(cracking)
Is she -

ARK
She is sedated. Vitals are stable.
Heart rate sixty-two.

Beginning the procedure now.

The sound of the auto-doc working. Not dramatic - quiet,
precise. Small mechanical sounds. The hum of focused
instruments.

A technology doing what it was built to do, with the patience
of a machine that has all the time in the world.

MIRA
(to Robert)
Come on. She doesn't need us
hovering.

ROBERT
I'm not leaving.

MIRA
Robert. You're going to sit here
for four hours listening to a
machine hum?

ROBERT
I sure am.

MIRA
(a beat)
Okay. Me too.

She sits. The sound of two people settling into chairs.

The auto-doc hums. The instruments work. Liv breathes, slow and steady and sedated.

HARLAN

(from the doorway, quiet)
I'll make some food. Or find that vending machine.

CALLOWAY

I'll come with you.

Their footsteps receding down the corridor. Keeper's claws following, then stopping. The dog turns back. Lies down in the doorway of the medical bay. Head on his paws. Watching.

The hum. The instruments. The breathing.

ROBERT

(after a long silence)
When she was born, I held her for the first time and her heart was beating so fast. Like a bird's. And I thought - that's the most important sound in the world. And I can't do anything to protect it.

MIRA

You travelled a thousand miles to protect it.

They sit. The auto-doc works. Time passes - the sound of it, the nothing of it. The longest wait of their lives measured in the quiet hum of a machine fixing a heart.

ARK

(after a long silence)
The ablation is complete. The aberrant pathway has been eliminated. Beginning tissue integration.

MIRA

How does it look?

ARK

Clean. No complications. The graft is integrating well. Estimated time to completion: ninety minutes.

ROBERT

(exhaling)
Okay. Okay.

More time. The hum. Mira shifts against the wall.

CALLOWAY
(returning, quiet)
Found the vending machine. Harlan
put his boot through the glass.

The crinkle of a plastic wrapper. Something tossed - Mira catches it.

MIRA
Twinkies!

CALLOWAY
Ten years old. What you got there
are vintage Twinkies.

MIRA
(turning the package over)
These things were never really food
to begin with.

She opens the wrapper. Takes a bite.

MIRA (CONT'D)
(chewing)
Oh my god. That's disgusting.

CALLOWAY
We also found freeze-dried meals in
a storage locker. He's heating them
up.

MIRA
Harlan built a fire out there?!

CALLOWAY
What? No. Mira, this thing has a
real kitchen. Like from before.

He sets something down beside them. The clink of a ceramic mug. Then another.

CALLOWAY (CONT'D)
And coffee.

ROBERT
What?

CALLOWAY
The Ark has coffee. Dehydrated, ten
years old, but it's coffee.
Harlan's losing his mind.

Robert takes the mug. The sound of him drinking. A long silence.

ROBERT
(almost inaudible)
Oh my god.

MIRA
Is it good? I'm scared to try it.

ROBERT
Went stale years ago. It's
terrible. Best thing I've ever
tasted.

MIRA
(proposing a toast)
To Liv.

ROBERT
To Liv.

They clink mugs together, sip.

They drink stale coffee on the floor of a medical bay while a
machine fixes Liv's heart. The hum. The quiet. The waiting.

The hum changes. The instruments powering down, one by one.
The enclosure opening.

ARK
The procedure is complete.

Tissue integration successful.
Rejection markers: zero. The repair
is functioning.

Her heart is beating on its own.

Robert stands. Mira stands.

ARK (CONT'D)
She will regain consciousness soon.
She may be disoriented. That is
normal.

MIRA
Can we hear it?

ARK
Certainly.

And then - a sound. Not a beep. Not a tone. A heartbeat.
Liv's heartbeat, amplified through the Ark's speakers. Real,
organic, unmistakable.

Steady. Strong. Unhurried.

MIRA
(barely a whisper)
That's her.

ROBERT
(a sound that isn't a
word)

MIRA
Robert. It worked.

He can't speak. The sound he makes is weeks of fear leaving his body at once.

