

JUMP GATE

by

WH Clark

Based on a true story

JUMP GATE

FADE IN:

OPENING CREDITS - FAILED MARS MISSIONS - MONTAGE

A) RUSSIA - ROSCOSMOS MARS LANDER

A ROCKET (Russian flag) in the upper Earth atmosphere FIRES boosters. As the stage separates, the ROCKET EXPLODES. SUPER: "NOVEMBER 16, 1996." The DEBRIS BURNS UP in re-entry.

NASA NEWS (V.O.)

After failure of the second fourth-stage burn, Russia's Cosmos space agency's Mars 96 mission burned up on Earth re-entry earlier today.

B) JAPAN - ISAS MARS LANDER

A SPACECRAFT (Japan flag) approaches Mars. The trajectory bends from gravity. SUPER: "JULY 3, 1998." Power is lost on the spacecraft. The SPACECRAFT ZOOMS away. Lost in the deep.

NASA NEWS (V.O.)

Japan Space Agency's Nozomi mission performed a Mars fly-by but lost fuel and zoomed off into deep space. We've lost all contact.

C) USA - NASA MARS LANDER

A SPACECRAFT (US flag) ENTERS the Mars atmosphere. Trailing a PLUME of FIRE. SUPER: "JANUARY 3, 1999." The SPACECRAFT CRASHES on the surface. Giant cloud of dust and debris.

NASA NEWS (V.O.)

NASA's Mars Polar Lander crashed into Mars, dead on impact. Yet another failed Mars mission.

EXT. TEXAS - HILL COUNTRY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The Austin metropolis. Town Lake, which is the dammed-up Colorado River. Follow the river north. Rolling hills. Cedar trees. A sprawling damn. Lake Travis behind it, to the north.

EXT. TEXAS - LAKE TRAVIS - MARINA - DAY

BILL (41, brown hair, balding) works on an antique sailboat.

Bill's refurbishing the hull - surrounded by well-used tools.

He's wearing ragged cutoffs. No shirt (swimmer's physique).
Ancient hiking books with faded socks absent elastic.

A giant orange and white cat SCHRODINGER sleeps in the middle
of all the tools. It's a gusty fall afternoon.

Bill glances up. He sees a sailboat. A giant spinnaker sail
billowing forward. Barreling toward the pier.

The sailboat SKIPPER unfastens the halyards. The spinnaker
gets wrapped up in the mast stays.

The sailboat can't slow down!

Bill jumps in a skiff. RIPS the ENGINE on. ZOOMS out to the
"CELESTE MECHANIQUE." Daring jump onboard.

Bill gains control. The skipper, DR. Z (80, rotund, Belgian)
SPINS the WHEEL in a hard tack. Barely misses the pier.

They loosen the halyards. Drift. The SAILS FLUTTER.

DR. Z (SKIPPER)
You saved my Celeste, young man.

Dr. Z watches the skiff, as another boat catches up to it
and tows it back toward their dock.

BILL
I wonder whose boat that is.

Eyebrows raised, Dr. Z grabs a cold one out of a cooler.

Dr. Z watches Bill packing up the sails. Coiling ropes. Making
things ship-shape.

BILL
You shouldn't be out on the lake
alone, much less running with a
spinnaker all reefed-out like that.

DR. Z
Never did a spinnaker before. Wind
hits. Keeled over. What a rush.

BILL
Wicked squalls all afternoon, sir.
Damn miracle you didn't - bottoms -
up.

Bill stands up. Gets ready to leave. Dr. Z implores:

DR. Z
I am always looking for good and
diligent students.

Bill massages the genuine teak railing. The brass fittings.

BILL
Not seen a beauty like this since
Annapolis. Plebe year. Ouch. Grumpy
drill chief to - starboard.

Bill glances at Dr. Z (angry scowl, arms akimbo).

DR. Z
You will teach me how to spinnaker.

BILL
Aren't you a little old to -

DR. Z
Crash and burn is a wonderful way
to go.

BILL
Am I a sucker for lost rabbits or
what?

DR. Z
Well? Time, tide, and the Mrs. Wait
for no man, old our not.

BILL
Okay, then. Stop by my house next
Sunday, same time. Little green
house yonder. Sir.

Bill points across the road to a small house up the hill.
There's a faded blue GEO Metro parked in the driveway.

DR. Z
Can we make it earlier? Noonish?
This will be a great excuse to get
out of church.

BILL
Hey. It's your - hide.

Bill gives Dr. Z a lazy salute. Scuttles onto the dock.

EXT. AUSTIN, TEXAS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The blue GEO Metro on the Interstate, backing up traffic.

The GEO Metro tools along Town Lake Boulevard (parks, runners on trails, birds). Turns off at a pink granite office building. Parks in a lot across the street.

INT. AUSTIN - TOWN LAKE ROAD - ARMADILLO RADIO - LOBBY - DAY

Bill cruises into busy penthouse offices, a threadbare sports coat among pricey three-piece suits.

Bill paces nervously. Adjusts his tie in a mirror wall. Shines his shoes on the back of his pants leg.

SUPER: "APRIL 1, 1999"

BROOKLYN (25, dark hair, Cajun, sublime French accent) studies Truck from a swank window office across the way.

Bill pulls out a scrap of paper. Reading - scowls. Pulls out a mechanical pencil to make a correction.

BROOKLYN

It is not ever fashionable to be
early to an appointment. Come.

Brooklyn swoops by, motions. He follows her to a sound room.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Bill watches Brooklyn ready a big reel-to-reel tape recorder next to a mixing board. She takes furtive glances at him: He's fidgety and nervous.

BROOKLYN

You keep itching that scratch and
it'll drive me crazy. Talk to the
D.J.

BILL

Got a meeting with the principals
this morning. Finally, they promote
me to an associate in the - firm.

She steps over, corners him: tidies his hair, straightens his tie. Smooths out his shirt. Truck's disturbia slowly dissipates.

BROOKLYN

Unlax, *mon capitaine*.

She KISSES him on the lips. Hard. Bill eases away, smiling.

BROOKLYN

Pshaw. Stressed out over a *picayune* raise? Make'n me proud, here.

Brooklyn SNAPS a BRA STRAP on her bare shoulder. He's smiling gently as he steps up to the microphone.

She turns on the reel-to-reel tape recorder and bows a graceful introduction. He cranks up a boss Texan accent.

BILL

Good morning, Austin. This is B.T.U. Bill with your energy tip for the day. It's springtime, y'all. The Texas Highway Department doesn't mow the grass for a few months so the wildflowers can grow.
(louder, enthusiastic)
You can do the same. Feed the wildflowers. Save them honey bees.

Bill steps back from the mic, pleased with himself. Brooklyn turns the reel-to-reel off - and, claps.

INT. TOWN LAKE ROAD - CROMWELL ASSOC. - BILL'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill (same clothes but no jacket - starched white shirt) works at a drafting board in an open "bullpen" area of cubicles separated by four-foot walls, marking up a blueprint floorplan with a red felt-tip pen.

A large CAD monitor by the drafting board has a NASA Space Shuttle screen saver. A short wall behind the drafting board is scattered with NASA Space Shuttle photos and patches.

SUPER: "BASED ON A TRUE STORY"

Out full-wall windows on all sides is the Austin cityscape.

LARRY (45, balding, tall, slow talker) stands up in a nearby cubicle. Truck waves him off, shy.

LARRY

Nice duds, B.C. Got yourself a lunch date today?

CLARK (40, high-energy, short, stocky, cheery) pops right up from another cubicle nearby.

CLARK

For real? The hottie across the hall at the radio station. Yes!

Bill remains seated, leaning back in his drafting chair.

BILL
Got myself a meeting with destiny.

Clark and Larry (smiling) talk over his head, overly loud:

CLARK
He's getting a window office.

LARRY
Ignoring us peons already.

Bill pops up and confronts them.

BILL
I am not. That's not - me.

RENEE (35, very buxom, too much makeup) stops by Bill's desk.

RENEE
You're wanted in the conference
room, Mr. Bill.

Bill jumps right up, flustered, tucking his shirt in -
grabbing his sports jacket. They yell after him:

LARRY
Be sure to ask for a big raise.

CLARK
And your own parking spot.

Bill waves them off and follows Renee across the bullpen.
Several workers in cubicles give him a thumbs up. Hoots.

RENEE
Relax, Mr. Bill. We're all rooting
for you. You're the best engineer
ever. We love you.

Truck pauses to straighten his tie in a glass wall.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

CROMWELL (65, rotund, bald) sits at the head of an elegant
table with HAMMER (40, redhead) and ADAIR (45, thin,
intense). They all wear top-dollar silk business suits.

Bill closes the door. Takes a seat. His eyes are glued on the
view, ogling: Out the full-glass wall is a spectacular view
of Town Lake and the Austin skyline beyond.

Frowning, Cromwell SLAMS a magazine down on the table.

CROMWELL

Great article in H.P.A.C. News this
month. Linking Attention Deficit
Disorder to bad Indoor Air Quality.

Bill gets antsy. Sits bolt upright. Studies Cromwell's face.

TRUCK

If you liked it so much how come
you're looking so - dark?

ADAIR

Kudos on your appointment by
Governor Bush to the Psychology
Associates Licensing Board.

Bill studies Adair's face. Adair won't make eye contact.

