

EVENT HORIZON

written by

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Based on a true story

EVENT HORIZON

FADE IN:

EXT. AUSTIN - UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

Aerial view of the campus. The football stadium. Ivy-covered buildings. The iconic Tower in the middle of a sprawling urban campus. Closer to The Tower until it fills the screen.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - THE TOWER - OFFICE - DAY

There's a gentle KNOCK on the DOOR in a cramped, windowless office. LEE SMITH (45, intense), a small man in a big suit, looks up from his Texas-size desk as -

TRUCK (45, thinning brown hair cut military-style, faded blue eyes) stands in the doorway. Hesitant. Afraid.

SUPER: "THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS (2002)"

Truck (faded black suit, thin black tie) eases a ragged yellow backpack off his shoulder and steps forward.

TRUCK

T.K. LeForge here. Sir. You wanted to see me?

LEE SMITH

If it's not the Great American Hero.

Lee Smith glares at him. Mustering a crumpled Charlie Brown smile, Truck slips into a seat in front of the desk.

TRUCK

Thank you for the meeting, Mr. Smith. I've been working real hard. What they done to me, it's wrong. I can show you. Right now.

LEE SMITH

This is MY meeting. I decide what -

TRUCK

I wrote all my research up, nice and pretty. It's ready for prime time. Best dissertation ever. Sir.

Truck eases an Orange Bound Volume (embossed University of Texas crest) out of his backpack and slides it across the expanse of a desk that's much too large for the small room.

LEE SMITH
You're expelled already. The
President rejected all your
appeals. I asked you here to -

Lee Smith focuses on the orange volume. His expression goes from grave to malicious. He tenses up. His hands clench.

LEE SMITH
Where'd you steal the orange U.T.
binder? This is harassment. This is
outrageous.

TRUCK
I know everybody hates math. But,
with all due respect, really? Here?

Lee Smith grabs the volume. Opens it. Scans the pages.

LEE SMITH
The Mars Trajectory as a Four Body
Problem? Haven't we told you often
enough already?
(shouting, livid)
You did not make it to Mars.

Lee Smith RIPS the VOLUME up. Just plain RIPS. Truck stares as the pieces fly into a trashcan across the room.

TRUCK
(quietly, very sad)
The Empire Strikes Back.

Truck grabs a fistful of shirt with one hand, terrified - as Lee Smith YANKS whole sections out. Tosses them into a SHREDDER. With each SHRED, Lee Smith screams:

LEE SMITH
Your lack of scholarship. Lack of
compliance. Lack of progress. Lack
of cooperation with the. Reasonable
requirements of. The faculty.

Truck swallows hard, calling forth the resolve to stand his ground. It's a real struggle. Finally, he grabs a small American flag in a stand on the desk.

TRUCK
With all undue respect. Mr. Lee
Matrix Smith, you're wrong on all
counts. It's your own damn faculty
who are guilty of all the above.

Truck waves the American flag in Lee Smith's face:

TRUCK

This is NOT how you treat a
decorated, disabled veteran. U.S.
Naval Academy alum. Older than
average student - Vietnam Veteran.

LEE SMITH

(to himself)

There are days when I actually like
this job. Others when I absolutely
love it.

TRUCK

My ancestors were on the Mayflower.
We fought the Revolution. Signed
the Declaration of Independence.
This is our country. Our land.

Lee Smith yanks open a filing cabinet, rips out a folder,
extracts a document, and slides it across the large desk.

LEE SMITH

You're banned from contacting
anybody on campus involved in the
most remote way with your research.

Truck grabs the document. Scans the text. Stands up. Makes a
big deal out of putting the paper into his backpack.

TRUCK

Everything you write down can and
will be used against you in a court
of law. Mister Lee Fracking Smith.

LEE SMITH

You have until dawn tomorrow to
Get. The. Hell. Off. My. Campus.

Truck gives Dr. Smith two (vulgar) fingers.

TRUCK

Hook 'Em Horns.

Standing up, Lee Smith grabs Truck. Hauls him to the door.
Physically pushes Truck out. SLAMS the DOOR behind him.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Truck stumbles out of Smith's office. Shoulders his backpack.
Slinks down the dark, empty corridor, past several Hispanics
in the night Cleaning Crew. He mumbles in their direction:

TRUCK

Broken. Ruined. A hundred grand in student loans. Twice that in lost wages if I was still a consulting engineer. *Adios, amigos.*

A few steps later, Truck passes an empty classroom with the lights on. He slows. Stops. Looks into the room. Moves on.

TRUCK

Nobody gave me five minutes to study my Mars research. Five. Fucking. Minutes. That's twenty G's a minute.

Truck passes a second classroom with the lights on. His eyebrows go up. Now there's an idea. Won't get another chance.

He looks both ways. The coast is clear. He steps into the room.

INT. CLASSROOM

Truck shuffles into the room. He stares at blank (black) chalkboards on all sides. He's sad, shoulders drooping.

TRUCK

I should be a professor now. A hundred percent disabled veteran? I could teach anywhere I wanted. Harvard. M.I.T. Texas A and M.

A new strength infuses his countenance. He stands tall.

Truck takes his suit coat off. Loosens his tie.

TRUCK

I could be a big wheel at NASA. Go up on the Space Shuttle like John Glenn. He was a Marine, too.

Truck grabs a piece of WHITE CHALK. Starts DRAWING on the chalkboard: an elaborate sketch of Lee Smith's FACE, glaring at him.

TRUCK

But, NOooo... Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.

Truck draws a thick circle around THE FACE and labels it "INTENSE GRAVITY."

TRUCK

This is more than prejudice. They aren't the least bit perturbed to put it all in writing.

Truck darkens out THE FACE, filling in the Circle of Gravity, and labels the diagram "BLACK HOLE."

TRUCK

It's a cult. A goddamn cult, is what it is.

Suddenly pensive, Truck stops - stares at the diagram, crosses his arms, thinking real hard.

TRUCK

A cult. That means - what?
(eyebrows going up)
Huh. The campus administration's sole purpose in existence is to protect the Big Egos.

Truck draws a circle around the "BLACK HOLE." He labels it "EVENT HORIZON." Steps back.

TRUCK

I was going just fine - until my twenty-page Mars algorithm running on a P.C. beat their almighty Cray supercomputer. Impossible!

Truck draws several straight lines. They're curved as they pass near the Black Hole, but once they intersect the Event Horizon, they crash into the collapsed star.

TRUCK

That's what grad school is about - worship the statistics. Dare to dance with the Math Goddess across the Event Horizon and - you die.

Truck draws several VERY THICK LINES. They're not bent nearly as much when they pass close to the Black Hole.

TRUCK

Statistics is God. How dare you refuse to bow down to The Almighty and suck his phallic symbol.

There's a SMALL NOISE behind him. Truck turns to see several of The Cleaning Crew on their "lunch" break, eating quietly.

TRUCK

Hola. Como estan? Oh, perdon.

Truck points to the messed up chalkboards.

FOREMAN

No problema, señor. Scribble away.
Please. No mind for us.

Truck smiles big, turns - embarrassed, can't draw.

FORMAN

You need help? Have a tequila.

The FOREMAN holds out a small glass full of amber fluid.
Truck steps over and throws it back - chokes, turning red.

Everybody laughs at the funny gringo. Truck smiles. Goes back to the chalkboard. He stands tall. He has an audience now.

Truck sketches a gruesome Lee Smith caricature and labels it "DARTH VADER." Points to the "BLACK HOLE."

TRUCK

Gigante ego. Si? Los dos.

Truck holds his hands around his head, indicating a fat head.
The Foreman translates - The Cleaning Crew nods, eyes big.

TRUCK

This is what is supposed to happen
to me. Big ego. Giant ego.
(pointing at himself)
Me. The gringo grad student.

Truck draws a stick figure falling into the Black Hole -
turns, waits for The Foreman to translate - they laugh.

TRUCK

The Inquisition has condemned me.

Truck draws another figure, thicker chalk - caught in the
Event Horizon - pushed around and around, caught in limbo.

TRUCK

To an abomination of desolation.

The Foreman translates. The Cleaning Crew whispers among
themselves, becoming afraid. Then. They quiet down, staring
at the door. The Foreman points toward the doorway.

FORMAN

Señor? It is the Big Ego man.

Lee Smith stands at the doorway, hands on hips, furious.

Two Campus Security Guards (JUAN, and JUANITA, both Hispanic, 20s) lurk behind Smith, who orders them with righteous fury:

LEE SMITH

Escort this man to The Tower. He
has until dawn to pack his things.
Then escort him off my campus.
He is hereby banned for life.

The security guards grab Truck. Truck breaks free.

The guards back off, hands on their holsters. Hand over his heart, thick with extreme sarcasm, Truck yells at Smith:

TRUCK

(thick British accent)
Your Tower doesn't scare me, Sire.
That horny bastard Henry the Eighth
beheaded two of my direct ancestors
in the Tower of London.
(chin up, shoulders back)
His second wife, Queen Anne Boleyn,
daughter of Elizabeth Howard, First
Lady of Wiltshire.
(stepping in Smith's face)
Then his fifth wife, the lovely
Queen Catherine Howard.
(growling with rage)
Howards die with honor. Sir.

Truck straightens his tie. Puts his suit coat on - slowly.

Truck waves goodbye to The Foreman. The Foreman angles his head toward Lee Smith with a look of disgust - motions with his hands for Truck to continue. Truck pours it on:

TRUCK

All you see in my countenance,
M'Lord, is the ignoble Sir William
Stoker Jekyll of Nemington, another
venerable ancestor I claim with
great distinction. He was -
(grabbing Smith's collar)
Purveyor of Forage for the King's
Horse. In the modern parlance,
honorable shoveler of bull shit.

Lee Smith breaks free and shoves Truck toward the door, into the arms of the campus cops.

LEE SMITH

(furious, to the guards)
Out. Get this crazy, lunatic
engineer off my campus and pronto.

Truck stumbles backward. The guards keep him from falling.

TRUCK

(in his regular voice)

We've the Bard's cousin in my
family tree, too. Who do you have?

(in Lee Smith's face)

Groveling barristers ridding the
unwashed masses of their precious
sunlight?

The two security guards grab Truck. Haul him away.

TRUCK

This is me, as my head bounces away
from the guillotine. Bounce.
Bounce. Smiling because the humble
plebe died with honor and dignity.

As their footsteps fade in the hallway beyond, Lee Smith
glares at the Cleaning Crew, hands on his angry hips.

The Cleaning Crew quickly put their lunch boxes away and
scurry out of the room, heads down.

LEE SMITH

Thank the Good Lord we've seen the
last of that blimey bastard.

Lee Smith sees his caricature on the chalkboard. With a self-
righteous fury, he erases it. Scurries out.

Beat.

A FEMALE FIGURE steps into the room. Looks at the chalkboard.
She hurries back out - turning out the lights as she leaves.

INT. UT TOWER - VINTAGE ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Truck, Juan, and Juanita ride up a rickety old elevator
through the guts of the iconic UT Tower building.

The uppermost floors are open-steel-framed floors for
"RESERVE LIBRARY STACKS." Everything is exposed: structure,
HVAC, electrical conduit, ethernet wires, and lead plumbing.

Juan and Juanita talk in Spanish quietly. Truck is pensive.
Depressed. Avoids eye contact. Jumps at every noise:

It's a long, SQUEAKY, LURCHING ride.

The ELEVATOR LURCHES to a PRECARIOUS stop. Everybody steps
out. A rusty old sign says "THIRTEENTH FLOOR."

INT. 13TH FLOOR

They're in the middle of a floor dedicated to "RESERVE STACKS." Rusty open metal shelves with musty old books. Half a dozen "STUDY NOOKS" for grad students.

On the outside wall are narrow floor-to-ceiling windows. Between the windows are chalkboards (black) from gently-used to vintage-old.

SUPER: "BASED ON A TRUE STORY"

In the center is a Lounge area. A haphazard collection of upholstered chairs. A raggedy old rug. Throw-back furniture left behind by untold generations of grad students.

Truck hustles around to turn on a random selection of floor and table lamps. Everybody stands awkwardly.

TRUCK

Where are my manners?

Truck hustles to a refrigerator, opens it, and points. They hold up their hands.

JUAN AND JUANITA

No, thanks.

Truck holds up his backpack, pointing at his black suit.

TRUCK

The condemned man is going to change clothes, okay? I'll be right back - make yourself comfortable.
Por favor.

Juan and Juanita smile and sit at two chairs in THE LOUNGE.

A FEW MINUTES LATER

Truck hustles into the room (ragged jeans, patched white shirt) - stops:

Juan and Juanita, each nursing a soda, are in quiet conversation. Truck mutters to himself:

TRUCK

That worked out well.

Truck tiptoes by them. Hangs up his black suit by a desk Starts sorting his things into moving boxes.

HALF AN HOUR LATER

Truck stands up - stretches - and steps over to grab a soda from the refrigerator.

Juan and Juanita, seated close on a small sofa, pull apart. Still self-conscious, they stand up. Stretch.

TRUCK

You inspire me to create, M'Lady.

Truck grabs white chalk. Sketches Juanita's face on the nearest chalkboard. She steps back, admiring his work, blushing - subtle glance with Juan.

JUANITA

Excuse me, but I am not this pretty woman. Why, I -

The Female Figure shows out at the stairwell, stops - then steps back into the darkness, unseen but eavesdropping.

TRUCK

But, alas. Sir Knight fumes.

Truck steps over to sketch Juan in chalk. Juanita admires the likeness.

JUANITA

This is indeed the beautiful man I see. You have X-ray vision, *señor*.

Truck steps, back, studying them: Juanita's flattered. Juan's offended. Truck's eyebrows arch, mischievous.

JUAN

Hey, mister. If you're coming on to my lady friend - just - don't.

TRUCK

Perdon. Eso no soy yo. That is not me. Bear with me, here.

Truck gently urges them to be seated facing the chalkboards (the two drawings are on separate chalkboards with a window between them).

TRUCK

Por favor? Un momento. One minute and you will understand.

JUANITA

We do understand English, *señor*.

TRUCK

Please. It's my last day on campus.
I was so looking forward to having
grad students working for me.
Advancing my ideas. Our ideas!

JUANITA

Nobody likes that Lee Smith guy.

JUAN

He treats our people like dirt.

Truck paces back and forth, his hands a flurry of motions.

TRUCK

I want to talk orbits. I have a
great new idea for your research
project, kids. The Gravity of Love.

JUANITA

(quietly)

You are not like any science nerd I
have ever seen on campus.

JUAN

(loud)

I do not like you, no matter if you
speak our lingo or not.

Truck draws a circle. Labels it "MARS." A "TRAJECTORY," a
straight line that approaches Mars - gets bent by gravity.

TRUCK

Watch. The lady sees an interesting
man - and her trajectory changes.
She tries to become closer to him.

Stealthy looks between Juan and Juanita. She's intrigued.
He's burning with machismo. Jealousy.

TRUCK

Men are from Mars, right? Women are
from Venus?

Juan stands up, angry, his hands angry fists at his side:

JUAN

Now wait just one minute, mister.

Truck holds his hands out, defensive.

TRUCK

Whoa. I'm just trying out a theory.
A theory of love.

Truck grabs a bottle of wine from the fridge. Two glasses.
White towel over his arm (like a waiter), serving them.

TRUCK

Come on. Relax. You're witnessing a
new theory of sexuality being
hatched before your very eyes. Is
that exciting or what?

They both glare at Truck.

TRUCK

Grad students? Desperate for a
thesis topic? Hyper-creative
professor throwing them a few
crumbs?

Juanita sips the wine, sitting back. Her body language toward
Juan urges him to calm his jets. He does. Eventually.

TRUCK

When we send a satellite to Mars,
all we want is for it to be
captured by Mars. Like this.

Truck draws a "SPACECRAFT" approaching Mars. It's bent by the
gravity and ends up in an elongated ellipse orbiting Mars.

TRUCK

Once you're in any kind of orbit,
the atmosphere causes the orbit to
circularize. It becomes a little
more circular with each pass.

JUANITA

I see that. The fatal attraction
becomes a relationship. Very nice.

TRUCK

You're in Mar's atmosphere now. As
in blustery conflict. You're
getting to know each other.
Conflict is inevitable. Healthy.
But temporary, until.

JUAN

I warned you, mister. Just -

Juanita jabs Juan in the ribs. He frowns but shuts the F up.

JUANITA

(whispering to Juan)
Listen to this man. Maybe you will
learn to be a romantic. Finally.

Truck steps back, observing, as a heated argument ensues:

JUAN

Who says we are a pair?

