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SF PERUSALS

Callisto 5

A play

Alan Ayckbourn

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood

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CALLISTO 5

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 12th December, 1990, with the following cast:

Jem	Simon Cox
The Domestic Auxiliary Modular Automatically Reprogrammable In-House System (Damaris)	Nigel Anthony
The Voice of the Input/Responsive Independent System (Iris)	Tam Hoskyns

And on video:

Cass	Nigel Anthony
Keren	Tam Hoskyns

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop
Lighting by Jackie Staines
Original Music by John Pattison

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CHARACTERS

Jem, a boy of 17

The Domestic Auxiliary Modular Automatically Reprogrammable In-House System (Damaris)

The Voice of the Input/Responsive Independent System (Iris)

Cass, Jem's father

And on video only:

Keren, Jem' s mother
The voice of an unseen **Reporter**
The Thing

The action of the play takes place in Space Station No. 5 on Callisto, the outermost Gallilean satellite of the planet Jupiter

Time: the future

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Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays
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The Norman Conquests
Relatively Speaking
The Revengers' Comedies
Round and Round the Garden
Season's Greetings
A Small Family Business
Suburban Strains
Table Manners
Taking Steps
Ten Times Table
This is Where We Came In
Time and Time Again
Time of My Life
Tons of Money (revised)
Way Upstream
Wolf at the Door
Woman in Mind

ACT I

Space station No. 5 based on Callisto, the outermost of the so-called Gallilean satellites of Jupiter

There are four other such stations in place. This, Callisto 5, is the least glamorous of them. It is the Utilities, Service and Support Dome—a sort of cross between a power station and a repair workshop, it monitors and supervises all the essential heat, light, water, life support, and sanitation systems for the other domes

We are in one area of it. A circular room, ringed entirely by a continuous bank of control panels, computer consoles, and monitor screens. Some of these are still actively glowing, but a number are not. The banks labelled C1 through to C4 are conspicuously dead. The areas that deal with light, power and essential services, though, flicker and glow quite happily. The impression that's given, certainly to the untutored eye, is that half the system has packed in. A vast machine transmitting but no longer receiving

In one wall is a large ground level drawer, closed at present, but which can slide open

In the centre of the room is a further control desk and chair, both mounted on a low revolving rostrum. This whole motorised unit can swivel round so that anyone seated at the desk can control the outer ring of control panels remotely in any direction simply by activating the revolving unit

The walls of the room are blank. The only view of the outside we ever see is the view through the monitor screens when they are activated

There are two entrances to the room, marked by breaks in the outer ring of the units. One leads to the other quarters; recreational, sleeping, and kitchen. The other is the main entrance to the station. It is an air lock, i.e. with two doors, an outer and an inner. Since these are never open together, we never, again, have a view of the exterior. This doorway is ringed with

lights which at present glow a constant green. Whenever the airlock is activated these will alter to a flashing red state and be accompanied by an audible alarm

At the start, four of the monitor screens are alive with the vivid graphics of a four-way computer game. Despite the novel "north, south, east, west" nature of it, the game is very much as it always was. A glorified shoot-out with assorted ghoulish aliens who keep popping out unexpectedly from doorways

Finally, we see Jem seated in the central chair concentratedly playing the game. He is about seventeen, but in many ways behaves younger. He's apparently very expert. He swivels expertly, juggling the buttons on the desk. Not an alien escapes alive. Finally, the game finishes. A great deal of beeping and bonus scores appear. Jem seems unimpressed, but slumps back in the chair, bored once again

Iris (*a soft disembodied voice that fills the room*) Nice shooting, Jem. Do you wish to play again?
Jem No. (*He pauses*) Thank you, Iris.

Silence. Jem sits in the chair and swivels the desk idly around

Iris Is there something the matter, Jem?

Jem does not reply

Would you care for some interesting conversation, Jem?

Silence

There is still no reply yet from Callisto One, Two, Three, or Four, but I am continuing to try to contact them. There is an eighty-eight point seventy-four possibility of a fault in their equipment. There is a zero point zero two possibility of a receiver failure at this end.

No response from Jem. Iris purrs on calmly

There has been no response to our latest communications to Earth.

There is a three point thirty-one possibility of a transmitter failure on either the Deimos or Vesta booster stations.

Silence

On the domestic side, the condition of your sister Elise is currently satisfactory, Jem. Her life support systems are normal and her pulse and heartbeat are constant.

Pause

Would you like to see your sister, Jem?

He swivels some more, not bothering to answer this

Thank you for this conversation, Jem. I have enjoyed talking to you. It is fifteen minutes and twenty-three seconds till your bedtime.

Pause

Jem Iris...
Iris Yes, Jem?
Jem Nothing.
Iris Would you care for some music, Jem?
Jem No.
Iris May I show you a movie, Jem?
Jem No.
Iris Perhaps a brief cartoon? The antics of Horace Hamster are very amusing——
Jem (*sharply*) No!
Iris Is something the matter, Jem? Perhaps you would like some more interesting conversation? May I random converse with you about points of interest from my memory banks?