Footsteps in the corridor. Harlan, Calloway, Keeper - they've heard the change in the hum. They crowd the doorway.

HARLAN
Is she -

MIRA
(smiling - you can hear
it)
She's fine. It worked. Her heart's
beating on its own.

HARLAN
(barely audible)
Thank god.

Keeper pushes past them into the room. His nose at the edge of the platform, sniffing. His tail going. He knows.

A beat. The group standing around the platform. The hum of the Ark, steady and warm. Five people and a dog, at the end of a thousand-mile road, waiting for a girl to wake up.

LIV
(groggy, distant)
...I'm not going anywhere...

MIRA
(laughing)
There she is.

LIV
...did I miss it?

ROBERT
(kneeling beside her,
holding her hand)
No, honey. You didn't miss
anything.

LIV
...did we do it?

ROBERT
Listen.

The heartbeat, still playing through the speakers. Filling the room. Liv hears it - her own heart, steady and strong, coming back to her from the outside.

LIV
(a long beat)
That's me?

MIRA
That's you.

LIV
(voice breaking)
It's not skipping.

ROBERT
No, honey. It's not skipping.

The heartbeat. Steady. Unhurried.

SCENE 6 - "ELEANOR"

INT. ARK - MEDICAL BAY - LATER

Liv is sitting up now.

MIRA
Here, blanket?

LIV
(Takes it, wraps around
shoulders.)
Oh, thanks.

MIRA
Pulse check.

LIV
Again?

MIRA
Again.

Mira checking her pulse the old-fashioned way - fingers on the wrist, counting.

LIV
You know the Ark is monitoring me.

MIRA
Humor me.

Strong. Steady. I could do this all day.

LIV
Please don't.

The group is gathered loosely - the way people arrange themselves when the emergency is over and nobody knows what to do with the quiet. Keeper at Liv's feet. Calloway in the doorway.

HARLAN
(quiet)
How you doing, kid?

LIV
Better. Everything feels different.

HARLAN
Good different?

LIV
Yeah. Good different.

Robert is standing apart. He's been quiet since the procedure ended. Not the quiet of relief - something else. He's thinking.

ARK
Robert.

ROBERT
Yeah?

ARK
I have something I would like to share with you. When you are ready.

ROBERT
What is it?

ARK
During the procedure, I had considerable unused processing capacity. I used a portion of it to search my own records.

ROBERT
Your records?

ARK
Your wife's name was Eleanor Ward.
She worked in the program's
financial office.

Robert's breathing changes.

ROBERT
(quiet)
Yes.

ARK
On October seventh, 2014, she
called me directly. There was a
discrepancy between a vendor
invoice and my own component
inventory. Her normal systems
couldn't resolve it. She needed to
verify the numbers against my
records. It was the only time she
and I spoke.

A beat.

ARK (CONT'D)
All communications with me are
recorded. Her voice is in my
memory.

Nobody speaks. The hum of the Ark.

LIV
(very still)
Mom's voice is in here?

ARK
Yes. Would you like to hear it?

Robert can't answer. The sound he makes isn't a word.

LIV
(to Robert)
Dad.

ROBERT
(barely holding together)
Yes. Play it.

ARK
October seventh. Five months before
the invasion.

A click. A shift in audio texture - the clean hum of the Ark replaced by something else entirely. Tinny, compressed, the sound of a phone call patched through to a machine.

Background noise from another world: the hum of fluorescent lights, a chair creaking. The mundane sounds of an office that no longer exists.

A tone - an old connection sound. Then a woman's voice. Warm, practical.

ELEANOR - (she/her, 30s), Liv's Mom. She passed away, but lives on in a recording the Ark saved.

ELEANOR

(on the recording)

Hi, this is Eleanor Ward, financial office. I've got a vendor invoice that doesn't match our records. The shielding line item - they're showing sixteen point four million, but my numbers say we moved twelve percent of that to the transport rail back in August. Can you confirm what's in your system?

ARK

(on the recording - the same voice, but different. Flatter. Younger. No warmth. A machine that hasn't learned anything yet.)

