Aria Lee

Prologue - Audio Text (received within the last hour)
Age: 8

> AUDIO TEXT FROM ROWAN LEE: My dearest Aria, it's Rowan. You have always been the music in my life. It is not safe where I am, so stay with Morgan. Stay close to Morgan. Morgan will protect you. I will find you again, wherever you are, so that I can hold you, dance with you, look at the stars with you, and watch you grow from a brave child into the amazing person that you will be. I lo***<transmission ends>***

End of Prologue

Scene 1 - Aria Loses Both Parents
Age: 8

Your parents are **Morgan** and Rowan, and your family is pretty rich. They own the Cosmic Lee company, which is a big company. They also own a starship, called the ***Alexandria***, which has an artificial intelligence Rowan programmed a few years ago. It helped end some sort of malware robbery that made the news last year; but both Morgan and Rowan (and the rest of your family) are in the news a lot, usually in good ways.

You are a good student, and have learned a lot of advanced math and science, even though you just turned eight. You needed to learn as much as you could, so you could go with your parents on the *Alexandria*, to find other worlds. ***Alexandria*** is a small ship, so it would just be your family, with a few other friends of your parents, to help make a new Earth. You probably need a new Earth because stupid people are breaking this one.

Alexandria couldn't hold all the people on Earth, of course, but with the help of experts, it had the genetic codes and machines to recreate all different kinds of people, and different kinds of animals. **Morgan** even paid for extra seeds to be shipped up to ***Alexandria*** at the last minute!

When they first started, before you were born, your parents weren't sure if this Earth would stop working right. Now they know, suddenly, that it is broken.

Only **Morgan** was there when it happened, and then you were running. And then flying into orbit, with so many people angry at you, for no reason you could see.

You are onboard ***Alexandria,*** and you're crying even though **Morgan** already told you not to cry and that it would all be all right. You got Rowan's message. **Morgan** got shot, keeping you from getting shot before you got on the ship. And you heard **Morgan** say, "Omega Protocol," which were evasive maneuvers, and **Morgan** got thrown around, which must have made the bullets and bleeding worse. You were *supposed* to build a new Earth with them… and now it might just be you doing it all by yourself.

End of Scene 1

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Scene 2 - Matrix Multiplication
Age: 18

Your parents had a dream: to save Earth. Earth couldn't be saved. But a lot of the life is being carried right here onboard *Alexandria*, to be planted elsewhere; hopefully someplace nice. (You've all had three attempts already, and hope the upcoming fourth will look better.)

You were a child when you were taken to the ship. But you're not a child anymore - you're an adult. You remember your mother promising to take you out for drinks when you turned 18. Happy birthday to you. Your present is that you will be stuck on a tiny ship for at least a few more years.

You used to take out your frustrations and your anger through hour after hour in the virtual reality system, but **Santos** used to annoy you enough about it that you'd get out. Somewhere along the way, the pain of losing your parents eased into a minor heartache, and you decided that if you were stuck on this ship, you were not going to let it frustrate you into submission.

So, you studied hard, especially navigation and piloting, spending hours and hours in the virtual reality system practicing how to land the shuttle. You fixed things. You patched things. You tended the hydroponics. What else was there to do aboard ***Alexandria***? Well, if it was there to do, then you did it until you were bored of doing it. And you think you can fill Morgan's shoes capably well. How you miss them…

Justice, too, has been like a parent to you over these past ten years. And **Justice** is dying, and relatively okay with it. It's natural, it happens. How stupidly philosophical. But no, you shouldn't feel bitter or angry; it's not you that's dying.

But like when Morgan died, it opens up a space on the ship that has to be filled. **Rowan** was created from DNA matrices, or factories, or machines, whatever. You were too young to think it was particularly strange back then, and, after living on the ship for a decade, you recognize the efficiency and necessity of not wasting things. **Rowan**'s also a good kid.

But **Justice**... **Justice** has this mental picture of you and **Santos** (**Santos**? Really?) having a child of your own together. Sure, the DNA matrices could be used to knit your halves together, and do a lot of the other hard work. But does it really matter to have a child related to two parents of the ***Alexandria*** crew? (**Justice** says, "yes," of course. And maybe it's mystical stuff, but it's also a dying wish. It's also a LOT to ask of a person. But then again, what else are you doing?)

Dr. Berg and **Sasha**, though, they're an actual couple, aren't they? You heard that **Dr. Berg** actually wants to raise a baby (at their age?), which seems inefficient, too. Would that really make a difference?

Santos? You hadn't thought about a relationship before this; now it's almost all you can think about. Is this a fleeting, momentary thing, or something that will last?