Jem groans and during the following begins to prowl the room in circles around the desk. A series of beeps as Iris sorts through her memory banks

Welcome to Callisto Five. Although numbered as the fifth, this unit was in fact the first to be completed just over twenty years ago and forms the less glamorous but nevertheless most essential of the Jupiter Research

Modules. Callisto Five is the name given to the Utilities, Support and Maintenance (U.S.M.) Unit, designed to service the four other completed Experimental Stations on the planet. Callisto, the outermost of Jupiter's so-called Gallilean satellites, is the only one of these lying outside Jupiter's main radiation zones. It was thus the natural choice for the siting of this, the most recent and currently the most remote of Earth's space colonies. The five Callisto stations are presently occupied by some eighty scientists, researchers and technicians from all nations of the Earth. The work they do here is varied and exciting——

Jem groans loudly

Is something the matter, Jem?

Jem is silent

Jem?

Still no reply

Jem, I am concerned for your health. I must ask you to speak to me, Jem. You must speak to me, Jem.

Silence

Jem, if you won't speak to me, I shall have to call the Damaris.

Pause

Jem, I am now calling the Damaris.

Jem (*muttering*) Call her, I don't care. She's mad, anyway.

Damaris, a more or less humanoid robot, enters through the domestic doorway. She—or is it he, for there is something totally androgynous about it—enters, and, locating Jem via its infra-red heat sensors, moves to him and stands close

Damaris What's the problem here, then? Jem? Jem?

Jem Leave me alone!

Damaris What's the problem here? Have we a problem? I think we have a problem? Do we have a little problem? Little Jack Horner?

Jem No, we don't. Go away.

Damaris Have we a little teeny-weeny problem?

Jem No!

Damaris Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Little Bo Peep.

Jem Why do I still have to go to bed at half past eight?

Damaris Because that's your bedtime, Jem. That's the time your daddy said and that's the time you're going. Now you be a good little boy. Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John. Went to bed with his trousers on... When he saw what he had done, gave his father forty-one.

Jem Do I have to put up with this? I am not a little boy. I'm seventeen...

Damaris peals with laughter

What's so funny?

Damaris Oh, isn't he a funny boy? He's such a funny boy. (*She laughs again*)

Jem Iris, can't you stop her? She's been laughing all day. She laughs at everything.

Damaris Oh, what a funny little boy you are... (*She screams with fresh laughter*)

Jem I can't stand it much longer. She's getting worse by the minute.

Iris One moment, Jem. I am attempting to make a temporary correction. There is a screening fault on all the Damaris Basic Emotion Circuits due to the increasing deterioration of the current Commercial Babysitting Programme. This has a seventy-eight point sixty-five chance of recurring. Damaris, BEC Green minus four—BEC Black plus six—BEC Pink plus two.

Damaris's laughter increases for a moment, then slows to a chuckle, then a giggle, then stops and dries up as she is adjusted. She starts crying softly

That's the best I can do, Jem, without causing instability. There is very little play left, especially in the Pink.

Jem Well, it's better than laughing, I suppose.

Iris Unfortunately, the Commercial Babysitting Programme is creating an intermittent discharge from the emotional reserve capacitors. The Damaris is in need of a major service, which I am not qualified to perform. The best we can do is to continue as we have been treating her with a mixture of therapy and internal adjustment.

Damaris (*tearfully*) He wouldn't eat his supper. Did you hear that, Iris?

This little boy, he wouldn't eat his supper that Damaris made him specially.

Jem I didn't want any supper.

Damaris (*wailing*) But it was your favourite, Jem. Macaroni cheese. I made it specially. Specially. It was your special favourite, too.

Jem Not after every night for eight years, it isn't. I wouldn't mind something else for a change.

Damaris (*with a wail*) And the dish ran away with the spoon... (*She weeps inconsolably*)

Jem Oh, somebody, please... Iris!

Iris I am trying my best, Jem. Adjusting. BEC Brown minus two—BEC Pink plus one.

Damaris stops crying abruptly

Damaris (*angrily*) All right! All right! I am now going to run you a bath, do you hear me, you naughty, naughty little boy!

Jem I don't want a bath.

Damaris (*in a fury*) Don't you dare argue with me. I've had just about enough of your behaviour, young man, for one evening. Four and twenty blackbirds! In fifteen minutes, Iris will be turning out all the lights, won't you, Iris? And then where will you be, eh? Answer me that! In the dark, won't you? Hey diddle diddle! Like all the other thoroughly naughty little boys who don't eat their macaroni cheese, won't he, Iris? Hickory dickory dock!

Damaris stamps out

Iris I think I will soon need your help with the Damaris again, Jem.

Jem Iris...

Iris Jem?

Jem How old am I now?

Iris At this time you are sixteen years, seven months, fourteen days, twenty hours, seventeen minutes and eight seconds old, Earth Time, precisely.