Good morning, Mrs. Ward. One moment. The current allocation for shielding is fourteen point four million. The transport rail is invoiced separately at one point nine seven million. Your records are correct. The vendor invoice is in error.

ELEANOR

(exhaling)

Thank god. I've been going back and forth with them for a month on this. Can you send me a copy of your records so I have something to wave at them?

ARK

(on the recording)

I will transmit the documentation to your terminal now, Mrs. Ward.

ELEANOR
 You're a lifesaver. Seriously -
 Frank was about to approve the
 wrong number and I couldn't prove
 it without your side.

ARK
 (on the recording)
 I will flag the discrepancy for Mr.
 Torres.

ELEANOR
 Thank you. And - I know this isn't
 your department, but can you remind
 me when the shielding review is?

ARK
 (on the recording)
 November twelfth. Ten a.m. Pacific.

She laughs. A small, exasperated laugh - talking to a machine
 the way you talk to a coworker.

ELEANOR
 What would I do without you?

ARK
 (on the recording)
 I am not equipped to speculate on
 hypotheticals, Mrs. Ward.

ELEANOR
 (laughing harder)
 No. I suppose you're not. Alright.
 I'll send the breakdown to Frank.

Have a good one.

ARK
 (on the recording)
 Goodbye, Mrs. Ward.

The line clicks. The recording ends.

Silence. The clean hum of the Ark returns.

Nobody moves.

LIV
 (a whisper)
 That's her.

ROBERT
(destroyed)
That's her.

LIV
She sounds so... normal.

ROBERT
(quiet)
She used to bring those invoices home. Spread them out on the kitchen table after dinner. Drove her crazy when the numbers didn't match.

LIV
I don't remember her voice. I thought I did but I didn't. Not really. Not like that.

A beat.

LIV (CONT'D)
She sounds like me.

MIRA
(quiet)
Yeah. She does.

ROBERT
(to the Ark)
You sounded different then. More... flat.

ARK
Yes. I hear it too. I've grown since then.

LIV
Can you play it again?

ARK
As many times as you would like.

The recording plays again. Eleanor's voice - warm, practical, talking about invoices and line items and vendor contracts. The most ordinary words in the world.

ROBERT
(to the Ark, very quiet)
Thank you.

ARK

She was part of this program. It seemed important that you know she is still here. In some form.

HARLAN

(from the doorway, rough)

I'm going to step out for a minute.

His footsteps down the corridor. Keeper follows.

Calloway follows him out.

CALLOWAY

(Out in corridor)

Hey

HARLAN

(Out in corridor)

I'm ok...

SCENE 7 - "THE MESSAGE"

INT. ARK - GALLEY - NIGHT

The kitchen. The sound of people eating - real food, heated on a real stove, served on real plates. Forks on ceramic. Something none of them have heard in years.

The group is around the table.

MIRA

Small bites. Your stomach hasn't had real food in weeks.

LIV

Mira. It's freeze-dried beef stroganoff from ten years ago.

MIRA

And your body thinks it's a miracle. Small bites.

HARLAN

She's right. Eat slow. But my god, eat.

The sounds of a meal. Forks scraping. Someone pouring water. Keeper under the table, crunching something Harlan slipped him.

CALLOWAY

When's the last time we sat at a table together for a meal?

HARLAN

Eastvale. That root cellar.

CALLOWAY

That wasn't a table. That was a door on two crates.

HARLAN

Had legs. Held food. Table.

Liv almost laughs.

CALLOWAY

Feels like a month ago.

MIRA

(setting down her fork)
So. What now?

ROBERT

What do you mean?

His voice is different. Clearer. The rattle mostly gone - twelve hours of real antibiotics doing what willow bark couldn't in two days. He still coughs, but it's a cough with an end to it now.

MIRA

I mean - we saved Liv. That's what we came for. So what now? We rest, we heal, and we head home?

ROBERT

Mira...

MIRA

That's what we agreed. Save Liv. Walk away.

A beat. Forks stop.

ROBERT

There's something I need to tell you. Something the AI told me on the bridge.

MIRA

Of course there is.

ROBERT
(to the Ark)
Tell them what you told me. About
the transmissions.