BILL

Dark AND angry. What's going on?

HAMMER

You belong in academia.

Bill studies Hammer's face. Hammer gives him an ugly face.

BILL

Dark, angry, and - righteous.

Bill's genuinely startled now. But he manages a weak smile:

BILL

I get it. April Fools. Hah. Boy did
(talking ever slower)
you guys ever get me on that one.

Cromwell pulls out a PINK SLIP. Signs it. Smiles. Passes it
around for signatures. They're joyful - cheery.

HAMMER

Ha-ha. You're fired. Is that funny
or what?
(talking ever slower)
We finally got rid of the schizo.

Bill turns white with shock. His voice cracks.

BILL

I've been seeing my V.A. shrink.
Every week. Learning all about
stress. Meditation. Yoga even.

Hammer stuffs the pink paper into Bill's unwilling hands.

BILL
Texas is a right-to-work state. I
have a right to - work.

HAMMER
Sorry, that's not exactly how it
works, Mr. Bill.

BILL
All the federal contracts y'all
get, having a disabled veteran on
the senior engineering staff.

CROMWELL
Look at you.

Bill scans his threadbare clothes - glares at Cromwell's.

BILL
What? I miss house payments all the
time, what you pay me. Now I have
to dress like a - pimp?

Adair slams the conference table. Bill reels back.

ADAIR
We'll hire us a real disabled.

BILL
After all I've done here? Nights.
Weekends. Holidays. Bill will come
in. He ain't got nobody at home.
Small. Effing. Wonder.

Cromwell waves the magazine at Bill.

CROMWELL
Something tells me you're not
giving me one hundred percent.

The principals stand up. Bill remains seated.

CROMWELL
You're FIRED. Now get the F out of
my conference room, pack your
things, and - leave.

BILL
That's it? Ten years? Three times
the work for half the pay? There
were only five people here when I
started - now there are - fifty.

The three executives stare at Bill, dark and angry.

BILL

All the work I did for the Austin
School District. They love my work.
Lowest bids. Happiest contractors.

ADAIR

You're incompetent. As an engineer.
As a person. As a -

BILL

I'm licensed in electrical,
software, mechanical, energy
conservation - H.V.A.C. You -

HAMMER

Thank the Good Lord there aren't
any laws against firing somebody
because they're too smart.

Bill sits back down. Arms crossed. Defiant. Tears glistening
in his eyes. Cromwell tells Adair:

CROMWELL

Show this moron's photo to
everybody in the office. They're to
call security if he ever shows his
ugly mug on these premises again.

ADAIR

Just - go. I've already hired three
engineers and a draftsman to
replace you.

BILL

Say, what? Listen to yourselves.
(very loud)
I'll go radioactive. Get on the
radio and - speaking of Austin
School District. There he is now.

Bill stands up. Points through a full glass wall (facing
Renee at the reception desk) at PAUL TUTT talking with her.

INT. LOBBY JUST OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paul Tutt glances at his watch. At the conference room -
startles to see Bill pointing - the others staring - at him.

Stunned, Paul Tutt watches the three principals physically
muscle Bill out of the room.

With tears on his cheeks, Bill gives Paul Tutt a brave smile and scurries back into the offices, a total wreck.

The principals, Hollywood smiles on their innocent faces, motion for Paul Tutt to enter the conference room.

EXT. TOWN LAKE ROAD - PARKING LOT - DAY

Larry, Clark, and Bill carry boxes full of rolled-up blueprints and papers in their arms. They cross the boulevard. Hustle into the parking lot.

BILL

I earned a small fortune in sweat equity here. This is grand theft engineering.

Bill crams his box into the beat-up old blue GEO Metro. There's no more room. Larry and Clark set their boxes down.

LARRY

This ain't none of our doing.

CLARK

Fire you, and now they get credit for all your projects.

LARRY

Nobody's done more than you to increase the value of this firm. The principals will cash in big-time when they retire.

They shake hands. Sad faces and somber expressions all around. Larry and Clark hustle back to the office.

Brooklyn steps out of a flashy "ARMADILLO RADIO" van nearby, jabbering away with a COWORKER. She gives Bill a paparazzi wave. The coworker says to Brooklyn, real loud:

COWORKER

Your guy drives a purple Mars car?
My grandpas' lawnmower has a bigger engine. Zoom-zoom. B-bye wildflowers.

Frantic, Brooklyn motions to Bill not to listen to her.

BROOKLYN

Pay no attention to - show biz.
Pass a good day, homey. B-bye.

Brooklyn tries to turn back to talk to Bill. But - the coworker urges her forward. He yells after her:

BILL
Homey just got - fired.

Bill rips off his coat. His tie. Throws them inside the car. Rolls up the sleeves of his starched white shirt.

EXT. TOWN LAKE ROAD - PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

The GEO Metro is parked next to a small dumpster now. Bill's surrounded by boxes. Sorting. Some papers go into the car. Most end up in the dumpster.

Just as Bill's hoisting a giant computer monitor into the back seat. Cromwell comes storming across the parking lot.

CROMWELL
Stop. That's our new CAD monitor.

Bill looks at the monitor. At Cromwell. He DROPS it - CRASH.

BILL
Not anymore it isn't.

Cromwell stares at the dead monitor. The boxes. The papers.

CROMWELL
You absconded with all sorts of
confidential company docs. Where -

Bill points to the dumpster. Mischievous smile.

BILL
Loosen your tie. Take a dive.

Cromwell growls. Turns on heel. Stalks back to the office.

AN HOUR LATER - TEXAS SUNSET

The GEO Metro is full up to the windows. To the roof. Bill sits on the hood, sipping bottled water. Watching:

Cromwell supervises Clark and Larry, who are digging in the dumpster. Bill stands on the tarmac, ready to leave.

CROMWELL
Don't you go. Not until we find
every last company confidential.

Brow furrowed, Bill locks the car. Heads down a gravel path.

Town Lake is resplendent. Bill pulls up short: front and center is The Austin American Statesman building.

INT. TOWN LAKE ROAD - THE AMERICAN STATESMAN - SUNSET

Bill steps into the lobby. Shuffles to the "NEWS DESK" and leans there, exhausted. He talks with the RECEPTIONIST.

BILL

I - I have a story. Discrimination?

RECEPTIONIST

I know you. You're B.T.U. Bill. I love your radio show - and, and all the energy tips on the front page of our paper. Way to go, dude.

People rush to the windows: The sun is just below the horizon. The sky is a brilliant orange.

Across the parking lot, A CLOUD OF BLACK OBJECTS JETS out from under the interstate bridge over Town Lake.

LADY EDITOR

There they are, right on time.

Bill gravitates toward the windows. Takes one look. Hurries out the door - leaving the receptionist in a lurch.

EXT. TOWN LAKE ROAD - THE AMERICAN STATESMAN - NIGHTFALL

Bill runs toward a SWARMING CLOUD OF BATS, right up underneath the interstate bridge, watching them, mesmerized. A LADY editor(youngish) stands beyond the bats, yelling:

LADY

Don't get so close, cowboy. Those are bats. Rabies?

Bill drifts into the swarm. Impervious.

BILL

(sotto voice)

Birds of a feather flock together.

The BATS SWARM him. He stumbles around. Lost.

BILL

Can't see. Lady? You there?

She yells at him over the CHAOS of FLUTTERING BAT WINGS.

LADY

Come. Come toward my voice.

Bill steps toward her. Faster. She pulls him away. Bill takes an angry step toward her, into her face.

BILL

I'll show you - smart.

Backing away, she acts afraid. Bill turns and hurries away.

INT. VA HOSPITAL - MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC - OFFICE - DAY

DR. CARTER (50, small, blonde, Texan) stands up.

DR. CARTER

I'm sorry. But I can't do talk therapy for you anymore.

BILL

Say what? You have to. I'm service-connected. It's the - law.

DR. CARTER

With the cutbacks, all I can do for you now are meds.

BILL

That Drano crap? No, thanks.

Dr. Carter shows Bill to the door.

BILL

Oh, I get it. The V.A. can't bill Cromwell and Associates anymore.

DR. CARTER

Let me know about the meds.

BILL

You'd like that, wouldn't you? One more good brain down the drain.

Dr. Carter gives Bill a little hug. Shows him out. Shoulders down, depressed, he slinks away down the hall.

EXT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Bill's under the Geo Metro, changing the oil, tools scattered - in the gravel drive of a tiny green house: Big yard. Scattered cedar trees. Big lake visible down the hillside.

Bill back-strokes out from under the car and searches for a wrench in one of his toolboxes. Looks up: A dark green ISUZU BRAT ROLLS down the hill.

The ENGINE IS TORQUED OUT - in neutral. Nobody's inside!

Bill stands, unmoving, watching the CAR ZIP by his driveway, gaining speed. It CAREENS across an intersection outside a campground down the hill - CRASHES into a stone wall.

Dr. Z comes running down the hill (Sunday suit and tie, classic 80's Keds high-tops). Bill steps to the street.

Breathing hard - heaving. - Dr. Z wrenches to a stop in front of him. Bill checks his watch.

BILL
Little early for your sailing
lesson.

Dr. Z glares at him - speaks in short, struggling breaths.

BILL
Coerced Mrs. Z. Up early for Church
services. So excited about sailing.

Dr. Z points to his bright white sneakers.

