

THE TRIAL

A screenplay by Bernard Beckett

CHARACTERS

SANDY SWARTZMANN (judge)

DELANE WRIGHT (defence lawyer)

LISA (accused)

JOSH (accused)

MAIA ALDRIN (prosecution lawyer)

DINING HALL. MARTIAN COLONY. THE YEAR 2065.

Behind a high desk sits SANDY SWARTZMANN. She is dressed in the tight pressure suit of the colonists. Over this, she wears a black gown. She holds a judge's gavel.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

I hereby call to order the disciplinary hearing of Lisa Paige and Josh Ropati. Would the prisoners please step forward?

Two children, LISA and JOSH, approach the judge's desk. Their hands are chained together at the wrist.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

You are charged with breaking colony rules 274b and 519. How do you plead?

DELANE WRIGHT, who has been sitting to one side, now stands.

DELANE WRIGHT

They plead not guilty, your honour.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

(surprised)

On both charges?

DELANE WRIGHT

Yes, your honour. On both charges.

SANDY SWARTZMANN turns to Lisa and Josh.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Do you know what the word perjury means?

She receives no response.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

It means lying under oath. Do you understand?

LISA and JOSH nod but don't look up.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Look at me when I am speaking to you.

LISA and JOSH both look up. They say nothing.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

If you lie to me in court, your punishment will be even worse. Now, I will ask you again. How do you plead?

JOSH

How could it be worse?

SANDY SWARTZMANN

I beg your pardon?

LISA moves her hands to Josh's shoulder, trying to warn him, but he continues.

JOSH

They said that if you find us guilty, we'll be sent back to Earth. What could be worse than that?

DELANE WRIGHT

(quickly)

Not guilty, your honour. They plead not guilty.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Be it on their heads. The prosecution may proceed.

MAIA ALDRIN stands, nods to the judge, and then looks at her notes.

MAIA ALDRIN

Your honour, there is no doubt both parties are guilty as charged. Security footage clearly shows them leaving the compound after curfew. There's no record of any permission being given for this, and both children disabled their GPS before leaving.

LISA

We're not children!

SANDY SWARTZMANN

In this court, you speak when you -

LISA

People keep treating us like we don't have minds of our own!

DELANE WRIGHT

Darling ...

LISA

(angrily)
What?

DELANE WRIGHT looks to the judge as if pleading for help.

DELANE WRIGHT

Your honour, can we discuss this without the -

SANDY SWARTZMANN

I don't think it was a good idea choosing to defend your own child, do you?

SANDY SWARTZMANN turns to Maia Aldrin.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Please proceed.

MAIA ALDRIN

Josh. May I start with you? Are you denying that you left the compound last night?

JOSH

No.

MAIA ALDRIN

And did you have permission to leave the compound?

JOSH

We just wanted to see Mr Collins.

MAIA ALDRIN

In a court, when you're asked a question, you answer it. Did your lawyer not explain this to you?

JOSH

This isn't a court.

DELANE WRIGHT

Josh, I think you should just -

MAIA ALDRIN

It most certainly is a court.

JOSH

(losing it)

No, it isn't. It's our dining hall. And you're not a lawyer - you grow hydroponic beans, and he isn't a lawyer - he's Lisa's dad, and you're not a judge - you're an oxygen-unit technician. And it's stupid. All of this is stupid.

MAIA ALDRIN smiles, as if Josh's outburst has played into her hands. She pauses.

MAIA ALDRIN

Did you have permission to leave the compound, Josh?

JOSH

Yes, I did. I had permission.

LISA appears as surprised by this as everybody else.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Remember what I said about perjury, young man.

MAIA ALDRIN

And who gave you this permission?

JOSH

Lisa did. And I gave her permission.

LISA

(catching on)

We gave each other permission.

MAIA ALDRIN looks to the judge, then back to the children.

DELANE WRIGHT buries his head in his hands.

MAIA ALDRIN

I suppose you think you're clever?

JOSH

Compared with you?

DELANE WRIGHT

(beside himself with worry)

We should be able to try these two cases separately.

Josh doesn't speak for Lisa. He doesn't speak for my daughter.

LISA

No, that's right. He doesn't. I speak for myself.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Are you saying you don't wish your father to defend you?

LISA

I'm saying that just once, I wish people would listen to what we have to say.

MAIA ALDRIN walks out from behind her desk and takes the centre of the room. She addresses the two defendants.

MAIA ALDRIN

You left your compound without permission. You disabled your GPS. You visited a prisoner in solitary confinement.

Are you denying any of this?

DELANE WRIGHT

Objection.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

On what grounds?

LISA

I'm not denying it. I'm not confirming it.
I'm saying you should listen to why we did it.

MAIA ALDRIN

Your motivations are irrelevant. Read the colony code.

JOSH

And what if we want to change the colony code?

MAIA ALDRIN

Then you chose the wrong way of going about it. Because now you're being sent back to Earth, and then we won't be able to hear you, will we?

LISA

You can't send us back to Earth.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

I'm the judge, and I can do whatever I want. Ms Aldrin is quite correct. In this case, the standard sentence is banishment from the colony.

JOSH

(exasperated)

This is exactly what we mean. You never listen to us.

SANDY SWARTZMANN allows herself a small smile.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

I'm listening now.

JOSH

We wouldn't be going back to Earth, would we?
It would be our first time.