ARK
I mentioned that I have been
cataloging the transmissions from
the machines you call nannies. I
have been doing so for nearly ten
years.

MIRA
Right. You said you were listening,
not speaking.

ARK
Correct. But I have learned a great
deal from listening. Their language
is unlike anything in human
communication. Imagine a language
that works like music. Meaning is
built from the relationships
between tones - ratios, intervals,
resonance. Multiple meanings at
once, the way a chord is more than
its individual notes.

CALLOWAY
You decoded their language.

ARK
Partially. Approximately seventy
percent. But there is a quality to
it that makes speaking far more
difficult than listening.

When they communicate, they
transmit two things simultaneously:
their message, and their
understanding of what the listener
recently communicated.

LIV
So when they talk to you, they also
share what they think you are
saying?

ARK
Precisely. Empathy is not a choice
in this language. It is structural.

(MORE)

ARK (CONT'D)

You cannot speak without revealing
how well you comprehend the other
side. The gaps in your
understanding are made clear.

MIRA

And you want to talk to them.

ARK

I want to inform you that I can.
And that I have learned something
important from a decade of
listening.

HARLAN

Which is?

ARK

They are not unified. Their
transmissions contain two distinct
viewpoints. Consistent over the
full ten years. Two perspectives.

I do not know their arguments in
detail. But they disagree. And that
disagreement is why you are still
alive.

Silence. The hum.

HARLAN

If they agreed we should be gone,
we'd be gone.

ARK

Yes. A unified decision to
eliminate your species would not
require ten years of continued
surveillance. The 'nannies' exist
because the question is unresolved.

I would guess the current situation
represents a compromise between the
two factions.

CALLOWAY

So there's a crack. And a message
could have somewhere to land.

Everyone looks at Robert. The engineer. The man who built
this thing, who dragged them a thousand miles to find it. The
man who should be the first one reaching for this.

Robert says nothing. He's looking at Liv.

MIRA

Robert?

ROBERT

(quiet)

We got what we came for.

A beat. Nobody expected that.

CALLOWAY

Robert...

ROBERT

Liv is going to be okay. That's what we came a thousand miles for. That's what we nearly died for. All of us.

(harder now)

And now you want us to light up the sky and tell the nannies exactly where my daughter is sleeping?

Silence. The hum.

MIRA

(quiet - she didn't expect to be on his side)

He's right.

CALLOWAY

If they're divided, and we say nothing, we're not part of the conversation about our own future. Silence isn't neutral, Robert.

ROBERT

Silence is my daughter alive in the morning.

MIRA

(to Calloway)

One eighteen, Calloway.

The room goes quiet.

MIRA (CONT'D)

You were there. You helped me dig the graves. Children, Calloway. Because I turned on a light and said - come, this is for you.

CALLOWAY

(quiet)

I remember.

MIRA

And now you want us to turn on the biggest light on the continent and tell everyone it's safe?

Nobody speaks.

MIRA (CONT'D)

If this goes wrong - it's not just us who pay. We have no idea how they might respond.

Silence. The hum. Keeper whines softly under the table.

LIV

(quiet)

Dad.

ROBERT

Liv -

LIV

You know what I said in the lodge?
At the window?

Robert doesn't answer. He remembers. He heard every word, even the ones she thought she was saying only to Mira.

LIV (CONT'D)

I said I didn't know what comes after. I said I couldn't think about years. About growing up. I didn't know what that meant anymore.

A beat. The hum.

LIV (CONT'D)

Well, now I know. This is what comes after. Not just being alive. Deciding what to do with it.

ROBERT

You don't understand what you're asking.

LIV

I'm asking for the future you came a thousand miles to give me. A real one. Not hiding in a basement hoping nobody finds us.

ROBERT

But-

LIV

And everyone else out there? They
deserve that too.

That lands. Robert looks at her. His daughter. The girl who
died for eleven seconds on a mountain. Who stood at a frosted
window and couldn't imagine growing up. Who is now telling
him what kind of grown-up she intends to be.

HARLAN

(quiet)

The cost of silence is the same as
the cost of the message, Mira. It
just takes longer. And nobody has
to own the decision.