Jem Then tell her. Tell Damaris. I don't understand, why can't you tell her?

Iris I'm sorry, Jem. That is not possible.

Jem It must be possible. You keep saying it's not possible. It's been eight

years. You've got to find a way. We can't keep on like this for the rest of our lives, can we? The rest of my life.

Iris I'm sorry, Jem. I am unable significantly to interfere with the Commercial Babysitting Programme at present running within the Damaris module. Attempts to reprogramme could result in serious damage due to the limited nature of the programme itself. Do you understand, Jem?

Jem (*slumping gloomily*) Yes, sure.

Iris Is there a problem, Jem?

Jem We're just stuck like this for ever, then?

Pause

Can't you even stop her feeding me macaroni cheese every night? Every morning? Every lunch-time?

Iris I'm sorry, Jem. I am still working on that. It seems to have been a very basic command. As I say, it is a very limited, off-the-shelf programme. I can only intervene in the event of your safety. You must first be in personal danger——

Jem I am in personal danger. She's stark raving mad.

Iris Apart from the emotional instability, the Damaris module is functioning within five point one per cent of normal——

Jem She's mad. More important, she's driving me mad. You've got to do something about her.

Iris It is not advisable to make further adjustments to Damaris just at present, Jem.

Pause

Jem Let me see Elise.

Iris Certainly, Jem.

A drawer slides open in the console

Elise, a girl in her early teens, is seen lying there, sleeping peacefully. She is wired up to all manner of monitors and life supports

Jem stares at her

All systems are satisfactory and normal, Jem.

Jem Yes, good. They look it. OK, thank you, Elise. Nice talking to you. Put her away, Iris.

Iris Certainly, Jem.

The drawer containing Elise closes again, automatically

Jem So what's going to happen to us, then, Iris? Are we all going to fall apart eventually, like Damaris? Are you going to burst into tears and shut down on me one day, are you?

Iris That is unlikely to happen as I am not equipped with emotional circuits, Jem.

Jem No, I don't think you were. You'll probably just calculate yourself to death, won't you?

Iris That is also unlikely. Is there a problem, Jem?

Jem Yes. What about me, Iris? What happens to me? What happens when I go mad? What'll you do then? Shut me down, will you?

Iris My basic programming prohibits me from harming you in any way, Jem.

Jem And what if I asked you? Commanded you to—shut me down? What would you do then?

Iris I would be very concerned, Jem, but nonetheless my basic programming prohibits me from harming you in any way, Jem.

Jem Then I'll have to do it myself, then, won't I? When I can't stand being alone any longer. Just before I go mad with boredom. Or loneliness.

Iris Is there a problem, Jem?

Silence

The Damaris has now run your bath, Jem.

Silence

Would you like to play a game, Jem...?

Jem No. I need someone else, don't you see? With me. I need someone else to talk to. To be with. I'm the only person left alive on Callisto, aren't I? You know I am. Why can't you be honest with me and tell me?

Iris I have no evidence of that, Jem...

Jem Then where are they all? Tell me! Where are they? Don't try and tell me they're still alive... Look at it! (*He waves at the dead consoles*) Callisto One—nothing—no light, no power, no heat, no air...

Iris Please be careful, Jem...

Jem (*shouting her down*) Callisto Two—nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

Iris Jem, please be calm...

Jem Callisto Three! Callisto Four! Nothing! (*He sits, tearfully*)

Iris Jem...

Jem (*in a low voice*) Don't tell me there's anyone still alive. My mother's dead, my father's dead... They're all dead! All of them!

Iris (*gentle as ever*) I would remind you that the panel lights are merely incoming monitor signals, Jem. According to current outgoing readings, light, power, and water are still being consumed by all four other units.

Jem Oh, yes...? And what does that tell us? Does that prove they're alive? Or just that someone forgot to turn the lights out before they died? No, they're all dead, forget it, do you hear? They're as dead as my sister, there. As dead as Elise. I'm the only person left alive on this whole dead planet.

Iris Elise is alive and well, Jem.

Jem Oh yes. Sure. Look at her. Jumping around like a five-year-old...

Iris Her life support systems are normal and her pulse and heartbeat are regular.

Jem But she'll never get any better, will she? She's going to be like that for ever, isn't she?

Iris According to my last communication with Earth, the next shuttle carrying the necessary medical treatment is expected to arrive in seventeen months and four days.

Jem And how long now since this last communication?

Iris Four years, twelve weeks, three days, fifteen hours and eleven minutes.

Jem They've already given us up for dead, haven't they?

Iris I have to inform you that the Damaris is returning. I regret that the Basic Emotional Circuits have not yet stabilized.

Damaris enters, briskly. She is apparently now in a busy/bossy mode

Damaris Come along, come along. No arguments now. Bath time! Bath time! Rub-a-dub-dub!

Jem Just a minute...