Juan stands up. Juanita stands up, too - hands on her hips.

JUANITA

Those looks you give me? Or what.
Am I just a sex thing to you?

Juan backs off. Turns. Juanita stalks him around the room.

JUAN

I only asked to be on the night
shift because -

JUANITA

You. Did. What? So you could get
into my pants when I was half dead
from no sleeping?

JUAN

Like, I never complain when you
fall asleep on the job. Do I?

Truck follows all this, getting a little too close.

TRUCK

Sounds like love to me. All the
hallmarks. Circular orbit. Getting
closer. Are we at - crashdown?

They turn to confront Truck. (Juan pushes Truck away.)

JUAN AND JUANITA

Go away, mister.

Truck backs off. Goes to elaborate on his chalk diagram. Juan points at Truck, his other hand an angry FIST at his side.

JUAN

I will not let this gringo bastard
trick me into giving you a ring.

Juanita breaks off.

They study Truck's diagram. He's added Mars orbiting the
"SUN" on the bottom corner of the chalkboard.

Juanita points at a "LOW-ALTITUDE CIRCULAR ORBIT" around Mars
(last in a sequence of ellipses getting more circular).

JUANITA

Please, mister. We are in this
stupid circle orbit around macho
Mars. We have been there for months
now. Months and months and months.

(fury toward Juan)

This is driving me crazy.

JUAN

Hey. Maybe I like you crazy.
Keeping you always guessing.

JUANITA

That's my job! And. And. I will not
do that gringo friends-with-
benefits thing. The next time you
say that -

JUAN

I said no such thing... Did I?

TRUCK

Doh! Friends with benefits. Wow.
How do we fit that in?

Truck studies the diagram. Draws a moon orbiting Mars. He's
pensive, sketching - Juan and Juanita gang up on him.

TRUCK

Major complication. But, wait -
look. I have an idea.

Truck draws a figure-eight-shaped orbit with the Sun and Mars
inside each loop.

TRUCK

It's called a free-return orbit.

JUANITA

No. Free. Returns!
(fury on fire)
You two bastards are in cahoots.

Juanita glares at Juan - Truck. Truck points to the diagram.

TRUCK

See how this free-return loop
intersects with the circular Mars
orbit? That's moving -

JUANITA

Around the Sun. As in the Son of
God? Why do you people always
assume we're Catholic like that?

JUAN

A goddamn long-term commitment?
Not. Gonna. Happen.

They both glare at Truck, who backs away from them, smiling and - unable to escape their fury. He begs them.

TRUCK

Please? It's just a theory. Brand
new. Hot off the press. Obviously.
(quiet, smiling)
Needs a little - refinement?

JUANITA

My love is not an effing theory.

JUAN

How dare you insult my girl.

TRUCK

This is good. Grad students are
supposed to be emotional about
their research topics. Does this
mean it's a go?

They both pull out their Police Batons. Ready to whack him.
Truck holds his hands over his head. Cringing.

TRUCK

This is where you say thank you
very much, Professor LeForge. It is
a most wonderful research topic
that we wish to pursue with a great
interest.

JUANITA

Stop talking like we were
immigrants. We were born here just
like you.

Juan grabs Juanita by the elbow, squaring off:

JUAN

Now you're getting personal with
the bastard?

A SQUEAKY DOOR OPENS from the stairwell next to the elevator.

Everybody freezes. Turns: It's the Female Figure, alias
BROOKLYN (25, died blonde hair, Newfoundlander, sublime
accent). She steps out, exhausted.

TRUCK

Who are you?

Brooklyn sits down. Breathing hard. Wheezing. Takes her short heels off. Massages her feet. Talks toward Truck:

BROOKLYN

B.J. Gushue. The Daily Texan.

Truck points toward a cluttered desk across the room.

TRUCK

Wendy's desk is over there. She's always forgetting to turn in her stories. Doh! Had to write a couple for her my own self.

Brooklyn squares off versus Truck.

BROOKLYN

You did what? Which columns?

TRUCK

Sure. The one about the Aggie bonfire collapse, blaming it on every licensed Professional Engineer in the state of Texas?

Brooklyn staggers back, stunned.

BROOKLYN

But. Wendy got an award for that story. A college Pulitzer Prize.

TRUCK

Made me proud, too. Isn't that what professors do for their students? My favorite was the one about The End of Science book, consumed by evil statistical methods.

BROOKLYN

Plagiarism? Cheating? You -

TRUCK

I know I'm not a professor yet, but I can pretend. I can get ready for it. And - hey, Wendy's good people. She deserved that big award, as bad as my grammar and spelling is.

BROOKLYN

(barely restrained)

It's okay to have confidential sources. But not sources that write the whole goddamn story for you.

Brooklyn stares at Truck, her mouth agape. Her foot taps.
Sweat breaks out on Truck's brow. He collapses into a chair.

TRUCK

Oh, crap. This isn't about Wendy.
It's - oh, man. It's about me. I
plumb forgot all about - the
university. All this - crap.

JUAN

Yeah. About that. We need to pack
you up and vamoose you from campus.

Truck deflates, agonizing. He appeals to Juan and Juanita:

TRUCK

Give me a little more time, will
you? *Por favor?*

Juan and Juanita have a hushed conversation in Spanish.

TRUCK

(perking up)

Isn't that interesting, how you two
revert to your native tongue when -

They break up. Juan steps into Truck's face, grabbing him.

JUAN

We have to usher the concert. We'll
be back at dawn. If you aren't out
by then, we'll. Take. You. Out.

TRUCK

You're going to a concert? What a
great place to have fun. I hope -

JUAN AND JUANITA

SHUT. UP.

They turn and get in the elevator. Juanita yells at Truck:

JUANITA

The door downstairs will be locked.
Nowhere to go - but crazy.

Juan slams the elevator door closed. The ELEVATOR disappears,
CRANKING and WHEEZING in fits.

BROOKLYN

What were the cops doing here?
(quietly)
You have a nice drawing hand.

Brooklyn studies the caricatures on the chalkboards.

BROOKLYN
Reminds me of some of Wendy's
political cartoons... Oh, God.
(quiet urgency)
I don't want to know.

Brooklyn steps over to the coffee table, pours a wine in one of the glasses Juan and Juanita were using, and downs it.

BROOKLYN
It's pretty hard to get the campus
police so riled up.
(sotto voice)
Although I'm not surprised.

She grabs the wine bottle and drains it. Wipes her lips.

TRUCK
I told them about a new theory I've
been working on.

BROOKLYN
I heard that. Interesting. But I
think they were about to beat the
living crap out of you.

TRUCK
A lot of that going around.

BROOKLYN
Rewind. They locked the doors? I'm
fracking stuck here?

TRUCK
A prisoner in the Tower of London.
Imagine that if you will.

BROOKLYN
Yeah, I heard that part, too.

TRUCK
You've been spying on me.

BROOKLYN
Just getting background.
(quietly)
Such are the consequences when you
contact the state media.

Brooklyn gets up. Pads over to Truck in her stocking feet.
Her fists are balls of tensile anger.

BROOKLYN
Speaking of which. It's hotter than
hell in here.

TRUCK
Sixteen floors? Heat rises?
(quietly)
I hope you're miserable.

BROOKLYN
That wasn't the kind of heat I was
referring to.

TRUCK
Sorry. I don't do subtext. My brain
isn't wired for it.

BROOKLYN
I've never seen a grad student
escorted off campus by the cops.
What the F did you do?

Truck stands up. Confronts her.

TRUCK
Oh, hell. I just realized. You're
The Daily Texan. A stealth agent of
the evil university bureaucracy.
Here to finish the job.

White towel over one arm (like a waiter), he implores:

TRUCK
Allow me to show you to the
guillotine. Relax. It's painless.
Just a few seconds seeing the world
upside down as your head bounces.

Truck bends way over. Looks at her with his head upside down.

Ignoring him, she surveys the room - sees the moving boxes.

BROOKLYN
You're moving out? Tomorrow's
Thanksgiving. Shouldn't you be -
you know - all that family crap?

TRUCK
We canceled Thanksgiving.

AWKWARD MOMENT

as she glares at him. Truck takes a step back.

BROOKLYN
I'm so not leaving without a story.

TRUCK
Another grad student singled out
with extreme malice. What's that,
the bottom of page six?

Truck hurries to his desk. Resumes packing his things. She
stands over him. Arms crossed. Full of authoritative venom.

BROOKLYN
Everybody thinks they're wronged
without cause. It's a matter of
perspective, though.

TRUCK
Three-plus years in grad school?
Excellent grades. Disabled veteran.
All the hateful things they did?

Her demeanor softens imperceptibly.

BROOKLYN
They expelled you? Your email just
said you were - having issues.

TRUCK
That was two weeks ago.

BROOKLYN
Nobody goes from problems to
dismissal in two lousy weeks.

Truck shows her the letter from Lee Smith, J.D. He fingers
the embossed University letterhead.

TRUCK
My eviction notice. Ouch. From the
Chief Legal Officer of the
University of Texas System. Alias
Dr. Lee Smith, J.D.

She grabs the document, dons glasses. Scans it quickly.

BROOKLYN
No probation? No remedial classes.
Oh, foot they barred you from
contacting anybody on campus.

Her knees get wobbly. She stumbles. Collapses at the table.

BROOKLYN

My editor said I'd be in and out in
no time. The best-made plans.

Brooklyn pulls out a cell phone. Texts a quick message.

TRUCK

I didn't mean to mess with your
Thanksgiving, lady.

BROOKLYN

I'm from Newfoundland. We don't
celebrate your Thanksgiving.

Truck looks at Brooklyn. He starts to talk - chokes up.

BROOKLYN

It must be hard, having it end so
quickly. Grad school. Your dreams.

TRUCK

End of my engineering career? My
entire professional life? Hard
doesn't even come close, lady.

Brooklyn grabs the water pitcher. Starts to pour. Stops.

BROOKLYN

Got anything stronger than city
water up here?

Truck points to the fridge. He gets back to packing.

BROOKLYN

I was supposed to cover the
Republic One concert tonight.

She finds a bottle of wine. Pours a glass. Steps over to his
desk - studies him: bloodshot eyes, brimming with tears.

TRUCK

Used to like their hit song, Love
Runs Out. Not so much anymore.

Brooklyn backs away. Sits at the table. Puts glasses on.
Pulls a few documents out of her backpack - studies them
quietly as he packs.

BROOKLYN

Do you really want me to publish
their point of view? When I
interviewed Dean Trotsky the other
day -

Truck stands up and faces her, furious.

TRUCK

Dean Trotsky? That Whore of
Babylon. What did she tell you?

BROOKLYN

Nothing that your graduate advisor,
Dr. Watts didn't already -

Truck steps right up to her, shaking with rage.

TRUCK

Watts? That back-stabbing son of a
bitch.

Brooklyn takes her glasses off. Puts the papers away. Sits
quietly. Observing Truck's now frantic pace of packing.

BROOKLYN

I can listen to the concert online
and do my report from here. We can
talk after the holiday break.

She steps over and puts a BUSINESS CARD on his desk. He takes
one look at the card and RIPS it to shreds - into the trash.

He turns and looks at her, cheeks wet with tears.

TRUCK

Mom's birthday was yesterday. We -
we always had her party on
Thanksgiving.
(choking back feelings)
My sisters, brother - all the grand
kids. She - Mom, we had her funeral
earlier today.

Truck points: Looking, she sees a black suit. Hanging by
Truck's desk. Black leather shoes on the floor.

BROOKLYN

Oh, dear. I'm sorry for your loss.
(back to business)
This is so not a good time. When
you're ready, we'll talk. I'll just
go and do the concert. God bless.

She sits down in a lounge chair. Opens her laptop. Pulls out
headphones.

Truck stands up, angrier than ever.

TRUCK

God? That bastard. The day I was expelled. A year ago almost to the day. When I went in to take my oral qualifying exam.

Brooklyn stops - closes the laptop. Stares at him. Puzzled.

BROOKLYN

Don't blame God for your own -

TRUCK

I was expelled. The same day Mom found out she had terminal bone cancer. And now another double-doom catastrophe.

BROOKLYN

If you were expelled a year ago -

TRUCK

It's taken all this time for my appeals to work their way through the University's lower intestines.
(quietly)
And what do I get? Fecal matter.

Brooklyn turns away to hide her smile. Sobering up:

BROOKLYN

Rewind. You passed your written qualifying exams?

TRUCK

Last summer. Three killer exams in one week. Talk about eliminating the feeble-minded in one swell foop.

Truck's hands are a nervous bundle. Wringing papers, tossing them away - wringing a cloth. A mangled old tennis ball.

BROOKLYN

That's cruel and unusual. Everybody else on campus takes one each semester. Even one each year.
(quietly)
Excuse me the correction, but it's one fell swoop.

Truck rips into the tennis ball. He's subtle about it his stress reactions. But she clues right in.

BROOKLYN

Huh. You might be worth the effort
after all.

Brooklyn pulls out a steno pad to take some notes. Dons her
eyeglasses. Looks over the top at him:

BROOKLYN

You set up a dissertation committee
after passing the qualifying exams?

TRUCK

I interviewed with five orbital
mechanics professors. They all
agreed to be on my committee.

BROOKLYN

You only need four.

Truck gets up and moves to the "SUN-MARS" diagram, and
elaborates on the Figure 8-shaped "FREE RETURN TRAJECTORY"
(the SUN and MARS are inside the loops of Figure 8).

(Whenever Truck gets overwhelmed he draws on the chalkboard.)

TRUCK

Dr. Watts. He barred me from
registering until I passed the oral
exam. So I signed up a backup in
case one couldn't come.

BROOKLYN

He didn't mention that in our
interview. Just that your advisor,
Dr. Brown -

TRUCK

Dr. Brown. That effing jackass
wouldn't help me get ready for the
oral exam, with practice sessions,
like they always do.

BROOKLYN

Your own advisor? Did you offend
him. Too?

TRUCK

Talk about mega stress. Under a
sudden-death registration deadline,
no help preparing for the three-
hour oral exam. No nothing.

Truck works on the drawing. The detail is pristine. His pace
frantic. Desperate.

Truck labels the Sun as "EVIL MR. EGO," the Figure 8 loop as "GRAVITY," and Mars as "NO ESCAPE."

BROOKLYN

When you went into the department
to take your oral qualifying exam -

TRUCK

Nobody showed up. I was expelled on
the spot. Actually. They'd sent me
a letter. Expelled days before.

BROOKLYN

They dismissed you with a letter?

TRUCK

Are you deaf as well as dumb?

She stops cold. Her empathy evaporates into resentment.

BROOKLYN

I can see now why they expelled
you. Rash. Rude. Undignified.

Truck stops - checks his watch - panics.

TRUCK

Stop stalling me, lady. Damn, I'll
never get out of this rabbit hole.
The lights go out at midnight.

BROOKLYN

You do have a flare with the words.

TRUCK

Why doesn't anybody ever believe
anything I ever say? Hello? I don't
speak with a forked tongue.

Truck looks at Brooklyn. At his desk: open packing boxes,
papers, and documents scattered in a melee of disorder.

BROOKLYN

Don't you call me lady.

Truck finds a letter. Slams it on the table in front of her.
She picks it up. A little afraid. Scans it.

TRUCK

Screw your expose in the campus
paper. Nobody will read it anyway.

THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

BROOKLYN

Ah. So the lights really do go out at midnight. You seem to be basking in a surreal glow, *mon ami*.

Other than some moonlight through the windows, they're in complete darkness. An ORANGE outside light FLASHES ON. Now they're bathed in a surreal orange glow.

TRUCK

They turn all the lights in the tower off. Then turn on a few orange ones to show a giant number one in The Tower.

BROOKLYN

There should be a psychological disorder for this kind of football mania.

They fidget in the darkness, avoiding eye contact.

TRUCK

Yeah. If they spent a fraction of the money on the graduate college that they do on football -

BROOKLYN

So now what do we do?

TRUCK

Wait. For our backup generator to start up. Time, tide, and grad student engineers wait for no man.

BROOKLYN

What good is a -

An EMERGENCY GENERATOR KICKS on. A few essentials come on - one light. The refrigerator. One desk task light.

BROOKLYN

Lousy engineering grad student.

Brooklyn steps over to one of the windows: a spectacular view of downtown Austin, Texas - from high up in the Tower.

BROOKLYN

What peeves you about me? Scared I'll rip your lame story to shreds and condemn you to ignominy?

Truck hurries over to the fridge. Pulls out a couple of beers - hesitates. Speaking to himself:

TRUCK
Time for the liquid courage.

BROOKLYN
Finally. Blessed relief.