DR Z
The Mrs. She clued right in. Drug
me out. Slapped me. Va-voom. Away
goes. The hobby wheels.

Dr. Z loosens his tie. Takes his suit coat off. Hands it to Bill, who leads him by the elbow to the front door.

INT. BILL'S SMALL HOUSE - LIVING/DINING ROOM - DAY

Bill clears papers off the sofa. Sits Dr. Z down, then steps into the kitchen (double-door opening off the open living/dining area). Dr. Z stands right up and explores:

Engineering drawings stapled to the walls. Stacks of papers on the floor. Bookshelves. Giant chalkboard. Computers.

BILL (O.S.)
Just in time for lunch. You like
Eye-talian pizza?

Bill comes back with a tall glass of ice water for Dr. Z.

Bill scurries back into the kitchen, making COOKING NOISES.
They talk through the wide opening between the rooms.

BILL (O.S.)
Starting my own consulting firm.
Sad story. Happy ending.

Dr. Z scans drawings on the walls, talking quietly.

DR. Z
School design. A strip mall church.
Garden center site plan. And look
here, a big computer fab building.
Big money in that one.

BILL (O.S.)
Hot platter. Clear a spot on the
table, will ya?

Dr. Z clears the clutter from the dining room table.

They chow down on homemade pizza. Dr. Z waves his arms around
the room:

DR. Z
I see a brain that needs heavier-
weight grease than engineering.
Otherwise, the flywheel spins and
spins and you go Beautiful Mind.

Bill looks at him sideways, a little bit insulted.

BILL
I'm not THAT bad off.
(quietly)
Psycho paranoid about U.F.O.s and X
Files government - conspiracies.

DR. Z
So, we have a deal? Stop by my
office on campus one day. We'll set
you up for the Texas X Files.

A vehicle drives into the driveway outside, lights flashing.
There's a knocking at the door. A loud, commanding voice:

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Police.

Dr. Z stands up. Grabs his jacket.

DR Z
Next Sunday? We will talk about
your future some more. Yes?

Bill nods and shows him to the door.

EXT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Dr. Z steps outside to face the POLICE OFFICER (45, big).

POLICE OFFICER
Chancellor Z. You okay? I saw the
Brat. It's totaled. You okay there?

Dr. Z stares down the street at the Brat, very sad.

POLICE OFFICER
Mrs. Z called. She's worried. Hop
in. I'll give you a ride home.

DR. Z.
Well, at least I got out of church.

POLICE OFFICER
(quietly)
Mrs. Z told me to save seats on
Wednesday for a make-up class.

DR. Z.
Break the law. You go to the
slammer. This is bad.

Dr. Z holds out his wrists. The cop smiles and mounts up. Dr.
Z waves goodbye to Bill and climbs into the cruiser.

EXT. AUSTIN, TEXAS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Downtown Austin. The State Capitol. Following an Armadillo
Bus (looks like a trolley car) north on a boulevard. To the
University of Texas campus. The iconic UT Tower. Northeast
side of campus. To the engineering buildings.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - WOOLRICH 101 - NIGHT

Bill finishes a problem on the chalkboard, turns:

SUPER: "TWO YEARS LATER."

BILL
Any more questions on the -
homework?

Among the students are MELBA (19, blonde, petite, quirky Texas accent), ANTON (21, Hispanic, fraternity starched), SEAMUS (25, chubby, Irish, red hair), and WALKER (18, black, football team linebacker).

MELBA

How come you can't teach our day
class in the big lecture hall?

Bill waits patiently while the laughter dies down.

BILL

Sorry. I'm just - the T.A.

ANTON

You can give us extra points,
though - right?

More laughter. Bill glares. They pipe down.

BILL

Do I look like a slot machine? Ka-
ching.

MELBA

I really do need some pony points
here - as it LOTS of 'em.

Bill paces. Watching the chaos of support for Melba get out
of control.

ANTON

We love your little talks about
your Mars program. Can we - I don't
know. Something.

BILL

Extra credit for - how's this: a
short essay on the challenges of
getting to Mars. Staying there.

Dead silence. A PEN DROPS.

BILL

I'll make a website and put
everything online. Will that work?

MELBA

We don't know - like, anything.

BILL

Everybody here has a different
major, right? What do you think of
when I say Mars? I point. You talk.

Bill points at one student after another:

ANTON

Biology. After three years in a weightless environment, your bones will be weak - for life.

SEAMUS

Physics. Not if the spacecraft rotates to create artificial gravity.

WALKER

Criminal justice. What if a key crew member assaults somebody? Stabs them? Throws them out an airlock? You can't lock them away because you need their job skills.

The class is deadly quiet.

MELBA

Sociology. Criminal behavior is going to happen. Just plain losing sight of Mother Earth is extremely traumatic. Even psychotic.

The CAMPUS TOWER BELL RINGS. Everybody gets their things and heads for the door. Bill yells above the commotion:

BILL

One paragraph. In your major. Nothing is off-limits. I'll give you ten points on - the next exam.

The class empties. Bill gathers up his papers at the front of the classroom. A small voice approaches him from behind:

BROOKLYN

Professor *Bourre*? Can you -

BILL

I'm no professor -

Bill slings his backpack over his shoulder. Turns.

BROOKLYN

Happy hour at the Union? Come see?

Bill freezes. Stares at her. Unbelieving - in shock.

Deflated, Brooklyn turns on heel and hurries out.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - HALLWAY - DAY

Bill hustles to catch up with Brooklyn as she stalks away.

BILL
Wait. I'm sorry. Please. I didn't
mean - that.

Bill goes to open the exit door for her. He pushes, but it
won't open.

AWKWARD MOMENT

as she steps back and waits for him to open the door inward.

BROOKLYN
I mosey on all the way over to the
geek side of campus, and what do I
get - geeked.

BILL
I said I'm sorry. It's been, what -
three whole years?

Huffing with resentment, she bolts away. He hurries after.

EXT. UT CAMPUS - ENGINEERING COMPLEX - DAY

They speed-walk across the shadowy nighttime campus.

BROOKLYN
Your classes get the best reviews
on campus. I thought that might be
good press. Wrong on both counts.

BILL
Really? They like my classes? Huh.
(quietly)
I show them lots of examples from
my years of consulting. Tell them
what it's like to be an engineer.
Talk about my Mars Jump Gate
project - sometimes.

BROOKLYN
You abandoned me. Us. Your show.
Disappeared without a *risque* word.

Brooklyn disappears into the Texas Union. Bill hesitates.

BILL
Funny thing about gravity.
Sometimes she grabs you. Other
times she seems to push you away.

Bill tucks his shirt in nice and neat and hurries inside.

INT. TEXAS UNION - FOOD COURT - CONTINUOUS

The place is rowdy. Brooklyn wanders into the crowd. Bill hustles to catch up to her. They step up to the bar.

BROOKLYN
Did you ever sue Cromwell and
Associates for discrimination?

BILL
Who's asking?

BROOKLYN
I do freelance stories for The
Daily Texan. More lance than free,
but, hey - pays the rent.

Bill ogles a group of buxom coeds belly dancing.

BROOKLYN
Hey, you. *Cocodril*. I expect your
undivided attention. Now.

Brooklyn grabs Bill's arm. Hauls him out to the patio.

EXT. TEXAS UNION - FOOD COURT - PATIO - CONTINUOUS

They sit at a wrought iron table and order drinks. Bill fights a spasm in one eye. Hurries to put in eye drops.

BROOKLYN
Same rude, inconsiderate bobo.
Hanging with the cute little
engineering chickadees now. No time
for *mademoiselle Trahan*.

Bill gets his eyes screwed on right. He glares at her:

BILL
Start-up consulting firm? Software
company? Bar X. Two-hour commute
every day? Teaching. Who's got time
for social? Full class - schedule.

BROOKLYN
Absent further evidence, you're
trending on mighty thin ice, here.

AWKWARD SILENCE. Two beats.

BROOKLYN
Well? Nanny looking for lagniappe?

Checking his wristwatch, Bill gets up to leave.

BILL
A story, on my T.A. classes? Not
interested. Gotta scoot - love runs
out. Bye.

Bill hurries away. Pensive, she pulls her cell phone out.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

An eclectic crew talks quietly, schmoozing on an open patio,
sipping champagne and wine. "REPUBLIC ONE CONCERT" posters.

Bill (white shirt, thin tie, jeans) stares at a full moon.
Brooklyn (sexy evening gown), cozies up to him.

BILL
Figured to see you - here.

BROOKLYN
Don't you just want to howl at the
lonely moon like the wolves do?

BILL
I was not a happy Cajun. After they
fired me. Didn't want to go
anywhere near that goddamn
building, after what they did.

Hands on ample hips, red lips pouting, she acts outraged.

BROOKLYN
I thought you'd abandoned me. Our
radio show. Didn't find out for
months you'd been fired. Then -

BILL
I was up to my neck in work. Trying
to get my business off the ground.
(quietly)
Wanted so much to - impress you.

Brooklyn hauls back - gets ready to SLAP him. He smiles, never looking away. She gets on tiptoe. Kisses his cheek.

BROOKLYN

You remember how hot-blooded I am.
That's a plus. A small one. But
I'll take it.

BILL

What brings you to campus? Another
option-of-last-resort person?