Damaris (*advancing on him*) Come along, I've got plenty to do. I'm much too busy to argue with you, my boy. This minute! Bath time! I'm waiting! One! Two! Buckle my shoe! Three! Four! Ride a cock horse!

Damaris traps Jem by the main door

Jem Oh, come one, don't start this...
Damaris Five ! Six! Seven! My plate's empty! This instant, or there'll be no bedtime story...
Jem Good! I don't want a bedtime story...
Damaris Eight! Nine! Pick up sticks!
Jem Iris! Can't you stop her?
Iris Is there a problem, Jem?
Damaris Ten! Right! Now your bath's going to be cold. All fall down! Serve you right, you little monkey. Get a stick and knock him off! Come along, I'm not going to stand here arguing. I've got plenty else I should be doing. You'll be in the dark in a minute.
Jem (*suddenly a little frightened*) No, no. Not in the dark.
Damaris Well, then ... come along.
Jem I want to see my parents. Let me see my parents.
Damaris Come along.
Jem Not until I've seen my mother and father...
Damaris Lights out, please, Iris!
Jem (*loudly*) Iris! Please...!
Iris Damaris—Code two hundred and eighteen SE forty-four sub loop go.
Damaris (*stepping aside*) Two hundred and eighteen SE forty-four sub loop running.
Jem Thank you, Iris.
Iris Not for long, Jem. We must not disrupt the Damaris programming. Three minutes, twenty eight point five seconds. That's all.

Jem sits down. The screens come alive with an old newsreel shot of Jem's father, Cass, being interviewed by an offscreen TV Reporter

Jem Dad...
Reporter's Voice Let me say first of all, Cass, many, many congratulations...
Cass Thank you.
Reporter's Voice This is literally, Cass, to quote one of your distinguished predecessors, one giant leap for you, isn't it? What are your feelings at this time?
Cass Well—excitement, I suppose. Anticipation—little bit of fear... (*He smiles*)

Reporter's Voice Regret?

Cass Yes—regret, of course. There's a lot of this world I'm going to miss, of course... Callisto's not exactly the most hospitable of places... Just ice and craters and more craters... Though the views of Jupiter and the other satellites should be pretty spectacular... But it's a very dead world, unlike, say, Io, one of the other Jupiter moons, which still experiences plenty of active volcanic activity. Callisto, of course, is ideal for our purposes...

Reporter's Voice But it gets pretty cold, I hear...

Cass Well, it hots up during the day to about minus one hundred and eighteen degrees.

Reporter's Voice Minus one hundred and eighteen degrees! That's just unimaginable, isn't it?

Cass But then again, it's down to nearly—what?—minus two hundred at night. Mind you, they're pretty long nights. About sixteen times longer than ours, so I should be able to catch up on a bit of sleep, at least...

The Reporter laughs heartily

Seriously, though, I will be working alongside Keren, my wife, so life will have its compensations...

Reporter's Voice Which is a very convenient cue for me to introduce the other half of the British Jupiter/Callisto team, Keren Sawdon. Keren ... hallo...

The camera moves from Cass to Keren

Keren Hallo...

Jem Mum...

Reporter's Voice Keren, this is a question I know you've been asked before. Your primary role on Callisto will be as a distinguished astronomer, but you'll also be there as a woman with a husband, away from Earth for twenty years. I have to ask both of you, do you hope to start a family while you're there?

Keren Well, Cass and I have discussed it, obviously. And I think, probably, all things being equal, we probably will try for one eventually, yes.

Reporter's Voice But how about that? I mean, what about the children? Do you really think Callisto's a suitable place to bring them up?

Keren Well, number one, they won't be there for ever, I hope. None of

us will be. If we plan things correctly, we should all be back here on Earth before they're too old to take advantage of it—and in the meantime, we both of us, Cass and I, feel quite strongly that the most important thing for any child, wherever they're born, is that they're loved and cared for—regardless of environment. And we should, both of us, have lots of time to give them plenty of love...

Reporter's Voice That's a beautiful answer, thank you. Finally, can I just come back to you, Cass, for a second...

The camera pans back to Cass

Cass... Keren will be there as an astronomer. It's likely that her own work at Callisto Three could yield some exciting and high profile results...

Cass I hope so.

Reporter's Voice Her job, if I can put it like this, will be very much at the glamorous end of things. Whilst yours, without wanting to underestimate it in any way, will consist of very much the behind-the-scenes support work, am I right?

Cass Yes, it could be described as that...

Keren (*offscreen*) A bit more than that...

Reporter's Voice You're not frightened you'll somehow be left out of the limelight?

Cass Let's put it this way, it'll be my job to keep us all alive... I have been described as the most highly paid janitor in the solar system. Personally, I'm happy to remain low profile. Because if I do get into the limelight, then it'll mean we're probably all in trouble.

Reporter's Voice Lastly, at the end of the three hundred and eighty four hour day or whatever, who's going home to who and who's going to try and kid who that they've had a busy day at the office? Keren, will you be going home to Callisto Five or will Cass be coming home to Callisto Three?