Brooklyn holds out her hand. Truck stares at her hand. Puts the beers back in the fridge. Slams the door.

TRUCK
That's odd. I had an appointment with a college reporter. Saw her briefly - where's she off to?

Truck ransacks the place, looking for the missing person. She pulls off her jacket and loosens her collar.

BROOKLYN
Angry grad student? Dime a dozen. Engineer? Boring. A fearless schizophrenic? Priceless.

TRUCK
Who told you -

BROOKLYN
Dean Trotzky. Dr. Watts. Dr. Brown.

TRUCK
That's privileged information. Privacy Act privileged.

BROOKLYN
I know that. That's why I'm here. Why are these people so desperate to get rid of you?

TRUCK
Everybody already hates a math savant. Add schizophrenia. And it's full-blown Halloween. Ma'am.

Truck opens several windows all the way. Soon there's a good breeze. Freezing cold air. Their breath shows.

BROOKLYN
Did you just ma'am me?

TRUCK
Common courtesy offends you?
(sotto voice)
They had to send a psych major.

BROOKLYN
Whatever gave you that idea?

TRUCK
Like, obvious.

BROOKLYN
You make an incredibly astute
observation based on absolutely no
evidence.

TRUCK
Not really. Nobody but a psych
major would dare hold a normal
conversation with a schizophrenic.

BROOKLYN
Maybe she's just bored.

She massages her sore feet. Truck acts offended.

TRUCK
Who said you could relax?

She's suddenly afraid - smiles when she sees him smiling.

BROOKLYN
My dissertation is about the
psychology of interviews. Mind if I
trouble you for background, *garcon*?

She holds out her empty wine glass. He just stares at it.

TRUCK
A journalist? I could handle. A
psych major? Back to square one.

Brooklyn nods. A little bit apprehensive.

TRUCK
I'm not insulting you. Just your
whole - profession.

She nods - eyebrows arched, trying to figure him out.

BROOKLYN
Are you on meds?

TRUCK
Are you kidding me? Give up this
vast, unlimited resource for
creativity? Perish the thought.

Truck flinches at an imperceptibly subtle sound. Again.

TRUCK

(quietly)

It's just that, well - there are multiple reasons why I'm anxious for your - health. Ma'am. Multiple.

Truck looks around, cringing - looking every which way but at Brooklyn.

BROOKLYN

My health? Is that a threat?

All around them, small SHADOWS RIP through the gloom. A RIVER of LIVING DARKNESS... Truck gets close to her, hovering.

TRUCK

Full darkness outside now. Cold air. Frisky critters. Hungry.

She looks around. Getting scared. Small SQUEAKING SOUNDS. In her face. A FLUTTERING of small WINGS. SQUEAK. SQUEAK.

TRUCK

Sometimes even the - most diabolical belfry has - er, bats?

BROOKLYN

Bats? Here? Are you joking me?

Brooklyn looks around as the SQUEAKING now ZOOMS all around.

TRUCK

Meet Oscar, Miss - I didn't get your name.

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn. But you can call me terrified.

TRUCK

Oscuris Choroptera. Bred to be incapable of carrying rabies. Except other bats sense they're different - and cannibalize them.

Frantic, Brooklyn grabs her jacket. Puts it on. Peels her collar over her neck. Hands jammed into her jacket pockets.

BROOKLYN

Vampire bats? Blood-sucking demons?

Truck stands by her, waving his arms - so the bats stay away. He watches her with one eye. Smiling at her consternation.

TRUCK

Unlax. They're not the vampire kind. They just eat bugs. Not interested in your blood, lady. Gag me with a - boom stick.

BROOKLYN

Small comfort. No comfort at all.

TRUCK

Probably send the poor little buggers into fatal convulsions.

Truck watches Brooklyn as her eyes follow the SQUEAKING bat sounds. The images fade, stop - complete silence.

Truck hits a power-strip on-switch.

TRUCK

Is she allergic to - light?

More lamps come on. Brooklyn stares at him, quite angry.

BROOKLYN

How small of a zero are you? Watching me freak out - at those - revenants. Enjoying it.

TRUCK

Oscars? How can hungry three-inch chiropterans be monsters? Ravenous.

BROOKLYN

I demand you. Stop this already.

Brooklyn hurries to close the two windows. Truck stops her.

TRUCK

Wait. They can't get back home.

Frantic, Brooklyn pushes him away. Slams the windows closed.

TRUCK

That's so cruel. This is their home. You can't just go and -

BROOKLYN

Interview the campus vampire?

TRUCK

They won't be back until sunrise anyway.

(quiet resolve)

I'll find a way. Sure I will.

BROOKLYN

Who has pet bats? What does the building facility manager say -

TRUCK

Typical shrink, assuming the mantle of invincible authority. Where are my manners? I've upset Miss *Mademoiselle Newfie*.

Gallant, Truck fills her wine glass and offers it to her.

BROOKLYN

No more alcohol. My head's a tornado.

(two beats)

No wait, my blood pressure's pounding my heart to smithereens. Give me that.

Brooklyn swipes the glass from him. Guzzles it down. Holds the empty glass out for a refill. He obliges her.

ON HER THIRD GLASS,

Brooklyn slows down. Sips. Sips again. Hmm. Very delicate.

BROOKLYN

This is some kind of fine *vino*. Who's wine cellar did you rob?

TRUCK

Courtesy of Mom's wake. Cajun style.

Truck grabs a big pizza box from the desk next to his and brings it over to a small table near a microwave.

TRUCK

You'll get blasted drinking on an empty stomach like that.

BROOKLYN

My family, they been drinking wine since I was a baby. Well, cheap wine. Whoa. REALLY cheap wine.

TRUCK

Don't drink myself. Alcohol dries my eyes out. Got extreme dry eye.

(quietly)

That's why I can't take psycho-active meds because they all dry your eyes out. I'd go blind.

Truck inserts two slices on a plate into the microwave. Sets the timer. Gets a glass of water. Sits down with her.

TRUCK

Speaking of Mom. She was a shrink, too. We hatched an idea for a new psychology theory. Maybe you could -

Half-drunk, Brooklyn holds her hands up. Pulls out her steno pad. With a flourish. Gets ready to write.

BROOKLYN

I see a dozen possible stories here. Some bad. Others worse.

There's a SQUEAKING WHEEL sound from another desk. Brooklyn freaks out - huddles down.

TRUCK

Relax, lady. It's not more bats.

Truck steps over. Grabs a small cage. Shows it to her.

TRUCK

Eduardo's desk. He's a biology post-doc. Rescued Bevo from prescription death by experimental meds.

A WHITE MOUSE (BEVO) runs a SPRINT on his little WHEEL.

TRUCK

He smells the pizza. Happens every time. Isn't he cute?

BROOKLYN

I don't suppose y'all have a permit for your little zoo here?

TRUCK

There you go again, deferring judgment to - higher authority.

Truck acts outraged - paranoid - (smiling), puts the cage down. Opens the door - steps back.

Truck takes Brooklyn by the elbow and eases her back into the shadows.

TRUCK

Be real quiet. Quiet as a graveyard. And watch.

They wait in the shadows. Bevo keeps hitting the TREADMILL like a real fitness pro, not noticing the door is open.

The MICROWAVE BELL DINGS.

Bevo stops. Sniff-sniffing. Sees the cage is open. Runs to the door. Makes a b-line for the microwave.

(Bevo sits on his haunches next to the microwave, waiting.)

Truck eases carefully over to the microwave, very carefully opens it - nary a sound - pulls the pizza out, and hands Bevo a sausage.

Beve grabs the meat in his mouth. Runs back to his cage. Ducks inside. Chows down.

Brooklyn laughs (a little too effusive, slightly drunk), tears flowing down her cheeks. They settle down for a bite to eat.

BROOKLYN

Something tells me Eduardo doesn't have a very bright future in medical research.

TRUCK

I hope not. He's too smart for that kind of work. He wants to teach. Big heart, Eduardo.

BROOKLYN

I'm guessing Oscar was another shelter animal? As in Oscars.

TRUCK

We have a cat, too. Jaxx by name. Nobody can figure out where she does the litter-box thing. I'm hoping it's in the faculty lounge.

Truck grabs a small photo album to show her.

CLOSE ON PHOTO ALBUM

Photos of a giant ORANGE AND WHITE CAT in sundry settings.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Jaxx is a neighborhood stray but in a building. Everybody in the Tower knows her - up, down. She answers to a dozen different names.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

You could track her. Don't you aerospace types have G.P.S. tracking gizmos?

TRUCK (V.O.)

Who wants to take the mystery out of cats? Why even try?

TRUCK (V.O.)

I'd like to fit Jaxx with a tiny microphone. Find out what nefarious things all the administrators say in this godforsaken building.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

An hour ago I would have been outraged to hear you say that. After reading the lawyer's hate letter -

TRUCK (V.O.)

Why bother? It's all in writing now, on University letterhead. The lawyers will have a field day. Manna from Heaven. Hallelujah.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

You seem to accept your -
psychiatric history with - aplomb.
No offense meant, mister -

BACK TO SCENE

Truck holds out his hand. She stares at his hand. Indecisive.

TRUCK

T.K. LeForge at your service.
Everybody calls me Truck. Long story. Hate plumbs. Yuck.

Brooklyn takes his hand and gives it a good, solid shake.

BROOKLYN

See there? I won't bite. Then spew out all of your vile, caustic blood from a neck puncture.

TRUCK

I'm glad we're talking.

Brooklyn pulls a laptop out of her backpack. Opens it up. Goes to The Daily Texan website online.

BROOKLYN

These exit interviews never last long.

TRUCK

Jot down a few notes. Commiserate.
Wish me good luck. B-bye.

BROOKLYN

Five minutes. Ten. Max.

TRUCK

Yeah. The University thought they'd
get rid of me real fast, too. That
was a year ago and a whole stack of
appeals and formal documents.

BROOKLYN

I still need to cover the Republic
One concert. Do you mind? The Daily
Texan streams it live.

Truck scoots over to a box of computer parts. Gets a long
audio cord. Plugs her laptop into a stereo. Turns it on.

TRUCK

Trying to lower my defenses with
some rock and roll music, are you?

She gets the concert on the stereo. Turns it down low.

BROOKLYN

I'm not worried about your
defenses. It's your offenses that
got my brain bamfoozled.

TRUCK

Dr. Watts was the same way. Dr.
Brown. Dean Trotzky. Lee Smith.
(deep voice)
What the F are you still doing here
on our campus? Just. Go. Away.

Brooklyn scans through several documents on the laptop.

BROOKLYN

I have all their documents. I
thought for sure you were three
sheets to the wind.
(quiet fear)
Suddenly they're all so lying.

TRUCK

You're confused after an hour.
(undisguised rage)
They've been doing this Houdini to
me for four. Damn. Years.

Flustered, Brooklyn looks around. Unsure how to move forward.
The CONCERT MUSIC starts on the laptop.

BROOKLYN
Apparently they don't rock and
roll.

Truck grabs some binoculars. Turns out the lamp, moving over
to a window: looking outside, down on the campus.

TRUCK
You can see the concert hall from
here. Quite the crowd.

Truck hands her the binoculars. She takes them, looking.

BROOKLYN
I never figured to see the campus
from up here on the suicide floor.
Very nice.

Truck stares at her empty wine glass.

TRUCK
Don't drink, not even socially. Not
that this here is a socially.

BROOKLYN
This is where you run to see if you
have any more wine in the fridge.

Truck brings her a fresh bottle.

BROOKLYN
When I pop the cork will another
creature lurk out of the shadows?

TRUCK
You mean George? The tower ghost?

BROOKLYN
Lots of Chinese where I live now,
Toronto. On Halloween, they have a
Happy Ghost festival. Costumes and
parties. Very much a big fun.

TRUCK
Party all you like, lady. For me,
this is no fiesta.

They scoot chairs over to the windows (one person sitting in
front of each window), watching the nightlife below - passing
the binoculars back and forth.

TRUCK

If you could understand my
research, you'd understand why I'm
so damn outraged.

She pretends to ignore him. He talks louder.

TRUCK

I can see it clearly in my brain.
It's really not that complicated -
doesn't even take math equations.

He's a nervous wreck. She steps forward. Puts a chalk into
his hand. Gently. Pushes him toward the chalkboard.

BROOKLYN

I saw your psychology diagrams
downstairs. Heard you talking psych
with the guards - I'm all ears.

TRUCK

Chalk. Chalkboard. It's just so -
one-dimensional. How can I -

She watches his hands play out the stress on his mind.

Seeing her watching him, Truck steps up to the chalkboard,
adding more detail to his Sun-Mars figure-8 diagram.

BROOKLYN

Is that a real orbital?

TRUCK

Any two large bodies have that
orbit. Sun and Mars. Sun and
Jupiter. Earth and -

BROOKLYN

I get it. Free return. Nice. No
energy required, I assume.

TRUCK

Put a spacecraft in the Mars return
loop and it will stay there
forever. No external thrust needed.

Truck draws over the Figure 8, round and round Sun and Mars.

BROOKLYN

(quietly)
Love never runs out.

Truck writes "EARTH" by the SUN and "MOON" by MARS.

TRUCK

The same gravity phenomena exists
around all large celestial bodies.
Stars. Planets. Moons.

BROOKLYN

So not the interview I expected.

His eyes look into the distance, losing their focus.

TRUCK'S THOUGHTS - HOUSTON - NASA MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Truck stares at an orbital diagram of the flight path from
Earth to the moon.

The figure-8-shaped chalkboard diagram around EARTH and the
MOON is on the giant screen overhead.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

That figure eight exists around
Earth and the Moon?

The orbital loop becomes a COMPUTER-GENERATED TRAJECTORY: as
the moon moves in its orbit, the figure-8 moves with it so
the figure-8 always has Earth and Moon inside the loops.

TRUCK (V.O.)

A spacecraft remains on that loop
forever, no fuel required.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

The loop orbits with the moon all
the while? That's so way cool.

The APOLLO 13 SPACECRAFT shows up on the live 3D plot above.

There's an EXPLOSION on the far side of the moon, and the
APOLLO 13 icon starts FLASHING RED.

TRUCK (V.O.)

If Apollo 13 hadn't been on that
free-return loop, they would never
have made it home.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

The movie made it sound like the
people in Houston saved the day.

Fist raised, Truck YELLS into the NASA amphitheater:

TRUCK (V.O.)

Celestial mechanics saved Apollo
13, not NASA.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck's still looking upward, fist raised - as he slowly realizes where he is.

Truck stares at the chalkboard: Full of sketches and trajectories matching those in his flashback.

Brooklyn frowns deeply. Grabs the floor light. Pulls it near her chair so she can take notes. She's all business now.

BROOKLYN

So, what you're telling me is that
this love loop can exist between
any two egos?

Truck steps over to the mouse cage - Bevo is sound asleep - gently closes the door, brings the cage over to Eduardo's desk, and covers it with a cloth.

TRUCK

I wouldn't know.

BROOKLYN

Tell me what I'm seeing here.

Truck goes to warm up another round of pizza slices in the small microwave.

He waits by the microwave and pulls the pizza out before the BELL RINGS.

TRUCK

We'll be here all night if I tell
you the whole story.

BROOKLYN

Till you exhaust your litany of
little horrors - when they come
back home to roost?

Truck grabs a soda from the fridge and brings her the pizza.

She picks at hers, then slides hers over when he's done. She listens to the concert, taking notes on the laptop.

A FULL MOON hovers front and center, projecting a warm light into the space. She sips her wine, staring at the moon.

When he's done, Truck grabs a case from beside his desk, unpacks a telescope, and sets it up at a window.

TRUCK

Always thought college was where
you could talk about ideas free
from retaliation - retribution.

(quietly)

Wrong on both counts.

Truck moves aside and lets her look through the telescope.

BROOKLYN

To think the Apollo astronauts
actually made a rendezvous there.

She zeros in on the concert venue and people mulling outside
at intermission.

TRUCK

You're dreading the night, aren't
you? Wishing you were at the
concert. Cursing your luck to lose
out on not just one story but two.

She looks up and confronts him:

BROOKLYN

No more than you, upset at my
derrière ruining your last night on
campus with Oscar and Bevo. Jaxx
the tower cat. Goodbye zoo.

Truck is deeply hurt. He turns away so she doesn't notice.

BROOKLYN

For certain. I didn't just say
that. I'm sorry. Really I am.

Truck stops over. Takes the cloth off of Bevo's cage: the
little white mouse glows NEON GREEN in the darkness.

TRUCK

This is what your hero professors
did in the name of science. Mice
are nocturnal. Bevo wouldn't
survive five minutes in the real
world.