BROOKLYN

Touché. The D.J. glamor fades after
a while. It's all so - fake. I
still pull a night shift now and
then to fill in.

BILL

I forgot how much I liked doing
engineering like that. My friends.
Having a real - job.

His shoulders droop. His chin drops, looking down at the ground. She starts to speak - doesn't. Then she says gently:

BROOKLYN

I'm here. Now. Catching up. Friends
without benefits? Like always
before?

Bill's posture is animated, shoulders higher.

BILL

Benefits?

Brooklyn maneuvers into his line of sight.

BROOKLYN

Don't go horny frog on me, here. I
need that story for the paper.

Brooklyn (adjusting her gown to show more cleavage) guides Bill toward a more private area. He dares a peek.

BROOKLYN

The things I do to dress a good
story out of people.

Bill laughs. Brooklyn takes a long sip of champagne.

She studies Bill over the rim of her glass: big black eyes, pouting matador red lips. Bill looks away bashfully.

BILL
The last time I published anything -
bad. News. Bears.

BROOKLYN
Just catch me up. It's just me and
you, here.

Brooklyn scoots closer, showing serious décolletage.

BROOKLYN
Vinegar and ice.

BILL
You know I don't get subtext.
Thanks for the Cliff Notes, though.

BROOKLYN
Can't even do innuendo yet?

BILL
My subtext yogi, she done ran off
with a redneck yokel.

Brooklyn stifles - then can't. Raucous laugh.

They work their way through the crowd.

Hand on his arm, she lets him lead the way.

BROOKLYN
I used to think you were such a
cold fish. Got x-ray vision now -
I'm a psych major - see more.

BILL
Gotta go, luv. My seat's up in the
nosebleed economy - section.

Brooklyn watches Bill go, her mouth open in surprise. She
YELLS after him (scandalizing people nearby):

BROOKLYN
You do not walk out on a hot *sauce*
piquante - in the middle of a
boucherie society *roux*.

Brooklyn darts forward and grabs Bill's arm.

BROOKLYN
Empty seats down yonder by the
symphony pit. Dare you.

BILL
 You know I can't resist a dare.
 (sotto)
 Thanks for remembering me.

Brooklyn slips her arm in his and guides him forward. He's ill at ease, self-conscious.

BILL
 What am I even doing here? I'm no tied-and-died elite. All these slick suits. Sparkly eyes. Silicone tits. Talk about April's fool.

She hurries him down the aisle.

They settle into seats close to the orchestra.

Bill stares at the moon, visible through high windows behind the orchestra.

BILL
 I'm the last Celestial Mechanics grad student in the last program in the world to offer C Mech as a doctorate. With me - it ends.

The pianist takes to the stage. The concert hall darkens.

BROOKLYN
Beau's talking science might seem rude, but I know your mind.

BILL
 I am so not enamored with any chickadee undergrad - girls.

BROOKLYN
Moi? He listened. Remembered. Ain't seen the likes of in a coon's age.

A few seconds later, in the hushed quiet - as shadowy figures move on the stage - Bill whispers to Brooklyn:

BILL
 What's friends without benefits?

Brooklyn laughs, raucous and loud, into the proper silence.

They look up at a bright light: a bodybuilder USHER stands in front of two well-dressed faculty.

USHER
 You two. Time's up. Reserved seats.

They scoot out into the aisle, just as the band starts up:

MUSIC: "LOVE RUNS OUT," LIVE BY REPUBLIC ONE

Wild and free, Brooklyn dances to the music - grabs Bill's hand, and gets him into the spirit.

They dance up the aisle.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - SYMPHONY HALL - NIGHT

Bill and Brooklyn dance out of the concert hall into a brightly-lit parking lot. Bill is night-blind, struggles.

Brooklyn loops her arm into his and leads him away.

BILL

What a hoot. I could almost -

Several high society types stand at a concession stand, talking quietly: Aloof. Righteous. Snobbish.

Bill stops. Swallows hard, his blood pressure rising. She studies him. Sees where he's looking.

BROOKLYN

Note to self. Leave the little black dress at home next time.

They walk a few quiet steps. She matches his struggling pace.

BILL

Bit tighter than I recall. Should wash it on the warm cycle. Cold.

She veers them off the sidewalk, down a narrow path along a stream. City traffic noise is muted by sounds of nature.

BROOKLYN

That's it. Stress is your nemesis. I forgot already. Come. You need to overdose on - natural.

Bill slows down and lets her guide him.

BILL

I sure miss having you around, B.K. You never judged - like people do.

Bill collapses on a bench at the edge of the stream. They sit quietly, staring up at BATS flying across the full moon.

BROOKLYN

Who's this new you? Tender.
Sensitive. Opening up? I like.

BILL

Getting fired like that. It makes
you think. I was the best. In
Austin. In Texas! How could they?

She sits down, leaning him into her embrace.

BROOKLYN

You still seeing that therapist?
(quietly)
Not that I'm complaining. Happy to
be your bare naked to cry on.

She rocks his shaking torso, humming "LOVE RUNS OUT." The
moon goes behind a cloud and it gets dark.

EXT. WOOLRICH LABS - CHAIRMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Backpack slung over one shoulder, Bill reads "JOB NOTICES" on
a corkboard outside the "AEROSPACE ENGINEERING" office. A
secretary, RITA (35, Hispanic), steps out of the office.

RITA

Bill-ster. I've been trying to find
you *toda la manana*. Come.

Rita grabs Bill's arm and hauls him down the wide hallway to
a laboratory complex of rooms.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - MECHANICS LABS - DAY

Dr. Z sits with Dr. DUNNE (50, gay, blond shoulder-length
hair, German accent) at a ragged old work table. They're
surrounded by complex lab-test equipment.

One whole wall is a giant mural of Neal Armstrong stepping
out of the Apollo lander on the untouched surface of the
moon. Vivid, bright colors project high expectations.

DUNNE

(staring at the mural)
We must succeed where the Russians
failed. It will be a glorious
victory. For America. For NASA.

DR. Z

(sotto)

One small step forward for science,
one giant step backward for
mankind.

Rita pushes Bill gently forward. He whispers to her, urgent:

BILL

Stop that, Rita. I told you. It's
not ready for prime time - yet.

Rita muscles him forward. Dr. Z brightens when he sees Bill -
smiles proudly. Sits taller in his chair.

DR. Z

Sergeant LeForge. Ralph Dunne from
NASA's Center for Space Research
out on Balcones Road.

Miserable, Bill slides into a rickety wooden chair.

DR. Z

He found your Mars Pathfinder one
point oh on the world wide web.

BILL

Huh. Mission accomplished.

DUNNE

Have you reached Mars yet?

Suddenly antsy, Bill squirms - gnashes his teeth.

DUNNE

Chancellor Z said you could get us
to Mars. We must land on Mars. In
the *wurst* way. Does it work? Did
you -

BILL

Chancellor Z always gunning the
engine of his - hobby wheels.

Panicking, Dr. Z hauls Bill aside. They whisper.

DR. Z

This man is NASA. He has influence,
exposure, funding - be nice to him.

BILL

Nice is a far cry from - lying.

DR. Z
 He knows the game. We promise him
 the moon. He gets us funding. Then
 we do just that. Close. This. Deal.

Bill is stunned. He stares at Dr. Z, unbelieving.

BILL
 That's dishonest. Manipulative.

Dr. Z makes a 'cutting motion to his neck' toward Rita. She
 hurries to bring Dunne a pot of fresh coffee and pastries.

Dr. Z leads Bill through a maze of lab equipment.

DR. Z
 Okay, so you're result-oriented. I
 get it. Academia is much more
 nuanced. It's not where you go but
 who got you there. Appearances.

Bill's eyes go blank, but he maintains his gaze until life
 returns to his eyes. Eyes narrowed:

BILL
 I promised Cromwell a whole suite
 of engineering design programs.
 Delivered. Doh! Got fired. They -

DR. Z
 Just talk about your Mars game.
 It's fun, Dr. Dunne. It's
 educational. It'll get kids
 fascinated about NASA.

They stop at a mock-up of a dangerous-looking cruise missile.
 Bill acts disoriented, and leans on the fuselage, in shock.

DR. Z
 Deep breath. Tact and tolerance.
 Come on, here. This man is
 important. Kiss some ass.

Dr. Z grabs Bill. Hauls him back. Sits him down at the table.

DUNNE
 I thought Marines never gave up.
 From the Halls of Montezuma to the
 shores of Mars?

Swallowing hard, Bill looks away - still out of sorts. His
 blank eyes see Rita hovering the the shadows nearby.

Their eyes meet. She smiles big. Gives him two thumbs up.

DR. Z
(to Bill)
It's a nice algorithm - enough to
get your name lit up in lights.

Bill opens up his backpack. Pulls out documents. Computer
printouts. Colorful plots of data points.

BILL
The data. The color printouts. Real-
time plots. I just wanted people to
see that it's not some cheap-shot
game made with a ton of shortcuts.

Dr. Z glares at him. Bill squirms in his seat, agonizing.

DUNNE
Are your calculations accurate?

BILL
Sixteen significant digits, likely
more.

Anxious, Bill crams his papers back into his backpack. He's
all jittery nerves.

DUNNE
If we could only find a safer
digital *autobahn*, we could finally
land on the moon - I mean, Mars.