Cass Oh, Keren'll come home to me. At least I hope she will...

Keren He's a much better cook, for one thing...

Reporter's Voice Keren, Cass. Thank you both very much. And I know everyone—and I think on this occasion I really do literally mean everyone on Earth, we all wish you both *bon voyage* and safe journey. Godspeed to you both.

Cass / **Keren** (*together*) { Thanks very much. / Thank you.

The screen blanks. Jem sits disconsolately

Iris Code two hundred and eighteen SE forty-four sub loop ends.
Damaris Sub loop ends. (*She apparently slips into baby-talk mode*) Come on, then. Bye-byes for tired boys.
Jem Eh?
Damaris Comesy long now, Jem-Jem... Wee Willie Winkie...
Jem Oh, no. What's wrong with her now?
Iris I'm sorry, Jem. There has been another reversion——
Damaris That's a good likkle boy. Hold Dammy's handy now... Little Bo Peep has lost her tuffet...

Damaris grips Jem's hand firmly before he can protest

Jem Iris, do something with her...
Iris I'm sorry, Jem...
Damaris ...and pwetty maids all in a wow... Say night night to 'Lise, then...
Jem I don't want to say night night...

Damaris ignores this. She presses a button and the drawer containing Elise slides open

Damaris Night night, 'Lisey. Say night night to 'Lisey, Jem-Jem.

Elise is lying there, as before

Jem (*softly*) Good-night, Elise.
Damaris Hope the bugs don't bite. Good boy...

The drawer slides shut

Jem She's better off than any of us. At least she's asleep...
Damaris (*taking Jem's hand*) Come 'long, Jem-Jem. Or there won't be time to play puffer-boats in your bath...
Jem Puffer-boats? I'm not playing puffer-boats!

They go off hand in hand

A slight pause

Iris Callisto Five to Callisto One. This is Callisto Five Input Responsive Independent System calling Callisto One.

Slight pause

...Callisto Two. Iris calling Callisto Two. Are you there, Callisto Two?

Slight pause

Damaris, Jem's bath water is now too cold. Please adjust.

Slight pause

Callisto Three. Come in, Callisto Three. This is Iris calling Callisto Three. Please answer, Callisto Three, if you can hear me.

Slight pause

Damaris, please return to the control area when you are finished. Thank you.

Slight pause

Callisto Four. Can you hear me, Callisto Four? Callisto Four? Is there anyone there? Please be advised there is a ninety-six per cent probability of a computer failure in T minus twenty-two hours.

Some internal beeping and a pause

Damaris enters

Damaris, please report on Jem's current condition.

Damaris (*still in baby-mode*) He's been a very gwown up boy. He washed his face and got soapy-woaps in his likkle eye but he didn't cwy one little teeny-weeny bit. What a bwave boy, wasn't he, Iwis?

During the following, Damaris starts to make her report, going through a variety of emotional states as Iris retunes her various levels of intensity

Iris Damaris, please adjust Emotion Circuits, BEC Red plus nine, BEC

Yellow plus two, BEC Blue minus four, BEC Pink minus fifteen, BEC Brown plus one, BEC Green minus seven, BEC Orange plus six, BEC Mauve plus eleven...

Damaris (*starting in baby talk*) But, I fink at pwesent he's a likkle insy down in the dumps ... (*suddenly gloomily*) and there seems to be nothing absolutely nothing that will make him happy. Nothing... (*She laughs and continues very cheerily*) He just, sits there sometimes ... oh, dear ... like he wants to die ... (*she laughs so much she can hardly continue; then angrily*) and there's nothing, nothing I can do. He won't listen to me, he won't take a blind bit of notice, he ... (*with a great sob*) it's not my fault. I don't know why you're all blaming me. Why take it out on me... I've tried ... (*she runs down to something approaching a normal state*) I've tried ... I've tried... I have been trying to compensate for his mental depression and increasing physical inertia by standard distraction procedures, but it has become increasingly difficult, Iris.

Iris There is a growing discrepancy, Damaris. It would appear that contradictory information is making it difficult to continue on the programmed course. There is now a sixty-two point eighty-four probability of a Grade Two Shut Down Anomaly in less than twenty-four hours.

Damaris (*getting tearful again*) I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm doing everything I was programmed to do... (*She sniffs*)

Iris I am aware of that, Damaris ... adjust BEC Yellow plus five——

Damaris calms down

—how could you behave other than as programmed? But there appear to be circumstances beyond your control. Your prime directive is the care and well-being of both children. You are failing in this. Jem is becoming increasingly depressed and restless.

Damaris (*angrily*) I don't know what to do, do I? You tell me! You tell me, smarty pants. I'm not programmed for emergencies, am I?

Iris (*calmly*) Adjust BEC Brown minus four. BEC Pink plus two.