BROOKLYN

You made a home for him. For them.

Brooklyn is horrified. She steps over and covers up the mouse
cage. Opens a window wide.

TRUCK

They banned me from campus, from
getting references, from working as
an engineer ever again. I might as
well be a neon-green alien, myself.

Truck yanks open the fridge door. Grabs a six-pack of beer.
Crashes into one of the lounge chairs.

Gently, she takes the beers from him and puts them back in
the fridge.

BROOKLYN

Talk. If it's newsworthy, I'll
print it. If not - you'll know you
belong on psychoactive meds.
(quietly)

She offers you a win-win situation.

Truck pulls the cushions out of the sofa. He makes a bed on
the floor. He pulls sheets. A pillow out of a locker. Makes
the bed - steps back, points:

TRUCK

Clean sheets. Sleep your way out of
the psychopath's nightmare. I've
got to - to organize all my papers.
Good night. Scary dreams.

Truck grabs a folded moving box. Rips tape off. Fastens the
box. Gets back to packing his BOOKS and PAPERS.

BROOKLYN

Is it my Newfoundland genes, or is
it getting warmer in here?

Brooklyn sits on the bed and rolls up her sleeves.

TRUCK

Once they close the doors
downstairs, with no people traffic -
no heat escaping. It all just goes
up. The heat. All sixteen floors of
it.

Frowning, Truck gets back to his packing. She mutters:

BROOKLYN

The things I have to do to dress a
story out people.

Brooklyn loosens up her blouse, showing some serious skin. He
ignores her. She sits at the table, sipping her wine, staring
his way.

BROOKLYN

There's only one way we can both
stop this belligerence of words.
(assertive demand)
Talk to the *Newfie*.

TRUCK

I've suffered enough humility on
this wicked campus. Now I'm
supposed to entertain the very
people who destroyed me?

BROOKLYN

You're a mouse that glows neon-
green in the dark. The world is
full of alley cats ready to pounce.
That's me. Boom. Mouse a la carte.

Truck smiles, despite his best effort not to.

TRUCK

I've been fighting them for two
years. And that's just the official
part, on the record.

BROOKLYN

The damned invariably show me their
hate diary. Look, lady. Still don't
believe me?

TRUCK

Sorry to disappoint, buy all I have
is documents. Lots of them.

Truck opens up a filing cabinet. Pulls out a stack of papers.
Hands them to her. He turns on the lamp. Holds it nearby so
she can read them.

TRUCK

I couldn't file suit against my
last job, consulting engineering,
when they fired me because I had no
documentation. Not this time.

Brooklyn scans the papers quickly - one after the other,
becoming more incredulous with each one.

BROOKLYN

Every last one on official
University letterhead. How the F
did you pull that off?

Brooklyn looks at him, absolutely stunned.

BROOKLYN

Why the hell didn't you show these to me in the first place?
Documentation is every reporter's superpower.

TRUCK

Aren't you going to read them?

BROOKLYN

You aren't the first person I've interviewed who was screwed over by the evil empire.

Brooklyn waves the documents at him, her hand shaking.

BROOKLYN

However. You ARE the first person with this kind of documentation.

Truck looks away, clamming up. Brooklyn sets the papers aside. Turns the light out.

BROOKLYN

I think you're afraid to win.
Afraid of your - condition. Afraid of - their damnation.

TRUCK

What condition? Who said I had anything the least bit wrong with me?

Brooklyn points to his hands wringing a ragged cloth in his lap - to the elaborate doodles on the chalkboard.

TRUCK

This - *disturbia* isn't half as bad as people's reaction to it.

BROOKLYN

Your definition of win is the Ph.D. you earned and gold-plated references to get a job with NASA.

Truck stands up and paces - ruminating.

TRUCK

I don't need references. Just the diploma I earned. I can manage the rest, rated at a hundred percent Permanent and Total but the V.A.

BROOKLYN
One zero zero? Ouch.

Brooklyn shivers a little. Truck grabs a wool blanket and hands it to her. She wraps it around her shoulders.

TRUCK
Real low humidity today. After
sunset, the mercury plummets.

Brooklyn stands at the window, admiring the nighttime cityscape, the full moon hovering above.

BROOKLYN
Schizophrenics are absolutely
terrified of the strong emotions
people show toward them.

They watch as random BATS CHASE across the moon.

TRUCK
All bats want to do is zoom out
into the night and eat the
mosquitoes that people hate so
much. All manner of bugs. Pests.

BROOKLYN
Baby-green ratatouille, minding his
own business? Happy as can be to
have fresh wood shavings for a bed
and a treadmill. Pizza.

Truck finds a couple more cushions and puts one behind her to rest her back, and another for him.

He pulls his shoes off and settles down beside her; both sitting up, staring at the full moon, shades of grays from high cloud cover.

TRUCK
Life's a box full of hand grenades.

Beat.

BROOKLYN
You passed the first stand-up-to-
her-venom test. Why quit now? It's
all downhill from here.

TRUCK
Haven't I fought enough already?

Brooklyn waves the documents in his face.

BROOKLYN

You want me to quote them? In broad daylight? On page one. That's what The Daily Texan does. Nail your coffin shut and seal it forever.

TRUCK

Nobody would believe it. They'd laugh at you. Then fire you. Then how will you pay the rent?

BROOKLYN

Are you dissing my skill as a journalist?

TRUCK

Nobody believes me. I even wrote to ABET.

BROOKLYN

You. Did. What? They could shut down the aerospace department. That's suicide.

Suddenly alert, she stands up to face him. He stands, too.

TRUCK

After Dr. Watts barred me from registering. After Dr. Brown refused to have practice sessions for my oral exam. Sure I did.

He scoots over to his desk and pulls out a folder. She follows him a step behind.

BROOKLYN

You used the system against itself. Original, but still hopeless.

TRUCK

Nobody would investigate. Not the Dean of Engineering. Not even the Graduate Dean.

He shows her one after another letter on official letterhead.

TRUCK

Not my state representative, Tod Baxter. Not the U.S. Department of Education. Hence ABET, the nuclear option of last resort.

She puts the documents in her backpack. He steps backward - she steps forward. He moves here and there, and she's right in his face, badgering him - bullying him.

BROOKLYN

Maybe you're just an inveterate troublemaker.

TRUCK

Twelve hours of thesis classes?
Zero face time with my advisor?

BROOKLYN

You. Got... nothing?

He takes yet one more step backward, but she's stopped.

TRUCK

I never even got help in course selection. Swallow that horse pill.

Her knees buckle. She falls back into a chair. She starts to ask a question - he holds up his hand:

TRUCK

No abnormal psychology, okay? Not yet. Please? That's an open, gaping wound that will be twenty years healing.

They look up at the sound of a CAT JUMPING DOWN from above.

A giant orange and white cat JAXX lands on the rug in front of them. He climbs into Brooklyn's lap for a scratch, PURRING.

BROOKLYN

I still can't believe you named a mouse after the Longhorn mascot - a goddamn bull.

TRUCK

Exactly my image of your blessed administration. A mean bull.

BROOKLYN

Poor baby, caged like a wild animal for years on end - only to be exterminated against. Happens to everybody. No story there.

Jaxx follows Truck over to his desk where he pulls out a bowl of cat food. They watch JAXX CRUNCH happily - PURRING.

TRUCK

You think you know it all.

Now it's Truck's turn to get in her face. She's anxious, gets up and moves away. But he's right on top of her:

BROOKLYN

I'll be a psychologist this time
next year. So, yes, I know it all.

Brooklyn stops, looking anxiously around for some escape from this maniac. They both stare at her -

EMPTY WINE GLASS.

TRUCK

Have you seen patients yet? Coped
them through real-life traumas?
Beyond losing weight or stopping
smoking?

Brooklyn grabs the wine glass. Holds it out to him.

TRUCK

I'm just a worthless grad student,
fodder for their giant egos.

Truck gets up to give her a refill. She stares at her full glass, pensive.

BROOKLYN

I can make it a human interest
piece. A brilliant mind who doesn't
know it.

Brooklyn takes a sip. Looks at Truck over the rim; another sip... as he ROLLS HIS EYES. Twiddles his thumbs.

The background concert music breaks into a new song. Brooklyn runs over the radio and cranks up the volume.

BROOKLYN

Great song. Dance! Come on. It's
better than wringing your hands,
embarrassed while I make a total
fool out of myself.

MUSIC: "LOVE RUNS OUT" BY ONE REPUBLIC

Truck turns away.

She sits down at her laptop to write a report, boogying with the music as she types.

DEAD OF THE NIGHT

On the stereo, the concert ends with a round of APPLAUSE.

Truck steps over to stand at the window, staring at the concert hall below, as people start filing out.

Brooklyn wraps the wool blanket around her shoulders against the cold. She steps up beside Truck.

TRUCK

Sure would like to run away from
this bloody war zone and just go
back to being an engineer.

BROOKLYN

Responsibility sucks.

She STOMPS ONE FOOT from the cold.

Truck hustles around and closes most of the windows. It warms up inside. Their breath doesn't show in the air now.

Brooklyn shuts down the laptop. Sets it aside.

Truck puts a pot of water in the microwave. Prepares a couple of hot teas - brings her one.

They sit down on the lounge chairs. His eyes are blank, his expression melancholy - staring into nothingness.

She's pensive.

BROOKLYN

I - I'm sorry about the whole dance
thing. That was very unprofessional
of me.

TRUCK

We only just met. I mean. Just-
just.

Truck looks at her, needful. She acts confused - desperate.

BROOKLYN

Did they know you were a consulting
engineer? Had your own software
company? that you published two
textbooks with McGraw-Hill?

TRUCK

How is that relevant?

BROOKLYN

Ph.D students rarely have real-life experience. A career. Reputation. We'll do anything to cheat the game. A professional, however, that's a whole new situation.

TRUCK

I'm - nobody.

Fighting his anxiety, Truck gets up and prepares two more teas. He hands her one and sits down opposite her.

She has her steno pad out, ready for the interview.

Truck stares at her papers. Her pen. Brooklyn's eyeglasses sitting on the table. Her black fingernails DRUMMING the tabletop.

TRUCK

What's wrong? Why did I stop talking?

BROOKLYN

Stage fright? Embarrassment? Terror. Oxygen deprivation?

TRUCK

You're the interview guru. What happened? You broke the ice with that dance routine, got me feeling comfortable. Fix this.

Brooklyn puts the pen and paper away. Dons the glasses.

BROOKLYN

Is this less threatening?

Truck stares at her, confused. She makes an angry face and pulls her mouth wide with her fingers.

BROOKLYN

Georgia the angry ghost.

Truck chuckles but doesn't smile. They talk quietly.

BROOKLYN

I heard you screaming with Dr. Smith. He didn't much like your Mars research.

TRUCK

Math! Ticked him off, didn't it?

BROOKLYN
Grandiose delusion?

TRUCK
Bar X Software? My own company?
Yeah, I know how to write software.

BROOKLYN
Sounds complicated. Getting to
Mars.

TRUCK
You saw the solution. On the chalk
board. The Figure 8 loop.

While he sips his tea, she ties her hair into two little-girl
ponytails, one sticking out on each side. She puts the
glasses on the table - under her arm.

BROOKLYN
Featherweight wannabe versus the
heavyweight champion of the
universe.

Brooklyn rolls up her sleeves and holds out an arm for an arm
wrestle. He puts a lazy arm out, readies, and tenses his
muscles. Brooklyn slams his arm to the table.

Truck mans up - puts his best effort into it. She slams his
arm to the table again. She eggs him on - he backs off.

TRUCK
To think I was afraid for your
glasses. Psych.

BROOKLYN
I'm not made of glass, Truck.
Whatever you have to say, I can
handle it.

Truck looks down, aside, inward - outward, beyond. He sees a
small box of stress balls. Grabs one. Works it in his hands
(his elbows are still on the table).

BROOKLYN
Try starting from a comfortable
place, Truck. The McGraw-Hill
textbooks, maybe. Very creative,
writing - you like creative, yes?
The challenge - the drama.

She smiles gently and leans back, ready to listen. He starts
to talk. Can't.

She pulls the lamp away from the table, for some calm
ambiance. Gets herself a wine - sits down again. Ready to
wait as long as it takes.

BROOKLYN

I'm thinking you took your
consulting engineering job very
seriously.

Eyebrows up, concerned expression - pensive, she's quiet.
Truck nods, smiling - introspective.

TRUCK

That's me, no-subtext Truck. Zero
percent or one hundred percent.

Truck starts to talk - can't - can't even look her in the
eyes he's so afraid. He pulls a book out of one box,
Retrofitting for Energy Conservation. Shows it to her.

FLASHBACK - INT. CAMPUS OFFICE - DAY

Truck shows the same book, to DR. WATTS (65, intense, thin).

TRUCK (V.O.)

When the professors in the
Aerospace Department saw the books,
they were outraged.

Dr. Watts gets furious - stands up, and chews Truck out.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

Neon green with envy, for damn
sure. McGraw-Hill is the most
prestigious publisher in the world.

TRUCK (V.O.)

From that day forward, not one kind
word from my advisor. Nothing.

Truck slides the book into his backpack. Stands up in front
of Watt's fury - and slowly backs out of the room.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck looks at her with the same frightened look. She studies
his mortified countenance, deeply disturbed.

BROOKLYN

They always react like that at
first. Jealousy. Did they know
about your, er - disability?

TRUCK

My attorney - I filed suit after getting fired by the consulting engineers - told me not to tell anybody unless absolutely necessary.

Pensive, Truck nurses his tea.

Brooklyn puts his McGraw-Hill book and glasses aside, roots around the space, and finds a rowdy ball cap - tucks it on.

She sits back at the table.

She grabs a pink STRESS BALL. They work the stress balls in silence.

BROOKLYN

Apparently, one or more of your office mates are female. In the STEM agenda. How exciting for them.

TRUCK

You're losing the whole patient-doctor façade. Telling me private things about yourself.

Truck watches her shift the stress ball from hand to hand.

BROOKLYN

Only because you can read between my words. Not my fault.

Suddenly she looks up - confused.

BROOKLYN

Say, why isn't the tower bell ringing? On the quarter hour.

Truck stares at his hands, not so good at hiding things.

TRUCK

Grad student engineer offices? We installed an emergency disconnect for - well, special occasions.

She throws the STRESS BALL at him. Throws another. ANOTHER.

BROOKLYN

Special occasions? As in - special seductions?

Truck defends himself poorly - takes his due.

BROOKLYN

But of course. Clean sheets. Well-stocked fridge. Wine. Spirits. Goddamn surround-sound stereo.

TRUCK

Hey, who says the liberal arts frat-heads get to have all the fun?

She picks up a sharp letter opener and winds up to throw it.

BROOKLYN

Don't they investigate for a short circuit? Body fluids?

TRUCK

We - I set up a motion sensor. Anytime they come to look for the short it throws the power back on.

She winds up again.

BROOKLYN

Okay. The rebel engineer made an early warning system. Surprise.

TRUCK

They've come out a dozen times, never found squat. Probably think Georgia the friendly ghost has a double-E degree.

Truck stares at his hands, mangling a stress ball on the table. RIPPING it to shreds. Sand spills out.

Brooklyn puts the letter opener away.

TRUCK

I'll start the rumor that she's armed and dangerous to boot.

They sit at the table. She's fidgety, squirming in her seat. He points toward the stacks.

TRUCK

Washroom in the back. A motion sensor light will come on to light your way through the stacks.

Brooklyn hurries that way - runs.

The BELL RINGS on the microwave. Truck rushes to silence it - looks toward Bevo's cage.

The SQUEAKY WHEEL starts turning. Truck grabs a hot pad. Extracts the pizza plate. Sets it on the table at his placemat.

Brooklyn steels forward, still in the shadows, watching Truck - stifling a LAUGH, hands to her face.

Truck pulls a slice of pepperoni from the pizza. Blows it cool. Steps over to Bevo's cage. Holds in through the bars until Bevo grabs it - retreats into the shadows to chow down.

Brooklyn drifts into the room, smiling - sits down. Truck points, and hustles to the restroom.

ZERO DARK THIRTY

Truck finishes the last crust of his pizza. Looks up: Brooklyn is standing, wrapped in a blanket, at the double window looking out on the sleeping city.

Truck drags a couple of recliners over to Brooklyn. They sit down: full moon, now a good ways above the horizon and in full, glorious view.

BROOKLYN

I do have to ask the obvious. You seem sane enough. Other than a low stress threshold, you're hitting on all twelve cylinders.

Truck steps away... Returns with a heavy bound book. Burnt orange cover. Embossed with the University of Texas crest.