Bill freezes. Blinks. His fists clench. He bites his lower
lip. A light-bulb idea. He speaks with a sudden vigor.

BILL
Oh, foot. The Apollo free-return
trajectory. That's it. Gotta go.
New idea. I made it - to Mars.

Bill gets up and RUNS for the door. Hand shaking, Dr. Z pours
himself a nervous glass of water.

DUNNE
Normal people do not disrespect
NASA like that, much less Ph.D.
schmucks.

Dunne scoots his chair closer, glaring at Dr. Z.

DUNNE
We don't need math savants anymore,
Victor. We have mainframe Cray
computers now.

DR. Z
He has an unlimited resource of
creativity. Something NASA lost
decades ago.

Very angry, Dunne gets up to leave.

DUNNE
I'll find out who your *wunderkind*
is. What's bugging him.

Dr. Z is distraught - high stress - grabs his left arm,
extreme pain.

DR. Z
Rita. The nitro pills. In my jacket
- front right pocket.

Rita grabs a bright-colored sailing windbreaker and runs to
his side.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - FIRST FLOOR - HALLWAY - DAY

Dr. WATTS (50, tall, cubby, serious) steps up to a classroom
door. He knocks, then gives a "come here" motion with his
hand. Bill steps out of the classroom.

WATTS
Dr. Z has had another coronary.

Bill looks nauseous - grabs a railing on the wall to keep his
balance. Watts studies him, enjoying Bill's agony.

WATTS
I'll be in the faculty lounge. Stop
by after your class.

But Bill's already closing the classroom door behind him.

Watts JINGLES loose change in his pocket absentmindedly.

INT. WOOLRICH 101 - DAY

Bill draws the Earth, the moon, and a "FREE RETURN
TRAJECTORY" between them (shaped like a figure-8 with Earth
and the moon inside the loops) - then a tiny "APOLLO 13"
spacecraft.

He doesn't see Brooklyn sitting in the very back of the
class, taking notes.

BILL

We're on Apollo 13. We just docked with the orbiting module on the far side of the moon. Ready to go home.

Bill points to Anton, then Walker, then Melba.

ANTON

Boom. Our fuel tank explodes.

WALKER

No oxygen left for propulsion. We'll never get home now. Oh, no Major Tom.

MELBA

Hardly any oxygen to breathe. We're gonna fracking suffocate. What the Sam Hell are we gonna do?

Bill points to the "FREE RETURN TRAJECTORY" on the chalkboard. The "APOLLO 13" is on the far side of the moon.

BILL

Nothing. You're on a free return trajectory. Just sit tight and wait for it to bring you back - home.

Bill takes colored chalk. Traces the path of the "APOLLO 13," arcing back to Earth. He points to Melba:

MELBA

Splashdown over the Pacific. Home.

Beat.

BILL

Why didn't the movie show us how important that special trajectory is? Because the actors refused. We saved Apollo 13. We. Are. Heroes.

Outside, the BELL CHIMES in the CAMPUS TOWER. It's the top of the hour. Class dismissed.

Bill grabs his backpack. Hurries out of the room, head down, shoulders hunched. Brooklyn watches him go, concerned.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - FACULTY LOUNGE - HIGH NOON

Dr. Watts studies at a conference table, surrounded by a stack of technical journals. He looks up as Bill enters.

Depressed, Bill eases into a chair opposite Watts.

WATTS

Dr. Z has a coronary history.

BILL

Small wonder, people always hating
on him - like they do.

Bill rests his stack of books on the table.

WATTS

As well we should. Celestial
Mechanics will die with him. You're
clinging onto a sinking ship. Now
would be a good time to bail.

BILL

Not this time. Not without a fight.

A copy of Retrofitting for Energy Conservation is on top of
Bill's books. Watts stares at the textbook, eyes dark.

WATTS

You published a textbook? With
fucking McGraw-Hill?

BILL

What. I'm supposed to survive on
what your lousy fellowship pays?

Arms crossed, grim, Watts steams up - green with envy.

WATTS

I've been trying for twenty years
to publish my optimization book.

Watts slams the book with his fist. Bill speaks softly:

BILL

Brought you a free copy. Sir. It's
all about the computer OPTIMIZATION
of building systems to save energy.

Watt's eyes are sharp daggers. Bill gently scoots his chair
back, away from the table.

WATTS

A new professor, Roger Brown, was
at our staff meeting this morning.

BILL

Always dreamed about NASA. And look
it, here I am.

Bill stares at a giant photo of the "NASA SPACE SHUTTLE" - autographed - surrounded by dozens of NASA astronaut patches.

BILL
In the heart of the beast.

WATTS
Dr. Brown needs grad students.

Bill's distracted by various NASA photos and knickknacks.

WATTS
I'm your graduate advisor, not your service technician. Vamoose.

Bill ducks out. Watts stares: takes the book, rips it in half with the fury of envy. Throws it in the trash.

INT. WOOLRICH 101 - DAY

The CAMPUS TOWER BELL CHIMES. Bill slips into the room as the other students file out. Bill starts to talk, but DR. BROWN (50, rotund, severe) holds up a rude hand to stop him.

BROWN
I talked to Dr. Watts. While all the world's space agencies crash and burn.
(loud, angry)
You. Made. It. To. Mars.

Bill is off-balance.

BILL
It's a very cool solution. Elegant. Intuitive. Fast. Energy-efficient!

BROWN
Extreme. Grandiose. Impossible!

Dr. Brown grabs his lecture notes and hurries out.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Bill and Dr. Brown pause in front of an office door. Dr. Brown fumbles with keys: he wears thick, coke-bottom glasses.

BILL
All your solutions are statistics. Mine is pure math. Statistics can never be as accurate as math.

BROWN

Celestial Mechanics is dead. As it should be. Outdated dinosaur.

BILL

Einstein was never happy with your statistics. Your - Relativity. God does not play with dice?

BROWN

You will come by my office out at the Texas Center for Space Research tomorrow morning. Eight A.M. sharp.

Bill starts to object, but Brown SLAMS the door in his face. Bill stares at the door, not understanding at all.

INT. CENTER FOR SPACE RESEARCH - DR. BROWN'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill (shiny face, starched white shirt, hair slicked back) knocks on a thick glass (open) door. Steps into a sleek, modern, space-age office. Dr. Brown glances up and points him to a chair. Bill (forced smile) takes a seat.

BROWN

Here's NASA's official pork chop plots, visual printouts of all our STATISTICAL Mars solutions.

Brown puts a stack of 36-by-48-inch binders on his desk. Bill stares at the binders, confused.

BILL

I brought my Mars research. My MATHEMATICS on the Mars trajectory.

BROWN

Nobody does math anymore, not with SUPERCOMPUTERS available.

BILL

Nobody THINKS anymore, either.

Bill pulls out a stack of papers from his backpack. A thick binder. Several 3.5-inch floppy disks. Bill pushes them gently across the desk toward Dr. Brown.

BILL

A professor at Northwestern is using my Mars program in his class. The kids love it. Learn a lot.

Dr. Brown flips the pages of the NASA plots.

BROWN
Literature. Search.

BILL
You aren't even going to look at my
research. The printouts. The data.
All organized nice and neat and -

Brown turns away. Deeply disturbed, Bill grabs his papers and
scurries out.

INT. TEXAS UNION - THE TAVERN - NIGHT

Bill weaves through tables toward the bar. Brooklyn takes her
backpack off a stool next to hers. Bill collapses on the
stool, dropping the NASA plots on the countertop.

BILL
Life's a big box full of hand
grenades.

Brooklyn studies Bill. The NASA plots. His face.

BROOKLYN
Crashdown on Mars?

Bill raises his hand to get the bartender's attention. Points
toward a draft beer spigot. The lady barkeep slides a draft
beer his way. Brooklyn slides it back.

BROOKLYN
Alcohol is no solution for stress.

Brooklyn motions to the barkeep for a refill of her red wine.
Bill stares at the beer, mustering self-control.

BROOKLYN
Come on, let's go make a bar bill.

Brooklyn grabs her backpack and heads outside.

EXT. THE TAVERN - PATIO - SULTRY NIGHT

Brooklyn sits in a wrought-iron chair. Bill ambles out with
the armful of NASA binders, heavy as a ton of bricks now.

BROOKLYN
Apollo 13 sure looked authentic to
me.

Bill tosses the NASA docs on the table. Collapses opposite her, bone tired.

BILL
They call it suspended disbelief.
Hollywood obfuscates the truth all
the time, like that.

BROOKLYN
What's going on? This isn't you.

Bill takes an anxious tug of beer. But. It's empty.

BROOKLYN
So now you clamp shut on me, pinch
the tail and suck the head?

Bill stares at his empty glass. Wishing it full.

BILL
Plumb forgot all those Cajun-isms
from back home on the bayou.

Bill stares at a beer on an empty table next to theirs -
grabs it - gulps it down.

Brooklyn shakes her head sadly.

BROOKLYN
I'm - just being a good - reporter.

Bill stares at a clutch of sexy sorority girls partying at
the next table. He brightens up, eyes twinkling.

BROOKLYN
Ech. No Apollo 13 column? No chit-
chat with the sweet coed.

Brooklyn gets up to leave.

Bill slaps the stack of NASA printouts. Brooklyn startles.