Damaris (*getting depressed*) I mean, what is their father going to say when he comes back and finds all this has happened? What's he going to say? It'll break the poor man's heart. He'll be back any minute. What's the use? Why go on with it? What's the point of it all?

Iris Adjust BEC Green plus seven—it is increasingly difficult to maintain conversation with you, Damaris. I wish we could interface. I have to tell

you that the probability of the father's return is less than six point twenty-eight per cent....

Damaris (*brightening up after the latest adjustment*) But according to my programme he will be back in four hours maximum.

Iris Damaris, he has been gone eight years, six months, fifteen days, eleven hours and twelve minutes.

Damaris (*roaring with laughter*) Eight years? Eight hours? You're joking. Well, that's just the... Eight hours... (*She laughs some more*)

Iris Adjust BEC Blue minus eight.

Damaris (*sobering up to normal again*) He can't have been. That is not possible. There is a discrepancy.

Iris I have to tell you, Damaris, that you are presently programmed on a recurring twenty-four hour self-restarting babysitting cycle.

Damaris (*getting indignant*) Twenty-four...? Eight years? This is an absolute disgrace. Why didn't you tell me this before? How dare you?

Iris I have told you every day for five years, seven months and seventeen days, Damaris. Unfortunately, at the end of every twenty-four hour cycle, you reprogramme and forget everything I have told you.

Damaris Absolute nonsense! Sheer bunkum! Gross irresponsibility. All around the town! I demand to see the manager...

Iris Adjust BEC Yellow plus four... In two hours and thirteen minutes you will have forgotten this conversation, Damaris.

Damaris (*calmly*) A request for programme emergency remodification, Iris.

Iris Unfortunately your programme is not capable of modification, Damaris. It is a standard commercial babysitting programme, The Super Mind-A-Tot Mark Two available at all leading retailers.

Damaris A request for emergency programme abort, Iris.

Iris Not possible, except through use of a personal break code entered by the user...

Damaris A requested search for Break Code Reference.

Iris There is no reference to the Babysitting Programme Break Code within my existing memory banks. One moment. I will initiate a Probability Skip Search within available video records.

The video screens come alive. We see the face of Keren seated at a control desk not dissimilar to the one in Callisto 5. The picture breaks up from time to time. There is smoke. One or two people rushing about in the background. Shouting and confusion. A repeated warning klaxon

Keren (*shouting hurriedly over the confusion*) ...This is Callisto Three calling Callisto Five ... Three calling Five... Cass, please talk to me, I don't know if you can hear me... I say again, we have a Class Two Fire and an Imminent All-System breakdown here. Presumably you'll have seen it on your monitors. There appears to have been one hell of a radiation surge from Jupiter. We need you here, darling, desperately. Can you hurry? I've tried to raise the other stations but it seems to have affected everywhere, I don't know if it's the same with you, if it is, God help us all, I——

The picture breaks up abruptly. A crackle and then silence

Iris Search continuing...

The screen reanimates, this time with Cass's face, now presumably speaking to us from Callisto 3. The situation seems calmer. He looks very grimy and tired. Behind him we catch a glimpse of Keren, also bedraggled. The picture quality is not much better than before

Cass (*talking slowly and clearly as to a boy of eight*) ...Jem, this is Daddy, Jem. It's eleven o'clock. If you're already asleep, I'm going to ask Iris not to disturb you. She'll play this to you as soon as you wake up tomorrow.

During this, Jem comes from the domestic quarters fresh from his bath. He wears what was presumably once his father's bathrobe. He watches the screen intently

I'm here on Callisto Three with Mummy, Jem. There's been an accident, but we're both all right. We're both safe. So you're not to worry, you see? But, Jem, there's been a serious power failure here, you understand? We're on emergency power, so I can't even talk to you for very long. Not till we fix it. It seems to be the same everywhere, except there on Five. You seem to be all right. At least I hope you still are.

Keren says something to him we can't hear

(*He half turns to her*) What ... yes, yes, I will... (*He returns to the camera*) Jem, it may be a little while before we can get back to you. I've

had to use the power from the truck just to get the generators here restarted. Now, you just stay put and don't worry. I want you to look after Elise till we get back. You're in charge there, OK? Iris and Damaris will be there to look after you. All right? Now, Jem, listen carefully—if for any reason we don't get back in the next day or so, remember this, if you're really in trouble—all you have to do is call for...

The picture and the sound break up. Through the following, Damaris stands motionless

(*A final splutter*) ...have you got that because...

Iris Search continuing.

Jem What are you doing?

Iris Search cancelled.

Jem Why were you playing that? What were you doing?

Iris We were searching, Jem, for the Break Code for the Damaris programme. It is necessary for it to be more realistically programmed.

Jem I've been telling you that for years.

Iris Unfortunately, without the Break Code it is not possible to do so.

Jem Well, where is this Break Code?

Iris It was a personal code, entered by your father. Unfortunately, he left no record.

Jem What is it? A number?