CLOSE ON DISSERTATION

Truck hands her the volume. She pages through it. Stops at several detailed drawings. The "FREE RETURN LOOP." A "MARS APPROACH" trajectory. The "EARTH ESCAPE" flight path.

TRUCK (V.O.)

What do you see?

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

The dissertation that got the notoriously calm Dr. Smith screaming his tonsils out.
(quietly)

Yes, I was outside in the hallway.

Brooklyn turns so the moonlight illuminates the pages. The hand drawings are artful. Elegant. Proportional.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 Lots of drawings. Very nice
 spacing, dynamic white spaces -
 proportional. I recognize your
 style. Not much text. No equations.

Brooklyn flips through the document: full-page artsy drawings
 facing pages of text. There are almost no equations.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck holds his hand out for her to return the book. But. She
 clutches the volume to her chest (suddenly apprehensive).

TRUCK
 The V.A. rates people based on
 their ability to do their job
 before onset. That's the sum total
 of my work for the last four years.
 I wrote it up this past year,
 waiting for the appeals.

Brooklyn cracks open the book, shuffling through the pages.

BROOKLYN
 Engineering is synonymous with
 numbers. Equations. Analysis. Much
 less Orbital Mechanics. Then -

She drops the book. Crash. Her hands cover her face in a look
 of abject horror.

BROOKLYN
 Oh, God. Please don't tell me -

Truck stands up. He assaults her with his words of fury.

TRUCK
 Three years of grief from every
 authority figure on campus - now I
 have a total, absolute phobia for
 numbers. Every number. Any number.

Brooklyn gets up, wobbling. Rushes away - dry heaves at the
 window.

Tears gushing down her cheeks, Brooklyn hurries back to the
 restroom, tears gushing down her cheeks.

Truck sets up the telescope, aimed at the moon - making
 intricate corrections to zero in on a specific spot.

Brooklyn steps up quietly and gives him a little hug.

BROOKLYN

I'm so sorry. The - for the, what they did to you.

They move apart and sit down.

TRUCK

You didn't analyze the evidence.

She opens the dissertation to the title page, reading.

BROOKLYN

The Mars Trajectory as a Four Body Problem.

Truck gets visibly flustered.

Gently, she takes his hand, gives him a piece of chalk - points toward a chalkboard.

Truck goes to a chalkboard and sketches the "NASA SHUTTLE." Very fast. Very accurate - engineering extraordinaire.

FLASHBACK - INT. GRADUATE DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Truck is in an elegant office with a panoramic view of the University of Texas campus. He stares at a poster of the space shuttle on one wall: his chalk sketch morphs into the full-color shuttle poster.

Truck turns away from the poster. Sits in front of a giant Texas-sized power desk, facing DEAN TROTZKY (55, Russian, rotund, thick glasses)

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

Pardon me. But. Is this title supposed to make me feel small - stupid? Well, it's working.

Truck pulls the DISSERTATION out of his backpack. Puts it on the desk in front of the Dean. She scans it. She stands up, furious - yells at Truck (who reels back, afraid).

TRUCK (V.O.)

I gave the original to the Graduate Dean this morning. Dean Trotzky? She tossed it. In front of my very eyes. Ouch. Out the window.

Truck stares at the walls, which begin to ooze blood. Shiny blood. Glistening. He blinks hard. Looks again. No blood.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
That was downright cruel. What the
hell is going on here?

TRUCK (V.O.)
Damned if I know.

Mouth agape, Truck watches as Dean Trotzky opens a window and
throws it out. Truck hurries over to the window.

BACK TO SCENE

His mouth still open, Truck swallows hard, fighting back
outrage, still sketching the shuttle - frantic. Brooklyn
stands near him. They talk as he draws.

TRUCK
It's shamefully simple. So simple
it would be in every freshman
textbook on orbital mechanics.

BROOKLYN
You're kidding, right?

TRUCK
No. Every diagram in there
represents a lifetime of equations.
I just put the wooden kindergarten
blocks together into a solution.
The integral math is horrific. The
sum total is actually quite simple.

Truck starts sketching the NASA Space Shuttle, in exact
detail. Brooklyn looks him over, studying him. She's as
concerned as he is intense:

TRUCK
Lobsters feel pain. Science fact.
They did an experiment, boiling
them. Scurried away from the heat.

BROOKLYN
Your drawings. It's a stress relief
mechanism. Ingenious.

Truck looks at Brooklyn as if expecting a question. Brooklyn
steps up to the chalkboard, admiring the detail of his work.

BROOKLYN
Excellent. You draw and converse at
the same time like this.
(quietly)
Always wondered how professors do
that. But this is more. Extreme.

He steps away from her, wondering at her new, clinical tone.

BROOKLYN

Never seen this high level of
cortical processing before.

Erasing his drawings with sudden anger, Truck gets incensed
at her comments:

TRUCK

Stop that, lady. I am not your
mouse experiment.

BROOKLYN

Sorry. I didn't mean it like that.
If anything, I'm complementing you
on your - adaptation.

Truck steps over to grab the box full of colored stress
balls. He takes one - offers the box - she grabs one, too.

Studied and pensive, Truck sketches the "UT TOWER" on the
board (squeezing the stress ball in his free hand), anything
to keep his hands busy - anything.

BROOKLYN

You don't have any schizophrenia
symptoms? Visual hallucinations?
Audio? Like voice-overs? They often
manifest with stress.

TRUCK

I know my limits, B.K. I work out.
Meditate. Computer programming has
always been relaxing for me. Doing
H.T.M.L. My Mars Fortran routine.

BROOKLYN

With the whole bureaucracy on your
case? For certain, that's
stressful. Sorry to pillow you like
that.

She stops - hugs a pillow to herself, ready for the worst.

BROOKLYN

They're like Leviathan, that
mythical best in the Book of Job.

Truck is suddenly silent. Terrible melancholy. He shades in
scary abstractions to The Tower diagram. Dark clouds.
Lightning bolts. Halloween ghouls.

BROOKLYN

Truck? You okay there?

TRUCK

Who am I to take on Leviathan?

He turns away. Walks around the space a few times. He sits down. Takes a deep breath. Tries his best to relax.

TRUCK

ABET. Might as well start with that letter. That was a year ago.

BROOKLYN

I don't think you would do something so extreme, not unless you did everything else possible under the sun.

Truck takes a second to arrange several university documents and hands them to her one at a time.

Brooklyn takes the documents in her hands, but her eyes are fixed on his face - watching his expression go blank, his eyes distant. Glazing over. Absent life. Fire. Anything.

Her cheery face drops away as soon as he's gone on his reminiscing trip. Now she has a dark, melancholy expression, drooping shoulders, sad eyes. Truck's expression becomes more authentic and professional.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS CAMPUS - MONTAGE

A) ENGINEERING LIBRARY COMPUTER ROOM - NIGHT

Truck's on a computer in the library, surfing the web. He finds the ABET website, and their email address - begins composing a letter inside a mail app.

As he works, the room becomes dark all around him, with random BOLTS of LIGHT.

TRUCK (V.O.)

I'm a licensed Professional Engineer. Absent any action on campus, I'm required by law to write to ABET.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

We call it neglect. Theft of services if it gets criminal. Grand theft college in the vernacular.

B) AEROSPACE DEPARTMENT FACULTY LOUNGE - DAY

Truck has a big argument with several professors, led by Dr. Watts. Dean Trotzky is there too, in the background, not participating, but still a powerful presence in the room.

TRUCK (V.O.)

My advisor quit, saying he has
worked for ABET for years and
resents my writing to them.

A dark, angry aura surrounds the Dean, her eyes oozing blood.

C) DR. WATT'S OFFICE - SUNSET

Truck sits meekly in an stark wooden chair, sitting tall, taking Dr. Watt's (dark, bloody) fury with all due respect.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Then my graduate advisor Dr. Watts
lowered the boom on me. Unless I
find another advisor I'll be
expelled. He put a bar on me to
register for classes.

Dr. Watts is incensed by Truck's calm demeanor. The elderly professor stands up, red in his face, YELLING at Truck.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

You got your bachelor's degree
here. That lets you take classes
any time you like, no exceptions.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Exactly. Time to take this up to
the next level.

Truck, wide-eyed and shocked - scoots his chair back from the desk, putting distance between himself and Watt's fury.

D) OFFICE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES - DAY

In a room full of students on crutches, in wheelchairs, with blind-man's walking canes - Truck steps up to the front desk and hands a stack of documents to a morbidly obese lady with one lazy eye (focuses wide). Her countenance is grotesque.

TRUCK (V.O.)

I brought all my health records to
the Office of Students with
Disabilities and asked for their
intervention. Hoping for -

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 Your bar for positive is awful low,
 Truck. Dare I hope for - higher?

Truck waits patiently for the clerk to fill out a short form.

Truck watches the obese clerk TOSS HIS DOCUMENTS into a giant stack across the room (perilously close to a very large waste-paper bin).

TRUCK (V.O.)
 They set up an ad hoc committee to
 review my research. Finally, after
 three years. Except. They don't
 like my Mars project.

E) SMALL SEMINAR CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Truck talks about his Mars Trajectory (diagram on the chalkboard) to bored, uninterested elderly professors.

Dr. Watts sits in the back row, eyes closed, snoozing. With each exhale, blood oozes from his nostrils. Ears. He drools blood out the sides of his mouth. The edges of his eyes. Bloody nubs of horns extrude from his forehead. Glistening.

TRUCK (V.O.)
 They said my Mars solution wasn't
 fit for a senior thesis much less a
 Master's Thesis. I was expelled. On
 the spot. Boom.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 They can't require you to do P.H.D.
 level research yet. That's the
 whole point of the doctoral
 program, to teach you how to -

The presentation over, Dr. Watts startles awake and gives two thumbs down. The other professors see this and follow suit.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 The Disabilities Office set this
 up? That's a hate crime.

TRUCK (V.O.)
 I didn't get Department's review of
 my Mars Pathfinder program for
 almost six months. They didn't have
 a clue what it did. I don't think
 they even could read Fortran.

Truck watches the three professors exit the room. As soon as they're gone he slumps into a chair, morbidly depressed.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
They expelled you without even
studying your research?

TRUCK
I begged them. For three solid
years. Sorry, we can't give you any
feedback, not until you pass your
qualifying exams. Department rules.

F) FACULTY LOUNGE - DAY

Dr. Watts stands up and asks a question to a dozen professors
sitting at a long conference table for a faculty meeting.

TRUCK (V.O.)
Dr. Watts polled every professor in
the orbits group. Nobody would be
my advisor. I'm officially
expelled.

G) GRADUATE DEAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

As Dean Trotzky chews him out, Truck forces a smile, wincing
with each angry word (black breath and teeth) from her.

TRUCK (V.O.)
I appeal. It takes a year for them
to investigate the appeal. I got
their notice yesterday. Dr. Smith
read me my last rites earlier.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
Expelled six weeks after you told
the Disabilities Office you were
disabled. A whole year to evaluate
your case? That's ass backwards.

TRUCK (V.O.)
No matter. They win. Go Longhorns.

A Campus Security guard storms into the Dean's office and
grabs Truck. Hauls him out by the scruff of his neck.

BACK TO SCENE

Fighting the guard's (imaginary) death grip - twisting his
shoulders free - Truck struggles over. Fixes slices of pizza.

Truck offers Brooklyn a slice - she waves it off. The mere
sight of food makes her nauseous. Truck sets his pizza aside.
Brooklyn steps over to settle into a lounge chair.

BROOKLYN

I - I took the grad student bus to
our observatory in the Davis
Mountains out in West Texas. Saw
the last solar eclipse.

At a chalkboard facing her chair, Truck draws the "SUN" and a
straight line on a "TANGENTIAL PATH" through the sun's
"CORONA."

FLASHBACK - INT. DAVIS MOUNTAINS OBSERVATORY - DAY

A group of students (Brooklyn is front and center,
fascinated), studies a giant telescope. The operating
mechanism. Computer controls.

A frail elderly professor explains it all.

TRUCK (V.O.)

We measured the bending of light by
the sun's gravity as it passed
close to the sun, very. The corona
was spectacular.

Truck's at the computer controls: staring at a large screen
that displays the spectral signature of the corona.

Truck leans back from the display, smiling big - mesmerized.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

I didn't see you there - and,
pardon me, I would have noticed.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Grungy dude, long hair, coke-bottle
sunglasses at the telescope
controls?

Brooklyn stops at Truck's workstation, ogling the display -
hardly glances at Truck (who sees her - instant attraction.)

BACK TO SCENE

Truck steps over to his desk. Digs into a moving box. Pulls
out the same ugly tech sunglasses. With a flourish, puts them
on. Smiles at her. Brooklyn stifles a laugh.

BROOKLYN

OMG. I remember thinking what a
strange science nerd that guy was.

Truck scowls at her, looking gruesome with the glasses.

TRUCK

Only way to adjust the telescope is
to look directly into the sun.
Glasses protect the baby blues.

He picks at the glasses, overcome with a wall of melancholy.

TRUCK

Gonna miss this place. Crazy isn't
it? All the bad things that
happened? Still gonna miss it.

Brooklyn steps over to give him a hug. A little too cozy.

Truck tries to push her away - trips over a stress ball. He
falls backward, grabbing her to stop the fall.

They collapse onto a sofa. She's on top of him.

TRUCK

There was always hope. Put up with
all their crap. And you'll get a
good job after. Now, with no more
hope. It's suffocating.

Suddenly a HEAVY OBJECT FALLS on top of them and lands on all
fours with a thud.

Brooklyn startles into a sitting position, straddling Truck.
It's Jaxx, the giant orange and white cat.

TRUCK

Saved by the cat.

Truck struggles out from her legs and pads over to his desk.
He opens a drawer. Pulls out a small bowl. Fills it with cat
food from a storage container.

Brooklyn pulls her hair out of the ponytails. Lets it fall to
her shoulders and back.

Truck fixes a couple of hot teas in the microwave.

They pull up rickety old straight-backed chairs and watch
Jaxx eat, talking quietly.

BROOKLYN

I'm not any - femme fatale.

Truck stares out the window at the full moon. She gets up to
stand by him.

TRUCK

Isaac Newton tried to figure out
why the same side of the moon faces
the Earth all the time.

BROOKLYN

Alley cats are normally skittish.
That feline of yours is downright
domesticated. Not rabid. Feral.

Eyebrows up, Truck glances at her amused expression.

Briefly, he glimpses her as a she-demon. He shakes it off.
But she returns as a wicked witch. He looks away, biting his
lip.

TRUCK

The mathematics gave Newton such
bad headaches, he gave up trying to
solve the moon problem altogether.

BROOKLYN

Men should know better than to try
and apply math to the mensural-
slash-lunar cycle. No free returns.

TRUCK

Every famous mathematician since
Newton has studied the moon
problem. Big-time headache.

The tea is ready. She takes one and hands him the other. She
maneuvers to sit quietly beside him, looking at the moon.

BROOKLYN

And all this - means?

TRUCK

Statistical methods will never
crack the Moon problem. They'd
never find my Mars solution either.
Just math. Pure, simple - math.

They watch as a SWARM OF CHIRPING BATS FLIES across the moon.

Several BATS break off of the NOISY SWARM and ZIP into the
window past them - disappear into the rafters.

BROOKLYN

More well-mannered animals. What
kind of fantasy world have I
stumbled onto here?

Jaxx sneaks up and jumps into Brooklyn's lap for a good scratch. The big cat is soon fast asleep.

TRUCK

You didn't see me blow my secret
silent whistle for Jaxx to come and
remind us who we are.

Brooklyn chuckles - tries to hold it... can't. Laughs.

BROOKLYN

Engineers are rarely - never! -
charming. Chatty even. Creative.

Truck smiles at her contentment.

He sees her surrounded by a warm, inviting aura. Traces of a halo. Angel's fluttering wings. His smile broadens. He relaxes.

TRUCK

The professors were jerks. The
administration a Who's Who from the
Horror Channel. But the science was
enchanting. Just wonderful.

BROOKLYN

You're very brave to stay positive
like that.

Truck, getting more uncomfortable as she morphs into a demon, closes his eyes, willing himself to not judge her.

TRUCK

Mom always said I'm never happy
unless I'm in a big tussle. Been in
trouble my whole life.

She's incredulous.

BROOKLYN

What forge did they create you in?
What fires of hell and damnation?

TRUCK

It's called the U.S. Naval Academy.
In a Marine Corps company. Ouch.

Truck smiles. Draws a little devil figure with a pitchfork.

BROOKLYN

It must be difficult, this math
phobia.