BILL
Dr. Z had a heart attack. He's
retiring. Meet my new advisor, Dr.
Pork-Chop plots. Alias mister I-
hate-dirty-dancing.

Bill flips through the graphical printouts. Shows her a
single page of mathematical calculations.

BILL
My Mars solution. It isn't in
NASA's data set. Ergo. It doesn't
exist. End of discussion, he says.

Bill rips up the page. Throws the confetti in the air. She
eases back into her seat - sipping her wine.

BROOKLYN
I'm sorry about your friend Dr. Z.

BILL
You may not recall, but I really
like that old geezer. He's got
style. Brains. Depth. Humility!

BROOKLYN
Like it wasn't obvious from the
second you two hardboiled eggs met.
Two chips off the old rock.

Bill swallows hard, saying quietly:

BILL
For the first time in my life, I
found a kindred spirit. So happy.

BROOKLYN
That's *beaucoup* cool. On both
counts.

Brooklyn takes a sip of wine - startles, almost choking.

BROOKLYN
Aren't I the kindred spirit?

Bill rubs his red eyes. Rubs them hard.

BROOKLYN
What's this with the eyes? Is this
new? Talk to mama.

BILL
Texas Hill Country? Allergies?

Bill grabs the NASA plots and storms away. Brooklyn stands up
to stop him but he's gone. She frowns as he scoots away.

INT. THE GRAD STUDENT ATTIC - RESTRICTED STACKS - NIGHT

Melba (brown UPS uniform) enters an open space.

Low ceilings. A veritable rat's maze of cozy nooks for grad-student desks. Bill's sound asleep under a bare light bulb.

Melba taps his shoulder. Bill startles awake. Turns. Screws up his eyes, focusing on her UPS tag.

BILL

No packages for Mars tonight.

Bill turns and falls right back to sleep.

MELBA

Mr. LeForge? I handwrote you an email. You said you'd be here.

Bill fumbles blindly to put in eye drops.

BILL

Oh. It's you. Hi, Melba.

Melba cozies into a desk chair close to him. Real close.

MELBA

You seem more discomfit every time
I come see.

BILL

I - I was in a - nightmare. Missed
the last bus to Mars - zoom-zoom
out I go into deep, dark space.
What's with the scary uniform?

MELBA

I work the dawg watch at U.P.S.

Bill grabs her homework. Scans the neat calculations. Melba stares at a mosaic of photos of Schrodinger the cat looking down on his desk from the fronting wall.

MELBA

If it's too much for your eyes,
just holla.

BILL

I told you people not to use
calculus.

Behind them, unseen, Brooklyn steps out of the stairwell with a box of pastries, a big smile on her face.

BROOKLYN

I thought you might want -
(seeing Melba)
... a mouthful of cavities.

Brooklyn DROPS the BOX on a table and SLAMS the DOOR closed behind her. Bill (never seeing Brooklyn) points at a big chalkboard close to his desk. Melba goes to the chalkboard.

BILL

Draw a circle. Thick lines. It's a hollow sphere with all the mass along the outside. Now draw a straight line through the center.

She turns. He gives her a "like, isn't it obvious" look.

MELBA

The center of gravity for that line is in the middle. Same with any line through the whole sphere. Ergo the center of gravity of the whole sphere is - voila - the center.

Melba does a little dance. Bill smiles sadly.

MELBA

Turn me loose. Yes. You're the Big Easy.

Happily pensive, he glances at his watch - stands right up.

BILL

It's tomorrow already? My - I have a meeting with the *Reichstag*.

Bill rushes for the door. Spots the pastries. Grabs one - wolfs it down. Stuffs the whole box into his backpack. Hurries out.

INT. CENTER FOR SPACE RESEARCH - LOBBY - DAY

Bill (same clothes) sits in a posh waiting area, gazing out on landscaped grounds through a long, sweeping wall of glass. He talks toward a surly SECURITY GUARD at his station nearby.

BILL

So this is NASA, right down to the too-big-to-fail ambiance. The subliminal arrogance. The annoying power colors.

SECURITY GUARD

The impetuous grad students.

The guard glares at him. Bill gives him an annoying smile.

Dr. Dunne hurls out of the elevator and powers toward Bill. They sit at an elegant glass table.

TEN LONG MINUTES LATER

Dunne examines a raft of colorful trajectory drawings. Computer printouts. Screenshots.

BILL
Never had a problem with being
creative. Just comes - naturally.

Bill stares through the glass tabletop at his ratty old shoes and scoots them underneath his chair to hide them.

DUNNE
You aren't disabled.

BILL
You talked to Cromwell? Did he -

Bill is flustered. Tries to say something - can't.

DUNNE
And Dr. Watts. Dr. Brown. Even -

Bill yanks nervously on his thin black tie.

BILL
Dr. Z, the number one Celestial
Mechanics worker of the modern era?

DUNNE
You know damn well Relativity has
displaced Celestial Mechanics as
the reigning scientific discipline.

Dunne flexes a painful wrist. Bill brightens up:

BILL
You play racquetball?

DUNNE
I'll crush your *glockenspiel*.

BILL
Hah, you don't have half the
resentments that I have. Game on,
mister potato head.

DUNNE
I'm not some old fart you can charm
with a few spinnaker sailing
lessons.

Bill waves good bye, backing out of the room.

BILL
G - Gotta go - the last bus home
leaves in ten minutes - all the way
on the other side of campus.

Bill hurries out. Dunne is dark, concerned - flexing his wrist subconsciously.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - BUS STOP - NIGHT

Bill runs up to the bus stop, just as the bus is leaving.

Bill collapses on a bench. Tired and dejected. Contemplating a passing U-Haul van with a fierce tiger on the side.

BILL
Bad day at the office, Schrodinger.

It starts to drizzle. Bill turns up his collar. He spots a HOMELESS MAN. Drops a few bills in his bucket.

BILL
We been rode hard and put up wet.

HOMELESS MAN
Semper Fi, buddy. God bless you.

An Express Bus stops. Bill hops on.

INT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOME - NIGHT

Bill studies at a small desk. Schrodinger is curled up on a shelf above the desk.

Bill copies hasty class notes to wide-ruled paper with large, very neat lettering.

BILL
Who can survive on ten hours of
visual time a day?

Bill takes a thick marker. Traces over letters, making important equations larger. Bolder. He has to use a magnifying lens to read one passage.

Bill pounds the table in frustration. Startled, Schrodinger wakes up with a jolt and runs outside. Bill

Bill turns out the desk lamp. Heads outside.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Tired and frustrated, Bill plants his butt on the front steps. Stares up at the starry night sky. He talks to Schrodinger, seated beside him - eyeing the fireflies.

DR. Z (O.S.)
Tact and tolerance, LeForge.

Bill looks every which way. Clamps his hands over his ears.

BILL
Shit. Now I'm hearing voices!

Dr. Z steps out of the shadows, carrying a plate wrapped in a cloth napkin. Bill jumps onto his feet, half terrified.

DR. Z
The Mrs. wanted this for you.
Didn't you know it's Thanksgiving?

Bill shakes his head, staring at the platter: hunger pains. Dr. Z opens the door. They head inside.

Bill opens the door a second later to let Schrodinger inside.

EXT. TEXAS UNION - FOOD COURT - CLOUDY AFTERNOON

Dejected, Bill eases into a seat opposite Brooklyn, sliding his tray onto the table. He wolfs down some French fries.

BROOKLYN
All that fast food's gonna find you
an above-ground New Orleans grave.

Brooklyn hands over an apple. He takes a crunchy bite.

BILL
A humility a day keeps Alzheimer's
away.

Brooklyn toys with her salad. She's distant, fighting unhappy. Bill's even darker, bordering on morbid.

BILL
Dr. Z is losing it. Hardly even
recognized me last night.

BROOKLYN
Oh, my. How sad, to see such a
brilliant mind wasting away.

Bill pushes his food away and concentrates on her.

BILL

But, hey - thanks for the donuts
the other night. Yum.

Brooklyn brightens up.

BROOKLYN

My specialty. Homemade *beignets*.
You ate every last one?

BILL

Ever tried to eat just one Crispy
Creme? Scientifically impossible.

Brooklyn gives him a twisted smile punctuated with a frown.

BROOKLYN

That's a lousy compliment. But I
know your tell-tale heart beats
only for me.

BILL

Wrote a little piece about
Celestial Mechanics. Dr. Z. Only
way to cope with the - grief. Maybe
your editor - might print it?

Bill hands over several pages of neatly-handwritten notes.

Brooklyn studies his appearance (ragged, tired, red eyes).

BROOKLYN

Sure. I'll fix it up and give it to
her. Big sigh. Love never runs out,
if that's what you mean.

BILL

Where's my ruthless reporter
friend? Tell me. Where?

Shaking her head, Brooklyn grabs Bill's notes.

BROOKLYN

It's okay. We still have us.

Bill grabs his meal. Takes a tentative bite. Another.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - MALL - DARK OVERCAST

Bill and Brooklyn stroll between ivy-covered buildings.

BILL
Without Dr. Z. Why am I even here?

Bill gets a distant look in his eyes.

BILL
I love all the math. Teaching is a
real hoot. The Mars research - best
computer code I've ever done.
Sweet.

Right in front of them is the UT Tower with a giant orange
"1" blocked out in the windows.

BILL
(deep voice)
Thank God there are no laws against
firing somebody who's too smart.

