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## Echoes: A Short Play

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Echoes

A short play by Laura M. Ward

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Two male characters, one gender-neutral character, and one gender-neutral disembodied voice.

## Echoes

## Characters

DR. PHILLIP DAVIDSON

COMMANDER MIKE DEXTER

GROUND CONTROL

TOUR GUIDE

## Scene

*Open on two astronauts aboard the Richmond 16, a spacecraft at some point in the vague but distant future. A small portion of center stage is lit, where there is a table. It should have some science-device-looking objects on it. PHIL DAVIDSON is sitting at the table typing on a computer of some sort, and MIKE DEXTER stands fiddling with the knobs on a science contraption. There is a heavy door with a small window so you can see some space outside. It blocks off stage right almost entirely. There is a (preferably red, preferably flashing) danger indication light somewhere on stage. For now, it is off. A minimal set is acceptable, but anything spacey or science-y you want to put onstage is chill.*

PHIL: *(idly, with a brief glance up from his screen)*: Hey Mike?

*(beat)*

Phil: Mike?

Mike: *(slightly annoyed, without looking up)*: What is it?

Phil: How do you organize a space party?

Mike: *(exaggerated sigh)* How?

Phil: You planet!

Mike: Phil, what have I told you about the space puns?

Phil (*defeated, recites somewhat sadly*) They got old before we even left our solar system.

Mike: Precisely.

(*Beat*)

Phil: (*brightening again*) We're almost there, you know.

MIKE: Yes, I know.

PHIL: Isn't it exciting! Just a few more months.

Mike: Yep.

Phil: Think we can make it?

MIKE: Look, we've been having this conversation every day since liftoff.

PHIL: Well, technically....

MIKE: (*interrupts, snaps*) If you say one more thing about the concept of a day when there's no planet to rotate, so help me I will eject myself from this spacecraft.

PHIL: I mean, I'm not wrong.

*beat.*

*MIKE gets up, starts checking the instruments on the table.*

PHIL: Also, you'd die in a thousand different ways.

MIKE: What?

PHIL: If you ejected yourself from the spacecraft. You would be destroyed by the pressure difference and asphyxiate at the very least.

MIKE: Worth it.

PHIL: (*softly*) Is it really, though?

MIKE: What?

PHIL: If we died on this mission. Would it be worth it?

MIKE: That's not what I meant.

PHIL: I know. But still.

*beat.*

I minored in philosophy, you know, back in college.

MIKE: Of course I know. I know everything about you at this point.

PHIL: No you don't.

MIKE: It's a small spacecraft. We work nights together. It's been years, and you never shut up.

There's nothing left for me to not know.

PHIL: Prove it. What's my favorite book?

MIKE (*rolling his eyes*): Growing up it was *Catcher in the Rye*. After that, it's been Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. (*scoffs*) He "inspired" you to become an astronaut. Because you're a cliché.

PHIL: (*Visibly impressed*) What's my mom's first name?

MIKE: Your mother's name is Margaret. Your father's name was Jack.

*The danger light starts to flash or otherwise indicate that there is danger. Neither notices.*

PHIL: Greatest fear?

MIKE: On earth, the possibility that there is no God. Up here, dying in space.

*beat*

PHIL: (*quietly*) Is it worth it?

MIKE: (*somewhat gently*) Yes. Or we wouldn't have come this far.

PHIL: You're assuming that the workings of the universe are dictated by reason.

MIKE (*rough again*): And you're assuming that I want to have this conversation. (*beat*) Has Jones finished repairing the jargon machine yet?

PHIL: I guess I'll go ask her. (*Stands up, exits stage left.*)

*MIKE continues what he's doing; doesn't look up.*

*PHIL reenters, carrying a large, dramatic science device.*

PHIL: Hey, when's the last time we (*notices flashing red light or whatever danger indicator you chose to use*)... oh no.

MIKE: What?

*PHIL points at the light.*

*MIKE follows his gaze. He doesn't say anything for a moment and then, very softly, mutters: Oh, shit. Looks around helplessly, then stands straight and speaks with new authority.*

MIKE: We appear to have a critical failure in one of our systems. Get Barry on the phone. Now.

PHIL: Yes, sir.