(MORE)

BROOKLYN (CONT'D)
Finding things to keep the flywheel
in your brain from spinning out.

TRUCK
You have no idea.

He hands her a small book. The cover shows a pelican with a
fish in its beak. She reads the title.

BROOKLYN
The Pelican's Briefs? That's funny.
Is that like, my - lingerie? You're
- Cajun? Too?

TRUCK
Acadia south. I was born in Baton
Rouge.

She smiles as he sketches a dark cloud. Thunderbolt.

BROOKLYN
You don't have an accent.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SPAIN - CASTELLON DE LA PLANA (1967)

Fleeting images of beaches. Fishing boats in a small port -
fronting on a large chemical refinery. Playing tennis on clay
courts with family.

Storm clouds cover the sun. LIGHTNING.

TRUCK (V.O.)
Pop was a chemical engineer. Esso.
He took overseas assignments.
Europe mostly. Baton Rouge was our
home base, though. Year at L.S.U.

The sky turns dark with a thunderstorm. It rains buckets.

FLASHBACK - EXT. NEWFOUNDLAND - ST. JOHN'S (1975)

Truck's on a U.S. Navy ship for a summer cruise as a
midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy, docking under the
Canadian flag at a large port in St. John's.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
I grew up in St. Johns. That's in
Newfoundland. Acadia north? My
folks moved to Austin. Better jobs.
I miss the culture. The food.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck's getting sadder by the minute. Gone is the old hope and vigor. She mirrors his feeling of growing desperation.

There's a FLUTTER OF WINGS. And a RAVEN LANDS at their window. CAW. CAW.

Brooklyn's a little afraid.

TRUCK

Hey, Nevermore. Long time no see -
wait one.

Truck hurries to give the raven a chunk of pizza crust. The RAVEN GRABS the crust and JETS into the night.

Brooklyn watches this little drama, not quite sure what to think.

TRUCK

Maybe I really am crazy. I should
just destroy everything.

BROOKLYN

And get on with your life? Like
that will solve anything.

TRUCK

Wrong. It solves everything.

He gets up to stretch his legs. She follows suit. They mosey into the stacks, finding their way with reflected light off the full moon outside. Hints of orange morph to crimson.

THE STACKS

Brooklyn stares at him - the stacks - the space, everything.

TRUCK

There goes the friendly journalist.
The evil agent of the
administration returns, hell-bent
on righteous justice.

She's all wound up now. Vents.

BROOKLYN

All this talk about love. Lust.
Psychology. Software. What was your
actual research project?

TRUCK

With my computer skills, I did a
model of the Mars trajectory.

Truck pulls out a stack of NASA's Universal Mars Trajectory Solutions computer plots. She frowns at the documents.

TRUCK

Dr. Watts - his specialty was
trajectory optimization.

BROOKLYN

He should have been all over your
Mars solution. Not moving heaven
and earth to expel you.

Truck struggles with her discontent - fades away.

FLASHBACK - INT. DR. WATT'S OFFICE - DAY

Truck pulls a stack of computer printouts and colorful
trajectory diagrams out of his backpack. Spreads them out on
Dr. Watt's desk.

Watts pulls out a stack of blueprint-sized documents with
"pork chop" shaped plots of trajectory solutions. Truck
imagines them as real pork chops, oozing fresh blood.

TRUCK (V.O.)

He never looked at my code, my
printouts - nothing. Just handed me
this stack of NASA's Pork Chop
Plots - their Mars solutions.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

How dare you question God.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Watts once told me he'd never, ever
read anything I ever wrote, no
matter what, when, where, or how.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

Your own graduate advisor told you
this? They're on your side. Not
fighting your every move.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck's distraught now, for the first time doubting his own
intellectual fortitude.

BROOKLYN

Computer savant goes to grad
school. Or psychopathy goes amok?

Truck darts out of the stacks, escaping her confinement.

GRAD STUDENT GHETTO LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

She hustles after him, pressing her advantage.

TRUCK

They - they found out I was
schizophrenic. Six weeks later I
was expelled. With malice, at least
according to the legal criteria.

Truck returns to the board. Draws the solar system - a saucer-shaped spacecraft going to Mars, a green alien at the helm.

The alien is friendly, inviting - the one agreeable creature he's envisioned thus far. Mars is sanctuary. Hope. Safety.

TRUCK

That's when I hit the EVENT
HORIZON. Truck the schizo.

BROOKLYN

Did you have a computer analysis?
Of your Mars solution? Data? Proof.

Truck takes a deep breath. Musters a little resolve. She waits for him to fade away before she downs a stiff drink.

FLASHBACK - INT. AEROSPACE DEPARTMENT SEMINAR - DAY

Truck's giving a formal presentation on his "MARS TRAJECTORY OPTIMIZATION SOLUTION" before a small group of professors, grad students, and a couple of NASA people (wearing NASA jackets). Dr. Watts is among them.

TRUCK (V.O.)

I tried and tried to convince them.
Look, I found a safe, efficient
trajectory to Mars. Better than any
other. Here's all the data.

Dr. Watts stands up. He's dark. Ominous. Raises his fist in anger. Points at Truck, urging the others to rally against Truck's work.

Watt's darkness spreads to the others. A plague of vicious malice. Eyes get dark. Faces gray. Shadows strobe.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

Eight Mars landings that have
failed lately - and. You fracking
got to Mars? What are the goddamn
odds of that? I don't believe you.

TRUCK (V.O.)

The more I insisted, the more they refused to look at my data. Made me look delusional - just for asking what I paid for.

Dr. Watts gets the group so riled up they stand and yell at Truck, fists raised.

Rejected, Truck bundles up his documents and scurries out of the room, head hung low.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck's head is still down, his eyes evasive. Brooklyn talks sternly, an egomaniacal professor:

BROOKLYN

But we made it to Mars. Satellites are orbiting Mars as we speak. They process all the data right here at the U.T. Center for Space Research.

TRUCK

I'm talking about humans going to Mars, Brooklyn. People on board? That requires exponentially more safety.

TRUCK'S THOUGHTS - FUTURISTIC COMPUTER LAB - DAY

Truck uses keyboard input and hand motions to generate a model of the Earth and Mars orbits around the sun, with an elliptical "TRANSFER ORBIT" from "EARTH" to "MARS."

TRUCK (V.O.)

They said my model was extremely simple, with Earth and Mars in the same plane. Not true.

The giant computer projection goes into three dimensions, with Earth and Mars in different orbital planes.

TRUCK (V.O.)

They never looked at the code or the data output, which clearly showed values in three dimensions for the complete orbit, accurate to less than a centimeter.

Truck adds a spacecraft on an elliptical "TRANSFER ORBIT" to Mars. The path ahead is dark, threatening. Ominous.

The spacecraft leaves Earth, slowly inching ahead of Earth and in Earth's orbital plane. It creases an edge of light.

TRUCK (V.O.)

My solution stays in Earth's orbital plane, then transfers to Mars' orbital plane when the two planes intersect.

As the spacecraft reaches "CONJUNCTION" - a line outward from the Sun halfway to Mars - representing the intersection of Earth's and Mars' orbital planes, there's a "THRUST."

The spacecraft transitions onto Mars's orbital plane.

TRUCK (V.O.)

It's the same with love, right - you have to get your sorry ass onto her plane of existence before she gives you the time of day.

Truck keys several commands, and three columns of 16-digit numbers show up at the bottom of the screen, showing the position in real-time of Earth, Mars, and the spacecraft in X, Y, and Z coordinates.

The path they describe is clean. Sharp. A bright LIGHTNING BOLT of hope in the darkness.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck is feeling pretty good. Brooklyn not so much.

BROOKLYN

How could they ignore this? An abstract paper, maybe - but a formal demonstration of your results? Plots. Data.

Brooklyn is dark, distant - brooding.

BROOKLYN

What they did. I just can't believe it's possible. It's terrifying. I'm an angry alligator. A snapping turtle.

TRUCK

So you're taking it out on me.

She screams at him (he responds by drawing furiously).

BROOKLYN

Of course, I am. You agreed to the goddamn interview. Asked for it.

She hurries to pour herself a large wine - gulps it down.

TRUCK

Been feeling just like that for, what - two years now? Ever since I did that stupid seminar.

Brooklyn struggles with what he's telling her.

BROOKLYN

Their reaction - clearly they thought you cheated. Did you?

Truck's still in presentation mode.

TRUCK

The Mars trajectory is extremely nonlinear. It usually takes a Cray supercomputer to find a solution using a genetic algorithm.

BROOKLYN

We use them in psychology, too.

He draws a series of wild paths clustered around the "MARS TRANSFER ELLIPSE" on the chalkboard.

Truck startles as fresh blood oozes from several of the paths. Frantic, he draws more paths. There's more blood.

The crimson covers his hands now. Then his arms. Up to his elbows. Truck keeps drawing arcs, which are pure blood now.

TRUCK

Try a dozen solutions, pick the closest one, generate a dozen more paths, see which one is closest, generate a dozen more. And so on.

She gives him a hard, accusing look. He shrinks, fades.

TRUCK'S THOUGHTS - FUTURISTIC COMPUTER LAB - DAY

The "3D MARS TRANSFER ORBIT" shows the spacecraft at "CONJUNCTION," where the Earth and Mars orbital planes intersect in a straight line. The room is bright. Colorful!

TRUCK (V.O.)

I set up my code to integrate the equations of motion from the midpoint back to Earth and forward to Mars. Two problems that can be solved much easier. Viola.

The simulation shows two problems (in two different colors, red and blue): The spacecraft going from "CONJUNCTION" forward to Mars and from "CONJUNCTION" backward to Earth.

There are several iterations until each half reaches its destination. The graphics are precise. Exact. Clean. Every path is shining. Every solution a glitter of light.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

But love can't go backward in time.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Gravity is a central force. If all the forces are central, you can go backward in time. Not a problem.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

What I'd give to back out of all the stupid things I did that ruined a love relationship. Reverse time.

The two solutions are merged, and the final solution in NEON GREEN shows a direct, seamless path from EARTH TO MARS.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck has a confident look. Brooklyn's bordering on psychotic desperation. She reaches for a stiff drink.

BROOKLYN

You mentioned how it was important for human missions to Mars.

Truck draws a giant circle for "MARS" and a tiny dot, labeled the "MARS ROVER," on a tangential trajectory toward it, on a flight path to barely clip the edge of Mars.

TRUCK

When the spacecraft reaches Mars, the Red Planet is going five thousand miles per hour faster than we are.

BROOKLYN

Feeling a hundred g's right now my own self. Extreme anxiety.

TRUCK

One g-force on Mars is about sixty miles per hour. People can't take more than nine g's. Six hundred miles per hour - max.

Truck shows a glancing approach to Mars, then a sharp escalation away into the unfathomable darkness of space.

TRUCK

One miscalculation and zoom - off you go into deep space. Lost forever. Absolutely no chance of getting anywhere - ever again.

BROOKLYN

Zero margin for error. For sure.
(quietly)
Men. Never give you a second chance. Try vice-versa? You bitch.

Brooklyn fights the rational logic of his argument. Biting her lower lip. Hands clenched at her sides. Arms stiff.

BROOKLYN

Jesus H. Christ. People actually VOLUNTEER to go to Mars? Talk about stark raving madness.

Smiling, Truck nods his agreement - eyebrows up.

TRUCK

What if I could eliminate the possibility of zooming off into deep space?
(quietly)
Get an automatic overtime in love?

BROOKLYN

You'd be my everlasting hero.

She gets her mojo back. Puts her drink aside.

Truck takes a different color of chalk and draws a figure-8 loop with the Sun and Mars inside the two loops.

TRUCK

The Free Return Trajectory exists around any large body orbiting another. With me so far?

Brooklyn nods, her eyes bright. Expectant.

Truck draws a box around the Mars part of the trajectory, then an expanded view, showing Mars and the nearby part of the figure-8 loop.

Truck sketches a bull, sword - striking.

TRUCK

That small spot on the bull's back
where the Matador hits, and his
sword follows a bone tube -
directly to the heart. Boom. Dead.

BROOKLYN

Natural patterns that repeat at
many levels? What do you call them -
fractals? I don't get it.

She screws up her face, confused - thinking real hard.

TRUCK'S THOUGHTS - FUTURISTIC COMPUTER LAB - DAY

Truck manipulates the keyboard to add the figure-8 path around Mars and the Sun. The path is projected on a screen.

Layers upon layers of numbers. Shifting numbers. A solution forms. A crease in the mass of data. A shining path.

TRUCK (V.O.)

My algorithm targets that small
segment of the Sun-Mars free return
loop that's close around Mars.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)

Men-are-from-Mars grabs you and
holds on tight. Felt it a hundred
times before. Let. Me. Go.

TRUCK (V.O.)

You need ten percent less fuel to
achieve Mars's orbit on my path.
Less energy means less g-forces.

(quietly)

Boom. From a boring circular orbit -
to head over heels - in love.

A simulated "MARS MISSION" approaches, tracking close to Mars, then slides into the free return figure-8... "MISSES THE MARK."

The sea of numbers shifts in waves. Ominous. Threatening imminent disaster. The fate is bleak. Guaranteed!

But instead of zooming off into deep space, the spacecraft cruises into a controlled path toward the sun.

TRUCK (V.O.)
And if you miss on your final approach? What happens?

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
Oh, hell. You don't zoom off, into deep space. Your path loops back to the sun. No killer heartbreak.

The spacecraft loops around the sun and then follows the figure-8 right on back to Mars for a second attempt.

TRUCK (V.O.)
For an easy emergency rendezvous to rescue you back to Earth.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
Or a return trip to Mars for another try. Yes. Sign. Me. Up.

A second scenario shows a "RESCUE SPACECRAFT" leaving Earth as the Mars mission is on the free-return loop, makes a "RENDEZVOUS," and returns the crew safely to Earth.

BACK TO SCENE

Truck is bright and energetic. She's less so, but definitely on a positive trajectory.

BROOKLYN
My head's spinning like a top. The possibilities. However -

A tiny drop of blood appears where she's biting her lip. She wipes it away with an angry fist. Grits her teeth.

BROOKLYN
All those experts? NASA. I'm afraid I must side with the home team. Pelican did not make it to Mars.

Truck runs to his desk. Pulls out a computer printout.

TRUCK
Here's the code. Only twenty pages.

BROOKLYN
Twenty pages Running on a desktop P.C.? Versus the millions of lines of NASA code NASA running on a Cray supercomputer? Stop. Mars madness.

She's pleading to deaf ears, which only aggravates her more.
He grabs her laptop and fires it up.

TRUCK

You can download my Mars program.
Run various scenarios - see the
results. Full color. Three D.

The laptop asks for a password.

She yanks the laptop away from him and crams it back into her
backpack.

She puts the backpack away and scurries into the stacks.

THE STACKS FROM HELL

Relentlessly assertive, Truck pursues her through the rows of
books on rusty metal shelves. Dark shadows loom. Threaten!

TRUCK

I ran dozens of scenarios, tested
every subroutine. Put it on the
web. Hundreds of people tested it.
No glitches. No problems.

BROOKLYN

Software engineer testing his
latest creation. Prove it.

Brooklyn hurries away from Truck through the dark, shadowy
stacks. Sudden anger darkens her countenance.

TRUCK

I sent emails to orbital mechanics
experts all over the world, the day
after I expelled - a year ago.

LOUNGE

Brooklyn jets out of the stacks. Truck's right behind.

They stand at the window, looking out on the full moon. His
expression becomes a terror as the moon bleeds crimson.

Seeing his horror, sensing his fear, she caresses his face
gently. Sits him down beside her, on the sofa.

BROOKLYN

You're not Copernicus. Science was
a baby then.

(MORE)

BROOKLYN (CONT'D)

There was plenty of room for
revolutionary achievements like
his. Not anymore.

Truck digs in, desperately trying to keep his cool.

TRUCK

It was dumb luck, finding that Mars
trajectory. The orbits people liked
it. At first. So I kept on going.
Found the free-return add-on.

Truck pauses to take a deep, calming breath.

TRUCK

Then they found out I was
schizophrenic. Game over.

He begins drawing modern, cubic abstractions with no
discernable form or fashion.

She watches him - the drawings, deeply concerned: Is he going
crazy before my very eyes?

BROOKLYN

Earlier today, talking with Watts.
Trotzky. I was so sure you were
the grad student from Hell.

Truck combines the triangular abstractions into a sleek
racing sailboat with a crew and giant sails. Rough seas.

FLASHBACK - EXT. US NAVAL ACADEMY - PLEBE SUMMER - DAY (1974)

Truck's getting bawled out by a Drill Sergeant onboard the
sleek sailing ship for reefing a sail incorrectly.