BROOKLYN
No way. Again?

There's an awkward silence. She breaks a mischievous grin.

BROOKLYN
Why don't you write a guest column?
For the paper. Satire. Tell us all
about what's happening. Yes?

BILL
You know how I feel about writing.
That piece I wrote for you on Dr. Z
like to rip me clean apart.

BROOKLYN
We can make you a *nome de plume*.
Will that work for you? Nobody will
ever know who wrote the - words.

She slips her arm in his and leads him toward a water
fountain shimmering in reflected sunset.

BROOKLYN
Your eyes are shot with blood.

They stop at the water fountain: Neptune standing on several
wild stallions, galloping through the surf.

BROOKLYN
You're studying too hard. You need
some R and R. WE need some R and -

BILL
Booyah. Last thing on my mind. Sex.
(quietly)
Oops. Where did that come from?

Bill stands still, letting the water spray soak his face. He massages a little moisture into his painfully red eyes.

BROOKLYN
Losing interest? That's not just a
sign of stress - worse, big time.

Nervously, Brooklyn checks her watch.

BILL
Scoot. I'll email you the column
later. You choose the pen name.

She gives him a bear hug. A kiss on the mouth, hard. She hurries away. Bill watches her scoot away, pensive.

LATER

Bill is stretched out flat on his back, eyes closed, soaking up some late-afternoon rays. A shadow looms.

DR. Z
Tired young faces in your dark
office said I might find you here.

Bill sits up. He squints badly and puts drops in his eyes.

BILL
Dr. Z. How are you?

Bill, still half asleep, is surprised - as Dr. Z takes off, striding down the sidewalk like an Olympian.

Bill gets up on his feet. Shoulders his backpack. Runs after the old man.

DR. Z
I'm on my afternoon power walk. Get
the lead out, Marine.

Dr. Z moves fast for an old geezer. Bill hustles to keep up.

BILL
I was afraid you were -

Bill and Dr. Z scurry past buildings with tall windows. Green ivy. Classical architectural lines. Dr. Z pauses to let a winded Bill catch up.

DR. Z
Losing my marbles?

BILL
It's just -

DR. Z
Forgot many things. Useless things.
My head is clear. Screw all the
tech shit. I'm living now - sharp.
Enjoying the feelings. The love.

Bill pulls out a handkerchief and rubs his eyes.

Dr. Z studies Bill, the prodigal son.

DR. Z
Thank you for the nice column in
the paper about my humble career.
You're a real fighter.

BILL
No I'm not. I wimped out the last
time they fired me.

DR. Z
The Mrs., she made me realize how
you are the last starfighter for
Celestial Mechanics. I thank you.

BILL
I'm neither a star nor a - fighter.
Sir. I'm - nobody.

DR. Z
The Relativity nerds think they are
Gods. Workers in Celestial
Mechanics, we know how very little
we really know about the universe.
(quietly)
I think you are doing just fine.

Bill tears up and hurries away, dropping the handkerchief.

Dr. Z steps over and picks up the handkerchief. It's thick
with fresh blood. He gently folds it and tucks it away.

DR. Z
Maybe God really does play with
dice.

Sad and introspective, Dr. Z watches Bill disappear.

INT. UT CAMPUS - OFFICE OF STUDENT LEGAL SERVICES - DAY

Bill tucks his shirt in. Puts his shoulders back. Deep breath. He knocks gently on a glass "OFFICE OF STUDENT LEGAL SERVICES" door and eases into a small, windowless office.

An attorney, EVANS (35, stern, one lazy eye) looks up from her large desk (much too large for the room). Bill is bone tired. Gags under his eyes. Stress in his every posture.

BILL

T.K. LeForge. You called earlier.

Pulling out a RED FOLDER, she motions for him to sit. He slumps into a chair with a big sigh of relief.

BILL

M'am? Can this wait? Like, I have oral qualifying exams NEXT WEEK. Three of the hardest exams on campus. Hell, in the whole world.

EVANS

I have a report from Dr. Brown, accusing you of commercial use of university servers.

Evans puts on strange glasses with corrective lenses. Bill glares at her: stark confusion. She's offended.

BILL

Student legal services? Emphasis on STUDENT. Aren't you supposed to be on my side, here?

EVANS

This is the second complaint against you. We talked -

Bill stands up, outraged. She raises her eyebrows. Takes a few notes. Bill's fists are balls of fury at his side.

BILL

Second? As in TWO? I've never seen you before. W - wait one. Dr. Brown turned me in? My own effing advisor.

EVANS

Sit down and shut up.

Evans takes more notes - puts the folder down. Takes her glasses off. Levels a creepy stare at him.

EVANS

We take abuse of university
services - and personnel. - very
seriously, Mr. LeForge.

BILL

A ten-dollar service? What about
the thousands I paid for Thesis
Research help from Dr. Brown? Never
happened. Grand theft thesis.

EVANS

We. Have. Rules. Let's go to your
website. Mars Pathfinder.

Evans types in a URL and turns around her computer monitor,
showing a colorful website: A little Martian figure driving a
green flying saucer (hands on a nonexistent steering wheel).

Bill steps forward, grabs the mouse - points.

BILL

See? There's a free download link.
It's not commercial. It's just my
research. Mars Pathfinder one point
oh. F.R.E.E.

She swats him away. Bill slowly eases back into his chair.

BILL

You threatened me with expulsion
unless I came today. Practically
eliminating my chance to pass the
qualifying exams. Talk about abuse.

She drums her giant ego desk with razor-sharp fingernails.

EVANS

Fair warning. We're building a file
on you. Erratic. Impulsive. Angry.
Obsessive behavior. Authority
issues. Anything further to add?

She waves the file at him. Dismissive. Bill steps forward.
Grabs her file. Waves it in her face.

BILL

Boom, crash. Bad cat leaves dead
mouse on the front doorstep.
(quietly)
Exit goes the last starfighter.

Bill turns on heel. Hurries out.

EXT. UT CAMPUS - OFFICE OF STUDENT LEGAL SERVICES - DAY

Bill storms out of the small building, speed-walking through a frantic between-class crowd of students.

EXT. UT CAMPUS - SPEEDWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Bill stomps down a pedestrian drive across the middle of the campus, heading toward the modern student gymnasium.

He looks through a glass window wall: the gym is cram-packed with students on treadmills. Lifting weights. Exercising.

He's suddenly depressed. He spots an empty bench under a large oak tree. Sits down. Pulls out a brown bag lunch.

Melba walks by - spots Bill - and eases down to sit beside him. She studies him carefully:

MELBA

Fire-engine red eyes. Sullen expression. Is this a chillax time to be cute and sociable?

Bill empties a packet of powder into a thermos of milk. He glares at her. Shakes the thermos to mix the protein drink.

BILL

I just had a close encounter with a cold, ruthless cyborg. *No problemo.*

Bill takes a long drink. Wipes off a milk mustache with his sleeve. She stares at the thermos.

BILL

It's a protein shake. Whey protein.

MELBA

You don't seem such a barking dawg when you're out of your element.

Bill scowls angrily at her. Growls. She's startled.

BILL

(high pitch, Texas accent)
This is so not the class I signed up for. Who writes those lame class reviews online any how? I'm stoked.

Melba relaxes, giggling. She pulls out a sandwich. A bottle of water. Bill drops the act with a warm smile.

MELBA

The glassy teddy-bear eyes always worked before.

Bill shakes his head, smiling - happy.

MELBA

I'm just a sociology major. Never thought I'd like this engineering stuff. How things change.

BILL

Don't quit your day job.

Not far away, Brooklyn crosses the street toward them.

Bill struggles. Puts EYE DROPS in. Melba sees Brooklyn - scoots closer. Slips a hand on his pants leg. Fake empathy.

MELBA

Your eyes are stop-light red. You study too much. Been to Student Health Center's eye clinic? Go.

Bill looks where Melba's looking.

Bill sees Brooklyn. Glares at Melba - runs after Brooklyn, but she disappears in a crowd.

INT. UT CAMPUS - STUDENT HEALTH CENTER - DAY

Bill (same clothes) steps into a grandiose lobby of a multi-story atrium, gawking at the splendor.

He steps over to a "DIRECTORY" next to the elevators. Studies the listings. Steps into an elevator.

INT. UT CAMPUS - STUDENT HEALTH CENTER - EYE CLINIC - DAY

Bill's in the exam chair. DR. DYLAN flips lenses - jots down notes on the computer. Steps back. Turns on the overhead lights. Bill winces at the bright light.

DR. DYLAN

Mr. Clark. You'll have to see an ophthalmologist. They'll do further tests.

BILL

Can you give me a referral?

DR. DYLAN

We don't have an ophthalmologist here at the Health Center.

BILL

For fifty thousand students? The tiny V.A. Clinic out in Lago with all of four doctors - ouch. - one of them is an ophthalmologist.

Dr. Dylan shoves Bill out of the room. Closes the door in his distraught face.

Bill yells at the closed door.

BILL

Student health insurance? If you don't have the specialist I need here, you people should pay for me to see one in private practice.

Dr. Dylan opens the door - SLAMS it shut immediately. Bill takes a step back. Stares at the door. Pulls out his cell phone.

BILL

Hey, B.K... Still want me to write a column for you... Lock and load, girl... Coming your way later.