LISA

Unlike you, we were born here.
We're Martians.

MAIA ALDRIN

Your point is?

DELANE WRIGHT stands. He is shaking with rage. He points an accusing finger at Maia Aldrin.

DELANE WRIGHT

I know why you're doing this. I know why you volunteered for this case.

MAIA ALDRIN

(smugly)

So do I. To protect the colony from impulsive youths who should have been at home out of trouble. Were either of these children under your supervision on the night in question, Mr Wright?

LISA's eyes widen.

LISA

Dad, don't!

DELANE WRIGHT

Yes. Yes they were.

MAIA ALDRIN

But how could this be? They have already told us they left the compound without permission.

LISA

Dad. You don't have to do this.

DELANE WRIGHT looks to his daughter, tears in his eyes.

DELANE WRIGHT

Can't you see? She already knows.

MAIA ALDRIN

Are you saying you accompanied the children on their illegal journey. So this was ... what ... a family outing?

DELANE WRIGHT

It was an education in civic responsibility. Don't you think at least one person on this planet should understand the concept?

MAIA ALDRIN

I would have thought there were other ways of achieving this, Mr Wright.

DELANE WRIGHT

(raising his voice)

Do you have children, Ms Aldrin?

MAIA ALDRIN

(loudly)

You know that I don't.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

(banging her gavel)

Order!

MAIA ALDRIN

Neither does the judge - or did you forget that?

DELANE WRIGHT

(continuing doggedly)

And is it not true -

JOSH

(screaming)

Be quiet! All of you, just be quiet!

An embarrassed silence falls on the court room. Everybody turns to Josh.

JOSH

Yes, we visited Mr Collins and took him food, and we knew it was against the rules.

LISA realises all eyes are on them, and this time, nobody is interrupting. This is her moment.

LISA

But that's only because the rules are stupid. And we knew you wouldn't listen to us if we tried to tell you that.

JOSH

Mr Collins is a good man. All he wanted was for us to know what's been happening on Earth.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

All members of the colony are expressly forbidden from sharing unauthorised information from the home planet.

LISA

Could you not do that, please?

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Do what?

LISA

Call it the home planet.

You might be a visitor here, but I'm not.

This is my home.

JOSH

It's wrong to try to keep the truth from us.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

We live in the most unforgiving environment any human being has ever encountered. There are more important issues at stake than your adolescent notions of right and wrong.

JOSH

Like what?

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Like safety, for one.

LISA

You're not interested in safety. You're frightened. And if people had said we could colonise Mars but every moment would be lived in fear - that we would scurry about underground like frightened animals - nobody would have come.

DELANE WRIGHT senses his opportunity. He is shaking now, but it is with pride for his daughter.

DELANE WRIGHT

Long ago, before the first settlers made the long journey to this planet, people named its moons Phobos and Deimos: fear and terror. None of us who embarked on this life-changing venture ever imagined those two words would become this planet's unofficial slogan.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Rhetoric will not feed your family, Mr Wright.

DELANE WRIGHT

No. But justice might. The choice is yours.

JOSH

It's different for those of us who were born here. We believe in the colony. We trust it, and we trust its future. We have no other choice. And soon, you'll have to start trusting us.

SANDY SWARTZMANN pauses to think. Her tone becomes softer.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

We do trust you. And you're right. Hope is surely as important to us as oxygen. Soon your generation will be old enough to make its own decisions, and perhaps then, some of these rules will change. That will be your choice. But not yet. You're not old enough.

JOSH

What are you saying? Can we stay?

SANDY SWARTZMANN shakes her head.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

Rules are rules. I am sorry.

DELANE WRIGHT

Then at least have the courage to tell them the truth.

SANDY SWARTZMANN

There is nothing left to say here.

DELANE WRIGHT

Tell them what it is you're really frightened of.

SANDY SWARTZMANN bangs her gavel twice in quick succession, and two guards appear. They drag **DELANE WRIGHT** away as he continues to shout his protests.

DELANE WRIGHT

Tell them about the rules you haven't written down. Explain to them why you've decided that no colonist will ever be allowed to choose their own marriage partner. Why are you so afraid of love?

SANDY SWARTZMANN

The needs of the colony always come before the needs of the individual. Get him out!

DELANE WRIGHT

You might as well try to stop the planet turning.

JOSH and **LISA** look at one another. They embrace.

THE END

The Trial

by Bernard Beckett

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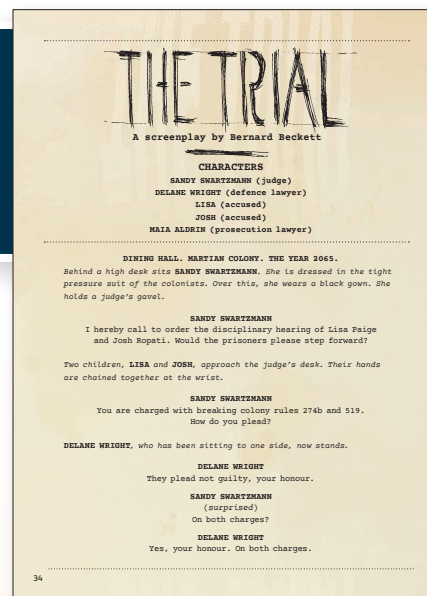
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