End of Scene 2

Aria Lee

Scene 3 - Stranger Than Fiction
Age: 28

This was your first chance to actually explore a living planet instead of a dead rock, and you were happy to take on the responsibility. You flew down with **Sasha** to check the lay of the land. It seemed like the best fit yet, with air you could breathe and a normal temperature range. It was great to fly over land instead of the endless expanse of space, even flying over the ruins of an alien civilization.

You landed the shuttle in an undamaged area of a larger city, and found a building that looked a lot like a library. You hadn't been in a library in 20 years, but you remember what they were like. How could you pass up the chance to explore this one?

It was strange inside, but beautiful. **Sasha** and you wandered through hallways filled with alien knowledge and art. It wasn't very well lit though, and **Sasha** stepped through a weak spot in the floor, falling down a level into a room that looked medical.

It took a few minutes to find your way safely down to where **Sasha** lay, longer than you wanted. When you got there, you saw a glow around **Sasha**, who was breathing and had a heartbeat, but didn't respond to anything when you tried to awaken them.

You were grateful you had started spending a little more time in the gym and a little less time in the VR equipment as you brought **Sasha** back to the shuttle under your own power. Not that the VR had been all bad. **Santos** spent time with you in the VR world, where you finally convinced them that growing up on the shuttle six years apart didn't make you ineligible for a relationship. It didn't hurt that you brought **Santos** on away missions to find necessary metals to maintain the engine. And even more importantly, the age difference matters much less now that you're in your twenties. You've been a couple for years now.

You brought **Sasha** straight to the doctor when you got back to the ship. The glow had faded by then, but you reported what it had looked like. You hope they can help. You're not sure how.

End of Scene 3

Aria Lee

Scene 4 - Please Universe, Not Again
Age: 38

Santos is sick. **Santos**, your partner of all these years, your friend, your lover, your confidante, is sick. **Santos** has been sick before, of course, all of you have, but something is very wrong this time. The symptoms are getting worse. It's only been three days since it started and you practically have to carry **Santos** to medbay. **Dr. Berg** can't seem to find what's wrong, and ***Alexandria*** hasn't been able to help either.

Not that either of them are trying very hard. **Dr. Berg** has been spending a lot of time in their room, and ***Alexandria*** has been cavorting in VR with **Sasha**. Maybe cavorting is a little harsh, but you want as much effort put into making **Santos** well as possible. Why isn't this more important to the crew? You can't lose **Santos**. They can't lose **Santos**.

Santos is getting noticeably weaker by the day. **Santos** just turned 44. This isn't how this is supposed to go. Your parents died young. You don't want everyone you love to die young. Someone should stay with you, and you should be able to stay with **Santos** until you both grow old together. At least until you could both touch down on a planet again, one you could really call home. **Santos**, with their engines, and their drive, has been the brain of the ship. You can't do this without **Santos**.

You don't want to have to retreat into VR again. **Santos** helped you out of that world when Morgan died. You don't want to go through it again. **Santos** knows what it was like on Earth, had a childhood around the same time on the same planet, which no one else with you can say. What would you do alone?

You were crying uncontrollably after the last examination. **Dr. Berg** had no answers, and you barely got **Santos** back to your cabin. Then **Santos** seemed to gather a moment of strength, asking you to get everyone to the bridge.

End of Scene 4

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Scene 5 - Journey's End
Age: 48

These last ten years were hard. So many more uninhabitable worlds. So many times you turned to ask Santos something, only to realize, painfully, that Santos was gone.

But this world. This one looks really good, and everything is pointing to it being The One. Would Morgan and Rowan have been proud of you? You hope so. You know Santos would be. You're now older than your parents were when they started everything. The readings are excellent; it's undeniable. Unless someone brings up a negative, you're ready to take a shuttle down and land. That will tell you what you need to know, for sure.

If this is The One, then ***Alexandria***, your home for decades, will shuttle down all the supplies, the 3D printers, the seed banks, the DNA samples. Then it will park itself in a geosynchronous orbit, and switch to a low-powered relay satellite mode. ***Alexandria*** would still be there to talk to, but you're going to be busy colonizing a world. You wonder what ***Alexandria*** wants to do - the ship itself can't land. You're not quite sure if **Sasha** would come down with you.

There's that weird message from Earth.

The end. Another beginning, really. Shelter. Scores of babies to creche up over the next ten years. Open spaces. But some regrets; maybe some goodbyes; maybe some last things to fix.

If this is The One, and not some belabored, painful "unacceptable" again... Best wait a little bit to be sure.

End of Scene 5