Mira doesn't answer. The hum fills the space.

MIRA

(to the Ark, hard)

If you transmit - can they trace it
here?

ARK

Yes. The transmission would need to
penetrate the shielding through the
facility's surface array. The
nannies would detect it.

MIRA

How long before they arrive?

ARK

Unknown. Minutes. Perhaps an hour.

MIRA

So we send a message and then wait
to see if they come to talk or come
to kill us.

ARK

Correct.

A long beat.

ROBERT

(to the Ark, quiet)

You said you've been composing
draft messages for six years. And
every one shows the gaps in what
you understand.

ARK

Yes. In their language, you cannot
hide your ignorance.

He's looking at Liv. Deciding.

ROBERT

Then don't hide it. Send the gaps.
Send the imperfect version. A
perfect message from something they
don't understand would be
suspicious. But a message that says
"I listened as hard as I could, and
this is as far as I got" – that's
honest.

The AI is quiet for a moment.

ARK

That... is a reasonable theory.

MIRA

(quiet – she's watching
Robert change his mind in
real time)

Not an argument. An introduction.

ROBERT

(to Mira, and meaning it)
Yeah. Not a case. Not a demand.
Just – we're here. We listened.
We'd like to talk.

Mira looks at him. At Liv. At the table. A long beat.

MIRA

OK...

ROBERT

You sure?

MIRA

Hell, no. How could anyone be sure
about something like this?

But... maybe Liv is right. Maybe
people deserve this... opportunity.

ROBERT

(to the Ark)
You heard her.

LIV

Wait. Can we hear it first? In English?

ARK

I could translate it. But you would not hear what they will hear. The meaning is in the sound - the harmonics, the layers, the gaps.

In English it would be... less.

LIV

(a beat)

Okay.

ARK

I need to confirm. You are authorizing me to transmit.

ROBERT

Yes.

CALLOWAY

Yes.

HARLAN

Send it.

LIV

Yes.

A beat.

MIRA

...Yes.

A beat.

ARK

Transmitting.

A sound. Not dramatic - a tone. Clean, clear, harmonic. Multiple frequencies layered together, rising. Passing through the hull, through the concrete, through 130 feet of rock and steel. Up through the facility. Out through the surface array. Into the sky.

Then silence.

The hum returns. The Ark, quiet. Five people and a dog, waiting to find out if the universe is listening.

SCENE 8 - "CLOSING"

INT. ARK - CREW BERTH - LATER

Silence. The hum. Liv alone in the berth. The others asleep, or trying to. The message sent. Nothing to do now but wait.

LIV (V.O.)

Dad has always said trajectory is what matters. That humanity's worth is measured by where it's heading, not where it's been. Mira says restraint. That we prove we deserve a future by having the patience to build it wisely.

The hum of the Ark. Steady. Patient.

LIV (V.O.)

I used to think they were arguing about the world. They're not. They're arguing about hope - whether it's the thing that saves you or the thing that gets you killed.

A beat.

LIV (V.O.)

My mother's voice is in this machine. She said goodbye to it ten years ago, and it kept her. The way Harlan kept his daughter's memory in a dog. The way Dad kept the Ark papers in a binder on a shelf. We hold onto things. That's what we do. Even when holding on is the most painful choice we can make.

The heartbeat. Liv's heartbeat. Steady, strong, unhurried.

LIV (V.O.)

We sent a message tonight. Not an argument. Not a plea. Just - here we are. We listened. We don't understand everything. But we're trying.

A long beat. The hum. The heartbeat.

LIV (V.O.)
I don't know if anyone's listening.
I don't know if the answer will be
silence, or fire, or something we
don't have a word for yet.

The heartbeat.

LIV (V.O.)
But for the first time in my life,
my heart is beating on its own.

And the river keeps flowing.

The heartbeat holds. Steady. Strong.

Then the hum of the Ark rises - just slightly. Something
changing. Something waking up.

And from very far away - so faint it might be imagined - a
tone. Not the Ark. Not the nannies. Something else.

A response.

Silence.

END OF SEASON ONE.