TRUCK (V.O.)

This is worse than plebe year at
the Naval Academy. I just want.
Out. Of. Here. Please?

The sailboat turns on a hard tack, and Truck tumbles
overboard into the surf.

Suddenly, he's adrift in an ocean of blood.

He watches, dumbfounded, as the sailboat powers away, leaving
him stranded in choppy seas.

He turns and begins the long swim to the Naval Academy
Seawall several miles away.

BACK TO SCENE

Struggling to keep his balance, Truck runs over to the locked stairwell door. He rattles the door. Desperate to escape.

BROOKLYN

You went to Star Fleet Academy?
That puts a few points on the
scoreboard. Truck six, Texas ten.

TRUCK

When I discovered all that, I was
still only rated ten percent. What
big brain isn't rated at least ten
percent?

BROOKLYN

So you were in therapy. That only
confirms the troubled diagnosis.

TRUCK

Hey. I liked therapy. Learned a
lot. Everybody should -

Brooklyn drops the lovey-dovey façade. Wrestles him into a half-nelson neck lock.

BROOKLYN

Who shot your ego and buried it on
boot hill, feet up?

TRUCK

Can I wear tennis shoes?

She pulls him into her chest. Caresses his hair.

BROOKLYN

Poor baby. What have they done to
my gentle green mouse - let loose
in the middle of a cat farm.

She pushes him violently away. His back hits a wall.

BROOKLYN

Turned him into a hungry feral rat
is what. With rabies.

She gets up and steps into the kitchen.

She hauls out the pizza (about half gone by now) and cuts off
a big slice, and shoves it in the microwave.

BROOKLYN

Flame the damn runway-model diet.

Truck hauls out a beat-up old coffee percolator and loads it with java. They wait quietly.

The digital counter on the microwave reaches "30 SECONDS." He runs to stop it before the timer rings.

BROOKLYN

Suddenly everything he isn't a
charming eccentric but a raving
science-fiction maniac.

She grabs the pizza and heads to the table, pours a coffee.
They eat quietly.

TRUCK

I am so not Looney Tunes.

Truck buries his head in his meal. She fights back a showing of compassion:

BROOKLYN

Your advisor knew about all this?
Your results? That graphic solution
you made on the chalkboards?

She points at the Mars blackboard. He nods.

BROOKLYN

You said he wasn't interested. Then
what did you do? Please? I'm
listening. Give me something here,
Truck. Any damn thing.

Truck hustles to his desk and hands her an "ORBITAL MECHANICS SEMINAR" flyer, announcing "THE EARTH TO MARS TRAJECTORY AS A FOUR BODY PROBLEM" presented by "T.K. LeForge."

BROOKLYN

Your first seminar didn't work. So
you set up another one? How did you
pull that off?

FLASHBACK - INT. AEROSPACE FACULTY LOUNGE - DAY

Truck's dressed nicely (consulting engineering pants, shirt, and thin tie), presenting his research to a small group of professors sitting around a large conference table.

TRUCK (V.O.)

I boycotted all my classes one
semester until they set up the
seminar. Several post-docs from
C.S.R. were there. NASA, too.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 And you dare claim they haven't
 shown you due diligence?

Truck completes the talk. Turns. He's dumbfounded, as all the
 mouths disappear. Faces become sheets of pale nondescript.

TRUCK (V.O.)
 Just because I had a seminar
 doesn't mean they took five minutes
 to study my results - recommend
 changes - more any effing thing.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 All those rocket scientists? Nobody
 showed a glimmer of interest in
 getting to Mars? That's - insane.

Truck packs up his papers and leaves. Nobody shakes his hand
 or congratulates him - or anything at all. He's miffed.

BACK TO SCENE

Still peeved, Truck brings her a folder of "PROFESSIONAL TECH
 PAPERS."

TRUCK
 If you can't explain it. I don't
 have a chance. I should just give
 up. I hate Mars.

He shows the tech papers to her one at a time.

TRUCK
 The A.I.A.A., the association that
 governs aerospace engineering. They
 put my Mars seminar paper on the
 student section of their website.

She flips through a formal journal paper, showing similar
 diagrams to the ones that he created on the chalkboards.

TRUCK
 I told the department. They
 immediately called and demanded
 they remove my paper from their
 website. Demanded.

BROOKLYN
 How can they even do that?
 (quietly)
 The aerospace gurus don't want to
 go to Mars, either? This is insane.
 What the F is going on here?

Truck shows her another small stack of papers.

His hands shake when he visualizes blood oozing from the pages, to his hands, up his arms.

She studies the terror in his expression.

TRUCK

After I was expelled - about this time last year - I sent emails to orbits experts all over the country.

BROOKLYN

Documentation. Proof positive that the beta phase of your Mars program was successful. How did it go?

TRUCK

I gave them my website address. They went. They downloaded the software. They liked. One professor even started using my program in his classes. Still is, to this day.

He hands her a stack of emails.

She flips through them, watching his face, consternation growing in her countenance.

TRUCK

They all responded, B.K. Every last one of them. Within a few short days. Interested. Keen. Anxious to help me further my work.

BROOKLYN

Exactly what they're supposed to do. But why not here at Texas?

She cringes, expecting the worse.

TRUCK

Dr. Watts wouldn't accept the emails as part of my appeal, saying I didn't explain what role they played in my case.

She looks through the documents, a serious look on her face.

TRUCK

There's your due. Fucking. Process.

BROOKLYN

That's not how the grad school
system is supposed to work.

(to herself)

Is this what it feels like to be
going crazy?

Her doubts start to crater into genuine empathy. He starts
drawing what ends up as an "INQUISITION TORTURE RACK."

BROOKLYN

I'm trying, real hard here - to see
the person you are. Behind all the
rocket science - the issues.

Truck stares at her, begging for her to find a glimmer of
hope. She's rattled - thinks hard, trying to help.

BROOKLYN

Okay. So. You passed the written
qualifying exams. All the
coursework for a Ph.D. That's gold
treasure on campus. Platinum.

TRUCK

Bucket of coal in the aerospace
department. Cow manure. Neon-green
kryptonite is what it is.

Deeply upset, Brooklyn gets up and hurries into the stacks,
pacing, round and round - distraught. Frustrated.

When she returns, Truck is sipping coffee, staring outside.

BROOKLYN

If they saw your presentation, I'm
sure that was enough to -

TRUCK

Convince them I got to the bloody
Red Planet? Bloody Mars. Bloody -

BROOKLYN

No. Obviously. Of course not.

Unable to maintain his calm, Truck gets up and paces around
the room, round and round. She follows him - confronts him.

TRUCK

Can you please sit down and let me
explain my Mars program? Without
judging me. Time and again.

The sheer force of his rage drives her to sit down. A static crackles around him. An illusion from indirect lighting.

TRUCK

First, you wrongfully assume that I am a Ph.D. candidate. I am not. I passed my written qualification exams - but not the oral exam.

BROOKLYN

You aren't supposed to do research until after you are admitted to the Ph.D. program. Your mistake.

TRUCK

Wrong. It was originally my Master's Thesis research project.

She finds his dissertation, waves it at him - stares at him with surprise - as the static appears again. She's startled.

TRUCK

Brooklyn? I was expelled because they didn't like my research - even though they never knew what it was.

Truck sketches a GRADUATION CAP, tassels.

Frantic, she turns out one light. Another. Until the static aura fades away. She fights back tears of frustration. Truck presses on.

TRUCK

They said I should have taken my qualifying exams a year after starting grad school.

BROOKLYN

Wrong. You have a year after getting your Master's Degree.

TRUCK

Which I got a couple of weeks before they expelled me.

BROOKLYN

Older students, with undergraduate degrees in a different major like you, always get more time - years, even, to catch up.

TRUCK

It has been twenty years since I got my B.S. in engineering.

(MORE)

TRUCK (CONT'D)
 I had to learn calculus from
 scratch. Everything else, too.

Truck sketches FACES while she reads several more documents.
 Her assertiveness is gone. Replaced with perplexity.

TRUCK
 The math qualifying exam alone
 tests the equivalent of an
 undergraduate degree in math.
 Literally. Math I never had.

She nods, trying to smile. It comes out as a grimace.

TRUCK
 My Mars Pathfinder program has
 proven itself as a solid
 educational tool. P.H.D. number
 ONE. Reaching Mars without needing
 a genetic algorithm. TWO.

She fights back welling tears, trying to be strong. Brave.

TRUCK
 Saving ten percent fuel over the
 existing ideal. THREE.

BROOKLYN
 (authoritarian voice)
 Sorry, Mr. Clark. Three strikes and
 your out. Get the F off my campus.

ON LAPTOP - MARS PATHFINDER WEBSITE

She opens up her laptop, goes online - shows him the screen.

Truck steps over to type in a URL, and she goes to his "MARS
 PATHFINDER 2.0" website.

TRUCK (V.O.)
 I stumbled on the free-return trick
 at the final Mars approach. Wow. I
 just saved a ton of fuel.

The splash page is a little GREEN MARTIAN driving to Mars.
 Brooklyn smiles at the figure - holding back her emotions.

TRUCK (V.O.)
 Nobody bats an eye.

BROOKLYN (V.O.)
 So you get back to work, thinking
 that's not good enough.

BACK TO SCENE

Her shoulders droop in genuine resignation.

TRUCK

Guess what? I did the same trick
for the Earth escape part of the
trajectory. That doubled the
savings. Dissertation number FOUR.

Brooklyn closes the laptop and puts it away. She still looks
confused, staring at the MARS DIAGRAM on the chalkboard.

TRUCK

Now I cut the fuel required by
twenty percent or more. Oh. My.
God. Excellent.

Truck looks at her - at the diagram - motions for her to
stand beside him: looking at the chalkboard.

TRUCK

Technically, I call my Mars
solution a Gravity Assisted Bi-
Elliptic Transfer orbit, GRABET for
short.

BROOKLYN

Like that really helps my blasé'.

TRUCK

Look at the diagram, B.K. Transfer
orbit. Split the diagram in half
and you have -

Brooklyn walks up to the chalkboard. Studies the diagram.

BROOKLYN

Two ellipses. Bi-elliptic. And. Oh,
wow - the little free-return loops
are gravity assists. GRABET. Yes. I
figured it out. All by my lonesome.

She gets excited. Stands up to celebrate. But -

TRUCK

That does it. If you can figure it
out. They sure as hell did. On the
spot. In a split second. Right
there. At the seminar. Before.

Savagely, Truck erases his diagrams. They're full of blood.
The harder he erases the more blood oozes. He's frantic!

TRUCK

After - hating me all the time.
Hating. Just hating.

First the Mars trajectory, then all the others: GONE.
Brooklyn watches him, at first surprised - then concerned.
Horrificed.

The sparkling aura around him becomes dark. Bloody. Dazzles
of light. She shakes it off. Afraid.

TRUCK

This is not my problem. Fuck
getting to Mars. Let the goddamn
missions crash and burn. Die. Die.

Bursting out in spontaneous tears, Brooklyn turns away from
his rage - gets up, and runs across the room, into the stacks
- to the washroom.

When she returns, Truck is sitting quietly at his desk,
feeding document after document into a SHREDDER.

BROOKLYN

You should publish. Write up the
Mars game. Add some more bells and
whistles. Kids are nuts for
computers now. Isn't everybody?

TRUCK

I'm expelled. I'm banned from
campus. Permanently. I'll never
practice engineering again.

Binders. Files. Floppy disks - into the SHREDDER, all.

BROOKLYN

It will be easier to fight them
once your Mars rendezvous is a fun
game. Then you can write another
paper and explain how it works.

She watches the SHREDDER box fill up. Truck bags shredded
material. Slides the empty box into the SHREDDER - more
SHREDDING.

She talks faster, getting frantic - watching him SHRED
everything that's loose and will fit in the feeder.

TRUCK

Can't. Just plain. Can't.
Literally. Math phobia? Mars phobia
now? Orbital Mechanics phobia.

BROOKLYN

Then, when they realize it's not just a game but a *force majeure*, they'll want you to represent how you can get there so efficiently.

Truck grabs Retrofitting for Energy Conservation. He rips it in half - feeds it to the SHREDDER. She's horrified.

BROOKLYN

Wait. Don't do that. I was just starting to believe you. Stop.

She watches horrified as he RIPS up a second book Electrical Design Guide for Commercial Buildings from McGraw-Hill and SHREDS it, too. She holds her hands to her mouth, terrified.

His face is grim with determination. His every feature is cascading into grief and despair.

Truck yanks open a filing cabinet and starts feeding stacks and stacks of papers. Notes. Files. More documents. Into the SHREDDER, all.

BROOKLYN

Won't the V.A. help you? Get talk therapy for this - extreme stress. math phobia?

TRUCK

They don't do talk therapy anymore. Just meds.

Brooklyn is beyond her wits now. Desperation squared.

She hauls him away from the shredder, YANKS the power cord out of the wall, picks up the shredder - throws it out the window. CRASH.

BROOKLYN

You got anything stronger than this faux California wine?

TRUCK

I'm sure that's not such a good idea.

BROOKLYN

(yelling at him)
Anything. Now.

Truck scurries around, going from desk to desk, looking through drawers and shelves and cabinets - comes back with a bottle of cognac.

Brooklyn grabs it from him and takes a long tug before he yanks it away from her.

TRUCK

I feel better already. Thanks for the gravity assist.

She waves him off. Hurries to the restroom.

You can hear her throwing up - water running as she washes her face. BRUSHES her teeth. GARGLES.

Brooklyn returns, looking tired. Ragged.

Add terrified, as BATS FLITTER through the window and disappear into the stacks.

TRUCK

I shouldn't have told you all that. You're not my shrink.

BROOKLYN

I'm tired of arguing. I'm tired of the anger.

Brooklyn collapses on the makeshift bed, a bundle of havoc and despair. Truck eases down beside her.

BROOKLYN

What happened to my little green alien friend? His love's run out.

They sit there, staring into blank space. At the RANDOM BAT coming home from the night's hunt.

More bats. More darting shadows. A swarm of them! Blotting out the night.

BROOKLYN

One thing's for sure -

TRUCK

The Daily Texan will never publish a story about this, not as much liability as it would cause the University.

BROOKLYN

U.T. has the premier law school in the world, and I'm sure they'd all work night and day to defend the sacred alma mater.

TRUCK

Pretty obvious their actions were the result of prejudice since it all blew up after the Disabilities Office got involved.

BROOKLYN

They'll help the physically disabled. Just as bigoted against the mentally disabled as everybody else. Worse! See it all the time.

Truck becomes very quiet.

BROOKLYN

Never had a hard-core psych case before in practicals. All this shit makes Edgar Allen Poe read like a romantic comedy. Your raven Nevermore. The bats. The - auras.

Brooklyn struggles to manage a weak smile. Truck stays quiet. Head down. Eyes devoid of life.

BROOKLYN

What about family? Friends?

TRUCK

Who wants a schizophrenic brother? Uncle? Friend? That's a joke. Nobody. Not even Jesus.

Neither of them smiles.

BROOKLYN

I'm assuming you investigated every possible legal remedy.

TRUCK

Good assumption.

BROOKLYN

Why don't you write a movie about all of this?

TRUCK

Look. It's Venus. The morning star.

Truck jumps up. Runs to the windows.

Brooklyn is startled - as he hangs over the edge. Dangles. Slips. Almost falls out. Catches himself.

Truck looks skyward. Points out at the dark night sky. At a single point of light.

Brooklyn grabs his arm. Hauls him away from the window.

BROOKLYN

Dammit. I was sure you would jump.
Don't do that to me. Ever.

Brooklyn studies the sad look on his dark, moonlit face.

(CONT'D)

You look as tired as I feel.

Deflated, Truck collapses beside her. Sudden inspiration - he gets up and hurries to the kitchen.

BROOKLYN

Please. No more pizza *ad nauseum*.

She fights back nausea. The impulse to upchug. Grabs her throat to stifle the reflex. Chokes her fears down with wine.

TRUCK

I brought some homemade cinnamon
rolls - from Mom's wake. Give me a
sec and I'll nuke them.

They hustle over to the kitchen area and the microwave.

DARK DAWN RISING

Truck sets a plate of homemade cinnamon rolls on the table. Steaming in the chilly air. Her eyes light up.

TRUCK

Never even told them about doubling
the energy savings on the Earth end
of the trajectory. Talk about going
ballistic.

They eat in silence. She gobbles the rolls down, famished.

A wave of sadness overcomes him in the silence.

Tired, absentminded. Truck picks at a scar on one wrist. She looks - notices - grabs the wrist with vengeance.