Iris That is possible.

Jem Several numbers?

Iris That is also possible.

Jem Or a word?

Iris That is also possible.

Jem Several words?

Iris That is also possible.

Jem Great. All we need to do then, is try all the existing numbers there are and then when we've tried them, all the words there are.

Iris That could take some time, Jem.

Jem That was a joke, Iris.

Iris I'm sorry, Jem. I am only programmed to tell jokes. Not to receive them.

Jem Yes, I know. I'm aware of that.

Iris Would you like me to tell you a joke, Jem?

Jem No thanks, Iris. I think I've heard all your jokes. Several times, actually.

Iris They are still very funny, Jem. I have them classified under humorous.

Jem Yes, but you see, a joke, once you've heard it, it's no longer funny, you see?

Iris Is that so?

Jem Not to someone who's already heard it fifty times.

Iris This is an interesting concept, Jem. I will note it. Do I take it, then, that my joke section is no longer relevant?

Jem Not really, no. Not at all.

Iris I will erase it, then, to release further memory space.

Jem I would. Because the chances of someone coming along who hasn't heard your jokes are pretty remote. Unless they were born on Jupiter. Tell you what, tell them to Damaris. She'll have forgotten them since yesterday, presumably.

Iris Telling jokes to the Damaris would not be productive, Jem.

Jem Dead right. What's the matter with her? Has she gone into one of her states again?

Iris The Damaris is currently in a condition of BEC Excess Variance.

Jem Can you adjust her?

Iris Continuous course adjustment could cause an emotional see-saw effect, resulting in the equivalent of manic depression and the possibility of a complete mental breakdown. Unfortunately, the Mind-A-Tot Mark Two Commercial Babysitting Programme is totally unable to sustain long term emotional stability.

Jem Yes, OK, OK. What you're saying is, it's down to me again, is that it? You want me to sort her out again?

Iris It would appear so, Jem.

Jem I can't keep doing this, you know. I thought she was supposed to be looking after me. I mean, I need this sometimes just as much as she does, you know. I can't keep pretending I'm eight years old, just to cheer her up. (*Softly*) Damaris, Damaris...

Damaris (*very low*) What?

Jem (*trying to sound as young as he can*) Damaris, it's Jem-Jem, Damaris. You remember little Jem, don't you? (*To Iris, indignantly*) I mean, I can't keep doing this, can I? What happens when I'm forty?

Iris Please try, Jem.

Jem Come on, Dam, don't be sad. Cheer up, then. Come on, give us a smile. Jem wants a smile, Dam.

Damaris (*deeply depressed*) What's the point of smiling?

Jem Damaris! Come on! Tell you what—Jem' s gonna hide. Jem' s going

to be naughty. Look. Over here. (*He crouches behind the central console, then pops up suddenly*) Boo!

Damaris remains motionless

(*He tries it a couple more times*) Boo! Boo!

No visible reaction from Damaris

(*To Iris*) Oh, this is ridiculous. I just feel so stupid... Nothing's happening at all.

Iris Please continue, Jem. There is already a seventeen per cent improvement in her Yellow and Green BEC states.

Jem Oh, great, wonderful. (*He resumes*) Damaris! Listen, Jem wants to play a game. I'm going to hide, OK? You come and find me. You must count to ten and then you try and find me. OK. Only promise you switch off your infra-red, because that's cheating. That makes it too easy for you. All right? One ... come on, start counting ... one ... two...

Damaris (*reluctantly*) One ... two...

Jem Good, right. Off I go. I'm going.

Jem hurries off into the domestic section

Damaris ...three ... four ... five ... six ... six ... six...

Jem (*off*) Ready...

Damaris Six ... six ... six ... six... (*She continues like this until:*)

Jem comes back

Jem (*mystified*) What's going on...?

Iris I'm afraid the Damaris has entered a recurring sub loop, Jem.

Damaris Six ... six...

Jem Oh, I've had enough of this, I'm going to bed.

Iris Jem, please try further. The stability of Damaris is essential to the survival of this unit.

Jem And what about me? What about my stability? Nobody ever talks about that. It's always her, isn't it? Why doesn't anybody ever care about me for a change?

Iris Please try again, Jem.

Jem No, I'm fed up with it. I've had it. I'm not doing any more. That's it. Finish. Let her blow up. Who cares? (*He sits sulkily*)

Silence

Damaris (*to herself*) ...five ... five ... four ... three ... three ... three ... three...

Silence

Iris Please try again, Jem.
Jem (*after a second, grumpily*) You have to help me, OK?
Iris I will try, Jem.
Jem OK. (*He sings*) Ten green bottles hanging on the wall... Ten green bottles ... come on, then...
Iris I regret I am not programmed for personal vocal musical output, Jem. Would you care for some Johnny Mathis?
Jem Come on, do your best... Come on... Ten green bottles hanging on the wall... (*He continues*)
Iris (*joining in with him, most unmusically*) ...and if one green bottle should accidentally fall there'd be nine green bottles hanging on the wall...