*PHIL puts down his science device and books it to the computer on the table. MIKE dramatically and scientifically fiddles with all the instruments on the table. They do this for a second.*

MIKE: It looks like pressure, hulls, trajectory, and atmosphere are stable. And obviously, the artificial gravity is still working. If anything else was wrong, the crew would have told us. Did you contact Barry?

*PHIL steps back from his computer, turns to face MIKE.*

PHIL: I think I know what's wrong. They're not answering me, Mike. We... It looks like we lost communication. Our signal is down.

MIKE (*starts pacing as best as he can in the small space*): Okay. All right. We can fix that. We have to figure out where the issue is.

PHIL: I'd bet it's the transmitter. The one outside.

MIKE (*paces faster*): How could it possibly be the transmitter? There is nothing wrong with that thing.

PHIL: Remember when we passed through that field of asteroids yesterday?

*beat*

MIKE: Yeah, that would do it.

PHIL: So what do we do?

MIKE: Only one option, isn't there?

PHIL: Oh gosh, please tell me we're not about to have to do a spacewalk.

MIKE: Any other ideas?

PHIL: Mike, we can't do a spacewalk without approval from below, and we'd be completely blind. It's too dangerous.

MIKE: So you want to do the rest of the mission without communicating with earth at all? Is that what you want?

PHIL (*chastised*): No.

MIKE: Exactly. One of us has to go. We're the only ones trained for something like this.

*Very long pause. Neither of them wants to do it.*

PHIL: You know, since you're commander of the mission, technically, it would be very noble and correct of you....

MIKE (*interrupts*): You know, since I'm commander of the mission, I'm too valuable to lose and have the authority to order you to eject yourself right now. And since you're second in command, it would be noble and correct of you as well.

*Another long pause*

PHIL: Flip a coin?

MIKE: No, I don't trust artificial gravity.

PHIL: Rock paper scissors?

MIKE: All right.

*They play rock paper scissors. MIKE throws rock, PHIL throws scissors.*

PHIL *sighs*.

PHIL: All right. I'll do it.

MIKE *nods*.

MIKE: I'll go start preparations and alert the crew, but you should probably get into a suit. We need to get this done as soon as possible. *(beat)* Is that okay?

PHIL: All right.

MIKE *nods or something, fidgets for a second like he's about to try to be comforting, and then thinks better of it and exits stage left*

PHIL *watches Mike leave, sits down with pen and paper, and begins to write.*

PHIL: Okay, last words, last words... Do I even need last words? I'm not eloquent; I'm a scientist. Oh well, I should still try. Okay. Last words. *(aloud while writing)* Mike, I need you to take a message to Stella if I die. I need her to know that I have always loved her, and if things were different... No. *(scratches that line out)* It's too late for that. *(crumples paper, pushes it aside, starts over)* We're having some technical difficulties, and right now all I want is to go home. Maybe, if I don't survive this spacewalk, that's where the stars are calling me. Maybe I'm going home... *(Crumple. Brings out new paper with renewed purpose.)* Ever since we lifted off, I've been asking Mike if any of this is worth it. When I was little I dreamed that I could do something that would make the world better. Instead I got into a rocket ship with an incredibly grouchy man and a



pretty useless crew, and I flew away. And now we probably won't even complete the mission; I'm just wasting my time. Maybe I've always been wasting my time. Maybe we all are. *(Crumples up the paper again, gets a new sheet, pauses)* I, Phillip Davidson, am giving up my life to further the noble goal of space exploration. I'm almost okay with that; my only regret is that I didn't have more twitter followers. *(Crumples this page particularly violently. New sheet. Writes silently for a bit.)*

MIKE: *(eventually, from offstage)* Phil?

PHIL *folds his paper, sighs, and exits stage left. The stage is empty for a second.*

MIKE *enters stage left, holding a recording device in one hand and a folded piece of paper in the other.*

MIKE, *(speaking into a recording device)*: Testing.... Testing. Okay, captain's log, I guess?