TRUCK

You'd think an engineer would know
how to do a proper suicide.
Somebody told me that once. A Ford
car salesman, I think it was.

Truck pulls the arm away, avoiding her eyes - melancholy.

BROOKLYN

All the horror stories in my
classes, about getting personal
with patients. Just figured out
that one. This is agony.

TRUCK

Didn't mean any harm. Honest. Hey,
maybe this will give you some
distance.

Truck digs into his papers. Pulls out a stack of documents.

TRUCK

Here are all the medical documents
I gave the Disabilities people,
about my old Army psych diagnosis.
If you're interested -

She grabs the papers from him. Pulls out her glasses.

Truck adjusts the floor lamp so she has good reading light.

BROOKLYN

Sacred ground. Finally.

Truck backs slowly away. Heads for the washroom. When he
returns, Brooklyn points to several typed pages.

BROOKLYN

Did you write these rebuttals to
the Army doctors?
(looks up to see him nod)
Clear. Direct. I like. Capable.

Brooklyn smiles over her glasses at him.

A SHORT SPELL LATER

Truck sits down at the table, watching her read.

BROOKLYN

They tried to use some of your
writings to prove you were
schizophrenic. Your lawyer
presented some letters.

TRUCK

My lawyer proved that it was
service-aggravated and not
preexisting.

BROOKLYN

There's your chance. Student Legal Services. They can help. It's free.

TRUCK

Went there. That lady accused me of using my website for profit. Damn near expelled me on the spot.

BROOKLYN

Student. Legal. Services? They're on your side.

TRUCK

Not if you're schizophrenic.

Truck pulls a framed letter from NASA out of a box, shows her.

His hand holding the frame is covered with fresh blood. It oozes off his fingers and onto the frame.

He no longer fights it. He just watches it. Resigned to his fate. Accepting it.

TRUCK

Here's one of the letters we presented, from NASA - about the research the doctors said was grandiose - sign of schizophrenia.

Brooklyn scans the NASA letter, reading part out loud:

BROOKLYN

Your concepts about the Unified Field Theory appear to be so profound as to be years ahead of the current scientific thinking in the areas in which you delved.

Her expression turns from sunny to total eclipse.

BROOKLYN

Oh. God. No. Here we go again.

Truck watches her expression darken. His face becomes melancholy. His eyes are calm. His resignation complete.

TRUCK

A new model of the solar system. There was a lot more, but that's all I can remember.

BROOKLYN

Remember? That NASA letter, it says
you wrote a book. The psych docs
mention it, too.

TRUCK

They were the last ones to read it.
I destroyed it not long after I was
kicked out of the Army. They said
it was a grandiose delusion.

Truck roots around in the other student alcoves and finds a
small shredder. Hooks it up.

She grabs the SHREDDER and throws it out the window... CRASH.

BROOKLYN

Destroyed. Again? What's this
destructive urge in you?

(forced calm)

But the medical trial said the
doctors were wrong to call it
grandiose thinking.

He picks at the gruesome scar on his wrist, seeping blood
from the jagged edges. He watches it drip to the floor. Pool.

TRUCK

Nobody explained that to me. I
destroyed everything. Then got so
depressed I tried to kill myself.

(quietly)

I destroy because they tell me to,
either directly or indirectly. If
it blows up your world, get rid of
it. Isn't what sane people do?

She looks at him - out the window - whispers:

BROOKLYN

Well. Yes. It is.

He's deeply melancholy. Unbearably so.

TRUCK

While I was on the psych ward
recovering from the suicide
attempt, I missed a medical review
with the V.A., and they
automatically reduced my rating
from ten percent to zero.

BROOKLYN

You've got the worse luck of any person I've ever met. Or read about. In my whole life.

Beat.

BROOKLYN

How did you end up on the psych ward in the first place?

Truck gets up and paces. She stands up, watching him. Waiting patiently. He sees her watching - hurries into the maze of stacks.

LIBRARY STACKS

Brooklyn searches through the dark aisles. Finally finds him. Listens as she follows his meanderings.

TRUCK

I turned in a bunch of senior enlisted for using hard drugs on the job.

Truck waits for a second for that to sink in. He sees her in the shadows, backlit by sunlight. First an angel.

Then a demon. The two fight. The demon triumphs. Darkness wins.

TRUCK

They found me out, blew up my motorcycle - my car. The officers covered it all up. I filed a report with the Inspector General.

Truck's getting more depressed by the minute.

We see him for the first time in full light: Dark beard. Bags under his eyes. Black skin around his eyes. Lips bleeding black blood.

TRUCK

Boom. Zipped me up into a straitjacket so all his charges against senior brass go away.

Brooklyn doesn't notice his dark countenance because he's never in full light.

LOUNGE AREA

They escape the stacks and sit back at his desk.

Desperate to be doing something, anything at all - she slides her glasses down. Turns on his desk lamp. Randomly - searches through his papers and belongings.

BROOKLYN

Never thought I see science going
backwards - before my very eyes.

She looks over her glasses at him.

TRUCK

This is so not my responsibility.

She rubs her eyes, head shaking - head in her hands, feeling the desperation in his situation.

He SMASHES the NASA frame, yanks out the letter, and RIPS it to shreds. Gashes his hand on the glass. Real blood. Bright!

TRUCK

Damn science. Damn NASA. Damn them
to all to fucking hell.

Gritting her teeth - Brooklyn grabs a piece of chalk, crams it into his hand - points toward a clean chalkboard.

TRUCK

I - I presented that solar system
project in my first class in grad
school. Got an A. The professor
loved it, Dr. Szebehely.

He draws the "SOLAR SYSTEM," Sun, and nine planets. "RINGS" around Saturn, more details.

BROOKLYN

Victor Szebehely? The former
Chairman of the Aerospace
Department? Why is he not now
supporting you? Did you piss him
off, too - like everybody else?

TRUCK

He passed away a few months later.
The last rational conversation I
had with anybody on campus for the
last three-plus years. Ironic.

BROOKLYN

Did he know what he was looking at?

He keeps drawing as they talk. More and more frantic detail. Planets on the waveform. Orbital eccentricity. Rotation.

TRUCK

You're damn right he did.
Regularization, his specialty -
eliminating unknowns to simplify
equations.

BROOKLYN

What did the other professors say?

TRUCK

Dr. Watts refused to let me use
that class toward my Master's
Degree credits.

Brooklyn hands the medical documents back to Truck.

He reaches for the shredder - but it's gone: stares at her, very angry. Frustrated, he erases the solar system diagram.

TRUCK

With any luck, maybe I'll start
getting visual hallucinations and
see Dr. Z again. Finally, somebody
on my side.

His expression softens when he sees her grieving expression.

BROOKLYN

I'm staring into deep, dark space
right now, Truck. Hopeless. Lost.
Help me back from the edge of that
terrifying, despicable place.

TRUCK

All these torrid memories we're
dredging up? Not nearly as dark as
the abyss I'm standing inside of.

TRUCK

Not to burst your bubble, but
there's one small problem.

Her felicity evaporates instantly, expecting the worse. She collapses onto the sofa. Extremely depressed. Moribund.

BROOKLYN

Just don't tell me, okay? I want to
go home. Ignorant. Stupid.

She hurries away and disappears into the stacks, yelling:

BROOKLYN

Go mental on me. Be delusional.
Just leave me out of your bubble.

Truck steps into the kitchen and starts washing dishes. He's just finishing up when she hurries back in - sees the shiny, neat kitchen area. Smiles, appreciative.

BROOKLYN

At least the schizophrenic can
manage his personal needs.

TRUCK

Mom kept me eating healthy - told
me when I was looking all stressed
out, dragging bottom.

She's bursting with excitement.

BROOKLYN

You can write a column for the
paper. A whole series of columns
about all this. I'll give you a *nom
de plume* so nobody knows it's you.

TRUCK

God only knows who will look after
me now that she's gone.

BROOKLYN

What do you think? Great idea? You
can even add one of your signature
cartoons.

Truck looks away and fiddles - unable to face her.

BROOKLYN

Tell me you're just a nice guy with
really bad luck. Naïve. Trusting
when he shouldn't. Too damn
creative for his your good.

He pulls a folder out of his papers, a stack of newspaper
columns cut out. He puts the folder in her hands.

BROOKLYN

If we'd met in the Student Union
back then, before - if we'd got to
talking. We'd be friends. More. How
could. Love. Run. Out. Like this.

TRUCK

When I was still zero percent schizophrenic. When I wouldn't have to tell you a thing about it - and you never woulda even noticed.

BROOKLYN

Or met you at the paper, when you were doing your columns - and I was lousy staff reporter on the beat.

TRUCK

Don't say that, B.K. That only makes it hurt even worse than it already does.

Hands shaking, she goes through the clippings, each one with a political cartoon (in Truck's hand) attached.

TRUCK

Remember Wendy's column in The Daily Texan right after nine-eleven?

A note of desperation enters her voice, growing into a crescendo - beat by lonely beat. Sad, Truck watches as darkness envelopes her hope, her light, her energy.

BROOKLYN

Her graduate advisor was playing a chance game on his computer. Bop cartoonish Osama bin Laden on the head to kill him.

TRUCK

True story. When I went in to ask Dr. Brown to set up a practice session for my oral qualifying exam. Too busy - playing that game.

BROOKLYN

Damn. The satire column about going to Student Legal Services - only to be served a legal notice?

TRUCK

My Mars website. They said it was commercial use of university servers. Dr. Brown turned me in.

BROOKLYN

Your own goddamn advisor? Was this before he was assigned to you? Please say yes.

Truck shakes his head no, eyes downcast and melancholy. She puts her hands over her ears, cringing.

In dawn's early light, we see her face clearly for the first time. Her eyes are black. Her cheeks hollow. Her expression grim.

Truck hands her a pair of sound-muffling earphones. She puts them on. He waits for her to make eye contact. She's LOUD:

BROOKLYN

What are these muffs for?

Truck points to the tower above them.

TRUCK

For when the bells toll.

She shakes her head. She yells at him (pointing at the headphones).

BROOKLYN

Can't hear you. Therapist's best friend.

They stand in front of the window in a stiff breeze, watching the sunrise. The city is starting to come alive.

There's a smattering of students on the campus already.

Brooklyn wobbles on her feet. Truck has to grab her around the shoulders to keep her standing straight.

BROOKLYN

I just hope I'm drunk enough to forget all this rigmarole tomorrow.

TRUCK

I wish I could forget. Except I have almost a Xerox memory. Never forget anything. What a goddamn curse.

They stand close. Too close. People yell on the campus below - staring up at them in the window, clapping.

They struggle apart. Stare at the cheering group below - step quickly back from the window.

TRUCK

Except. Can't remember the fun Mars research. The joy of discovery. It's all submerged in hate and more hate. Dark. Depressing. Void.

Truck doodles at the chalkboard. She tidies up the room and sets the furniture in order. Truck heads to the washroom.

While he's gone, she stares at the Mars diagrams. She highlights parts. She shades others into a perspective.

BROOKLYN

It is kind of relaxing. But that's
it. Doodles. Delusions.

Truck returns and collapses in a chair, watching her. They look back toward the stacks at the sound of VOICES.

THE POWER COMES ON - random lights illuminate.

Truck quickly checks his watch. Runs to his desk. Grabs the sound-muffling headphones. Tosses them to Brooklyn.

She stares at Truck. At the headphones. Bewildered.

THE TOWER BELL RINGS.

The whole damn ROOM SHAKES the SOUND is so INTENSE. She jams the headphones on her head.

Truck scrambles around the room, rifling through the other desks - finds another set of headphones, and puts them on.

He grabs a steel girder and counts off the rings with each wave of vibration.

After six he gives the all-clear and takes the headphones off. She follows suit.

BROOKLYN

It's too bad, but there's no
escaping reality, hard as you might
try. Gravity.

She collapses at the table. Truck pulls out a mechanical timer, sets it to one hour - puts it on the table.

The stare at the timer: TICK. TICK. TICK.

Truck turns out all the lights in the space.

BROOKLYN

Those were workmen. They found your
electricity kill switch?

TRUCK

They'd be raiding this floor with
the campus police if they had. I
think the motion sensor kicked the -

The VOICES get louder. Truck dives under the table. Hiding. She follows suit. They hunker down. Mum's the word.

FOOTSTEPS trundle down the stairs, as two workmen converse.

WORKER #1

God dammit. All the way here from San Antonio. On Thanksgiving day. Fucking bell chimes up. As soon as we enter the premises.

WORKER #2

I told you. The place is haunted. George the friendly ghost.

WORKER #1

Yeah, right. Try putting that on our work order.

The FOOTSTEPS recede.

Truck sneaks out and turns on a floor lamp. Brooklyn is more pessimistic than ever, slurring her words - half drunk.

BROOKLYN

I sure wish we could have found a way out for you.

She trips, and they fall back onto the makeshift bed.

They ease up into sitting positions, staring out the window at a spectacular dawn sky.

BROOKLYN

They're just too damn consistent. No jury would believe you, Truck. Everybody, at every level, blocked your every move. Checkmate.

Sunlight washes their faces, both dark and grim, moribund.

TRUCK

With Mom gone, nobody to help me out - what do I even do?

BROOKLYN

Like I said in the beginning, maybe it's time to consider psychiatric meds. Or maybe the V.A. will put you back in talk therapy.

TRUCK

They don't do that anymore. Only meds.

BROOKLYN

What a waste of a beautiful mind.

TRUCK

So there's no hope? No angle, no way whatsoever for me to win? Even get another shot at grad school somewhere else to finish this?

BROOKLYN

You need references to do that. Honestly? As many of these exit interviews as I've done. Researched for my dissertation. It's curtains.

TRUCK

Hope is a terrible thing.
(quietly, sad)
Love's run out.

BROOKLYN

Don't say that. You're sleepy. Tired. In the mourning. Something will come to mind, I'm sure. Sleep on it? Yes? Which reminds me -

TRUCK

Queen Catherine needs her beauty rest. Sure. I can do that.

Truck hustles over to tidy up the makeshift bed. She pads behind him, loosening up her blouse and belt.

BROOKLYN

We'll fix this, Truck. Somehow. Someway. This time next year, you'll be working for NASA. With your military cred, maybe even an astronaut on the Space Shuttle.

TRUCK

No, thanks. Not if what I've been through is anything like NASA's engineering design process.

Brooklyn is dead on her feet. Truck lays her down. Tucks her in. Gently, he puts headphones on her head.

Truck steps to his desk, shoulders drooping, head hanging low. He empties the shredded documents into a pile.

He stares at the paper, falls to his knees, sobbing with tears flowing down his cheeks - grasping the shreds.

TRUCK

Never create that again. None of
it. Never. Not with my extreme math
phobia.

He struggles to his feet. Stares at the desk. The black suit.
The gruesome scar on his wrist. The sunrise out the window.

TRUCK

No Mars. No nothing. No. Fucking.
Hope. Whatsoever.

Truck takes his clothes off. Puts the starched white shirt on.
Burnt orange suspenders (with Longhorn icons).

Truck ties the thin black tie. Puts the black shoes on.
Shines the shoes on the back of his pants leg.

Truck pulls a razor blade out of his desk drawer and, with
one last look toward Brooklyn, he slits both wrists.

Truck sits on his desk chair. Adjusts the chair so the light
from the rising sun is warm on his face.

He watches the sun until his eyes glaze over. Close.

Juan and Juanita enter the room, chatting away. They look
around, see Truck. Rush through the pool of blood.

Brooklyn wakes up. Sees them. Runs to Truck. Screams.
Desperately, covered in blood, they try to revive Truck.

INT. UNIVERSITY TOWER - GRAD STUDENT GHETTO - DAY

Several students gather around a big screen TV in front of a
chalkboard Truck had been using.

SUPER: "ONE YEAR LATER"

Graphic images show the NASA SPACE SHUTTLE flying across the
blue sky. Smoking. Disintegrating piece by piece. Finally -
EXPLODING into a million pieces over the heart of Texas.

Thick smoky contrails shoot out from the detonation.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The NASA space shuttle exploded
over Texas earlier this year, all
hands lost. Shades of the
Challenger disaster at Cape Kennedy
in 1986. The U.S. Navy
investigation of the Columbia
disaster was released today.

A montage of images mixed with short video clips of the Challenger disaster over the Florida coast.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The report blames the NASA culture,
a bureaucracy and a process that
quote - tramples reason, stifles
professional differences of
opinion, and that doesn't reflect
reality. End quote.

As one, the students turn to stare at Truck's old desk, still empty - exactly as he left it.

FADE OUT.

THE END