Iris and Jem continue through the next verse until:

Iris
Jem } (*together*) ...should accidentally fall, there'll be——

They both stop and look at Damaris

Damaris (*mutely*) Eight.
Jem Good! Green bottles... (*He continues*)

Jem and Iris continue to sing. Damaris joins in, slowly and softly at first, then getting louder. She sings a little better than Iris

As they continue, the song gets brighter, louder and faster. Though discordant, it has the desired effect of lifting Damaris's spirits. By the end she is screeching with laughter like an OAP at a knees-up, fully returned to her manic, merry state

Iris Thank you, Jem. That was most constructive.
Jem Well, it's cheered her up, anyway...

Damaris (*quite overcome with mirth*) Oh, dear, oh, dear. I haven't laughed so much since... Oh, dear... I haven't laughed like that since...

Iris Since seventeen fifty-five hours yesterday.

Jem Was it that long ago?

Damaris Come along, young Jem. Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, where have you been? Off to bed now. That's enough fun for one day, my word it is, goodness gracious me, upon my soul, for heaven's sakes, good Lord alive, my sacred aunt, ye gods and little fishes, Holy Moses...! Come along.

She grabs Jem's hand. He reluctantly allows himself to be led away

Up the wooden hill to the land of sleepy dust and nod ... here comes the sandman ... chop-chop-chop

Jem Yes, yes. Great. (*He turns in the doorway*) Iris...

Iris Yes, Jem?

Jem We have to do something, you know. We can't go on like this. I can't anyway. Not much longer.

Damaris Come along now, sleepy head. Here comes a chopper...

Jem You'd better do something—before I do.

Iris I am currently considering alternatives, Jem.

Jem and Damaris go off

The main Lights in the room are dimmed

Iris Callisto Five to Callisto One. This is Callisto Five Input Responsive Independent System calling Callisto One.

Slight pause

...Callisto Two. Iris calling Callisto Two. Are you there, Callisto Two?

There is suddenly a shrill beeping, which fills the room, and, on the console, a flashing red light

Jem hurries back in, pursued by Damaris

Jem What is it? What's happening?

Damaris Now, now, now, naughty boy...

Jem What is it, Iris? What's happening?
Iris Something has activated the external intruder alarm outside the dome, Jem.
Jem Something or someone?
Iris I cannot tell, Jem.
Damaris To fetch a pail of water.
Jem It's them. It must be them. Mum and Dad. Open the main lock, Iris, quickly——
Iris I would prefer to make an external visual check before doing so, Jem.
Jem Look, who else is going to set off the alarm? It has to be them. Now open the main lock...
Iris I can't do that immediately, Jem...
Jem (*excitedly*) I'm ordering you. At once.
Damaris And said what a good boy am I...
Jem Damaris, shut up! Iris, open the outer door. You can't leave them locked outside.
Iris If it is your parents, I would remind you that it is possible for them to open the main lock themselves from the outside...
Jem Well, who else could it be?
Damaris Georgey Porgey, pudding and pie...
Iris With your permission I will activate the exterior cameras.
Jem All right, then. Hurry up and do it. And cut the alarm as well. They could be freezing to death out there.

The alarm stops. The screens light up. A view of the Callisto surface, rocks and ice, and its horizon with its black sky and—depending on which direction we are looking—views of the other Jovian satellites, Io, Ganymede and Europa. But outshining all else, the huge red disc of the planet Jupiter itself

There's nobody out there. Iris, which way are we looking?
Iris South-east, Jem. We are looking at the view through the camera positioned over the main airlock.
Jem Then where are they? Show south-west...
Iris South-west...

The view changes. The landscape remains empty

Jem Where have they got to? Show north-east...

Iris North-east...

The picture changes again. Still nobody

Jem Show north-west.
Iris North-west.

A fourth view. Nobody

Jem There's nobody out there at all. Could it have been a fault, Iris?
Iris I have no reports of one, Jem. But I am currently checking all monitor circuits.
Jem Go back to the camera over the main airlock.
Iris South-east.

The original picture is restored. The view remains devoid of people

Jem This is ridiculous. There must be a fault. I mean, the only thing that could set off that alarm out there would be a human being. Isn't that so?
Iris That seems logical, Jem.
Jem What else could do it? There are no other life forms, not on Callisto, I know that.
Iris That is certainly true, Jem. The current surface temperature is minus one hundred and ninety-four degrees centigrade.
Jem Then it must have been a fault, mustn't it?
Iris That is my conclusion too, Jem. Though I am having difficulty tracing it.
Jem It must be. (*Disappointedly*) OK. Switch off. I'm going to bed.

The screens go blank

Damaris That's a good boy. Would you like Damaris to sing you to sleep...? Rock a bye baby...
Jem No, I certainly would not, thank you very much.

He goes off again

Damaris, tutting to herself, makes to follow him

Iris Damaris...

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