Stardate.... Something. I've never been the journaling type, not like Phil with his old-fashioned pen and paper especially. But he's asked me to do this. Something about giving his sacrifice some meaning. I don't have the heart to tell him that everything is meaningless anyway. But since he's probably going to die within the next ten minutes, I'll do what he asks. *(beat)* Anyway. Commander Michael J. Dexter, recording the events of today's incredibly dangerous spacewalk undertaken by Dr. Phillip Shawn Davidson. He will be repairing a transmitter that has been damaged by an asteroid strike, an undertaking made even more dangerous by the instrument's proximity to the ship's engines. There is a distinct possibility that Dr. Davidson could be killed or that he could damage the engines in some way, which would destroy us all. He would like me to relay his last words if he is lost, but if it's another one of his stupid space puns, I will absolutely refuse. Since all our signals are down, I'm going to have to just watch him

through the window. Hopefully I can pull him back if I see anything going wrong. *(beat)*  
 Oh, god help us all. *(MIKE crosses to the window and stares intently through it for a moment.)* Okay, things are okay so far. *pause.* Okay, okay, he's reached our transmitter. We just have to wait while he examines it. There's nothing I can do, really. *(pause)* I mean, I guess I could have gone out there. I should have. Then I'd go out with a shred of dignity, but... No. Never mind that. *(Looks silently out the window)* Phil is still examining the instrument. Nothing appears to have gone wrong so far. *(beat)* Phil's a good man. He's not the one I would have chosen for a mission like this, but... *(sees something)* Oh, god. *(cranes neck to look out the window)* Oh, god. Oh god. Okay. Um. Um. *(fumbles with paper, reads aloud):* Goodbye, Mike. I may not know whether this has all been worth it, but it's certainly been great. I guess you could say it's been.... out of this world. *(Pause)* Damn it, Phil! *(Drops recording device and runs offstage, stage left.)*

*Let the stage be empty for a second.*

*MIKE (quickly trudges back in, dragging a space suit. He speaks while pulling it on.):* If that idiot thinks he can go out on a joke like that he's got another thing coming... I will drag his ass back onto this ship if I have to...

*PHIL (from offstage):* Hey, man, I fixed the transmitter. I can hear you.

MIKE: Good, then you can get ready to be rescued.

PHIL: Don't you dare; we'll both die.

MIKE: Irrelevant. I'm on my way.

GROUND CONTROL *(also from offstage):* Mike, this is ground control at the Barry Space Center. You are not following protocol. This is entirely unacceptable. You will not exit the spacecraft.

MIKE: Shut up, Barry. Let me have this. His line was severed, and he is literally clinging to the side of the ship. Do you want that idiot to die?

*Pause for a second. Ground Control does not respond.*

MIKE: Yeah, that's what I thought.

*MIKE opens the heavy door and exits stage right. There are some pressure-y, vacuum-type sounds from the door.*

GROUND CONTROL : Commander Dexter, report.

PHIL (*offstage*): You know, there are probably worse ways to die than by drifting away into the void.

MIKE (*offstage, mockingly*): You'd die in a thousand different ways.

PHIL (*offstage, also mockingly*): Worth it.

MIKE (*offstage, nearly genuine*): Is it, though?

*Pause*

MIKE (*offstage*): All right. Barry, I've got him. We're going to make our way back into the ship now.

*MIKE and PHIL stumble in through the stage right door. PHIL staggers over to the chair and collapses in it. MIKE closes the door, hits some buttons on the side of the door frame, removes his space suit, and folds it during the following dialogue.*

GROUND CONTROL: Is he all right?

PHIL: Yeah, Barry. I'm good. (*beat*) How much longer until B612?

GROUND CONTROL: Just another few months now. You know that.

MIKE (*mockingly, so it's clear he's imitating Phil from before*): You know, technically, months don't exist for us since we're not on earth.

PHIL (*similarly ironic tone*): So help me, I will throw myself out of this spacecraft. (*beat*) Again.

MIKE *chuckles*.

MIKE: You know, PHIL, I think maybe we're going to make it after all.

*Lights dim. PHIL and MIKE exit.*

*Lights come back up.*

TOUR GUIDE *enters from stage right, addresses an invisible crowd in the audience or offstage.*

TOUR GUIDE(*enthusiastically*): And here we have the remains of the Richmond 16, which carried its crew on one of the most disastrous space missions of all time. This wreckage was discovered on the outer edges of B612's orbit and recovered by The Royal Academy of Universal History just a few years ago. They say that Commander Micah Dexhart's final words were "You know, I think we might make it after all," a statement he made immediately before the spacecraft's engines exploded for unknown reasons. The explosion was so catastrophic that fragments of the Richmond's hull are still being found as far off as in neighboring star systems. Now if you'll follow me to the gift shop....

*Exit TOUR GUIDE stage left*

*End of play.*