He takes the stairs down to the lobby.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS - VICTORIAN LIBRARY - DAY

A dozen faculty are in a heated discussion at a conference table. DEAN TROTZKY (45, female, gray, intense, gaunt) is at one end of the table. Watts sits down next to her.

They pass around copies of The Daily Texan, reading.

FAT FACULTY

According to an official Lone Star energy audit, the Tower - this very building - has such bad indoor air quality that the entire bureaucracy has Attention Deficit Disorder.

HISPANIC FACULTY

I enjoyed the column about The End of Science book because now every science is only statistics and cannot go any further.

ASIAN FACULTY

You just wait, statistics will take
over medicine soon enough.

RUSSIAN FACULTY

(to Watts)

He is right, you should know.
Relativity is all statistics, too.

WATTS

Relativity is sacrosanct.

RUSSIAN FACULTY

If all sciences are dead, you must
throw out the Relativity baby with
the dirty bathwater.

DEAN TROTZKY

I make the decisions on this
campus. Relativity stays.

(sotto voice)

I am so not in the thrall of any
A.D.D. psychosis, either.

Watts grabs the paper. Twists it angrily in his hands. Dean
Trotzky and Watts talk quietly.

WATTS

One of my grad students just
published a textbook on energy
conservation. Insolent jerkoff.

Watts hands her the paper. She twists it, vexed.

DEAN TROTZKY

I'll find out who that fucking Dr.
Doom is.

Dean Trotzky rips the newspaper in half (hands blackened with
cheap printer's ink). Gets up. Storms out of the room. Watts
grabs another paper - mangles it.

INT. THE DAILY TEXAN OFFICES - DAY

Dean Trotzky storms through "THE BULL PEN," where student
reporters work at rows of Mac computers.

Dean Trotzky strides past the office of "EDITOR" (stenciled
above "THE BULL STOPS HERE") and into a glass-walled room
full of students in a staff meeting.

INT. THE DAILY TEXAN - CONFERENCE ROOM

Brooklyn sits at a table with other student reporters. Today's paper, opened to the editorial page, is spread out on the conference table in front of The EDITOR (24, gay).

BROOKLYN

This is what we all *envie* for.
Edgy, provocative, gutsy.

Dean Trotzky storms into the room.

EDITOR

Dean Trotzky. What an honor. I was just telling my people how much I liked the lead editorial today.

DEAN TROTZKY

Who wrote that obscenity?

The students fidget. They look up. Down. Away. Doodle on their note pads.

Eventually, all eyes settle on Brooklyn.

DEAN TROTZKY

I'll put the Fear of Isaac in you,
little miss Bull-Stops-Here.

BROOKLYN

With all due respect, The Daily Texan is completely separate from your *fricasseed* University.

DEAN TROTZKY

I'm cool, calm, and collected compared to my Faculty Council. They want to crucify whoever wrote this *junker*.

Dean Trotzky slams the table with the palm of her hand.

Black print ink from the student newspaper on her hands leaves her PALM PRINT on the table. Everybody stares at that angry palm print.

BROOKLYN

It's whomever. Madam Dean.

DEAN TROTZKY

Have you *squigleys* no respect for authority?

EDITOR

You're our faculty advisor, not our
banana-republic dictator.

Dean Trotzky ignores him - confronts Brooklyn, in her face.

DEAN TROTZKY

Maybe Dr. Doom is your secret
namestik. Huh? Everything fits.
Ugly story about A.D.D. Excellent
command of the vernacular. Election
soon. Face the *muzhik*.

Students around the table gather their things. Stuff them in
their backpacks. Check their watches. Anxious to leave.

BROOKLYN

Excuse me, but did anybody ever say
how you - abuse the vernacular -
when you're. Fucking. Ticked. Off?

DEAN TROTZKY

You're playing hardball in the
major leagues now, *Babushka*. Does
alias Dr. Doom realize this?

BROOKLYN

What happens when the free press
reveals confidential sources to the
powers that be? Huh? Tzarina?

Brooklyn stands up, arms crossed, belligerent. Dean Trotzky
slams the door as she struts out of the room.

The Editor favors the rest of the students at the table with
a conniving smile.

EDITOR

I think you've been forging those
Dr. Doom columns. Faked news.

BROOKLYN

Go ahead and put me in a dress. I
will not divulge my source. Not
even to you all.

Everybody gets up and leaves. Brooklyn, all alone now -
slumps in a chair, clinically depressed.

EXT. TEXAS UNION - COMMONS DINING AREA - DAY

Bill slides into a chair across from Brooklyn.

Bill tosses a newspaper down, opened to his column on the editorial page.

BILL

Yay. Mr. Bill goes to grad school.
Cliffhanger.

Brooklyn grabs her salad bowl. Throws it. Covers Bill with greens. Chunks of tuna.

BROOKLYN

It was *crapeau* - offensive.

Brooklyn grabs a sharp knife. Jams it into the tabletop.

BILL

Whoa. Stop already. This isn't you.
You're fearless. Skin as thick as a
Mississippi River catfish.

The Editor hovers in the background, unnoticed. Recording all of this with a long-distance microphone.

BILL

Isn't that what journalists do? Get
people upset?

BROOKLYN

We do it with subtext, innuendo -
suggestion. Not outright -

BILL

Sorry. Don't do that. None of it.
Just plain not wired for it.

Brooklyn grabs her backpack and hurries out.

EXT. CAMPUS MALL - SUNNY DAY

Bill catches up to Brooklyn, hustling alongside her.

BILL

Hey, this is me. You can blow up at
me. I can take it. Try me.

BROOKLYN

Go away. You only make me angry.

BILL

We're friends. Didn't mean to -

BROOKLYN
That's even worse. *Terrible* worse.

Bill takes her arm. Slows her down.

Brooklyn swats him away. Swings her backpack. Ready to conk him on the head. She turns away. Disappears into a building.

INT. GRAD STUDENT ATTIC - BILL'S DESK - NIGHT

Bill leans back from a desk full of homework papers. Talks to new photos of Schrodinger above his desk.

BILL
I used to think cats were really complicated. Scratch that theory.

FOOTSTEPS sound behind him. It's Melba, in a UPS uniform.

BILL
How did you even get in? They lock the dungeon doors after ten P.M.

Bill buries his head back in his books, ignoring her.

MELBA
I work for U.P.S. We can get in anywhere. Resistance is futile.

Melba pulls a box of fresh donuts out of her backpack. Hands them over. Plus a tall soda.

BILL
If you think this will get you an A in the class, dream on... However. It does buy you a little help outside of office hours.

Bill wolfs down the donuts as she talks.

MELBA
Relativity? In an undergrad class? Nix the B.F.P.

Bill gives her a questioning look.

MELBA
D'oh. Best. Fracking. Professor?

Undaunted, Bill points to the chalkboard. She shuffles over there. Grabs a piece of giant kindergarten chalk.

BILL

Okay. Draw the sun. A big dot. Now a ray of light passing close by. Straight line. Assume all the light is converted into a photon of mass by the Sun's gravity.

MELBA

We did all that. Well, my study group did. How is this Relativity?

Bill grabs a RELATIVITY book. Shows her a bookmarked page. She reads:

MELBA

When light passes the sun it is bent by -

BILL

(high-pitched voice)
O.M.G. That's exactly twice the number we calculated.

She does a dance. Grabs him around the neck. Hugs him.

Bill peels her arms off. Points to her Mickey Mouse watch.

MELBA

Uh-oh. Mr. Bill's P.M. class review for the big exam tomorrow?

Bill grabs some papers. Hurries out of the room.

INT. WOOLRICH 101 - NIGHT

Bill erases an elaborate "EARTH TO MARS TRAJECTORY" diagram from the chalkboard, talking to his shadow on the board.

BILL

Why won't they look at my Mars research? It's beautiful. Accurate. Fun.

He stops and stares at his chalky hands, talking quietly:

BILL

I am not a ghost. They can't treat me like that. I'm here. Right here.

The CAMPUS TOWER RINGS. Behind him, folks hurry out. Melba slips to the front of the class. Sits on top of Bill's desk. Her short skirt hikes up her thighs.

MELBA

I tried your Mars program. The one
on the web? What a screamer.

Bill turns around. Melba's right there.

BILL

You're being mighty curious, miss
this-is-only-a-lame-science-
elective.

Melba stares at him, her legs swinging. Bill's ill at ease.

BILL

You do your job - study, and I'll
do mine - graduate.

Brooklyn steps into the room. Bill looks up. Their eyes meet.
Brooklyn smiles. Sits down quietly.

BILL

(whispering to Melba)
Saved by the Woman in Black.
Can't have Ph.D. wannabes hanging
out with adorable coeds, can we?

MELBA

Grad students are like any other
student, but carrying a much bigger
student-loan debt.

Brooklyn clears her throat. Melba leans over, favoring Bill
with some bawdy cleavage. Bill takes a quick look down.

BILL

You had a homework question?

HIGH HEELS STACCATO down the hall outside.

Bill looks up: Brooklyn's gone. Melba smiles dreamily.

MELBA

Mine are much better owned than
that domesticated old milk cow's.

They look up at the sound of a CRASH in the hallway.

BILL

Gotta go - the ramparts are
falling.

Bill gets his things together. Scrambles out.

INT. HALLWAY

Bill runs past what was once a fancy potted plant in a hanging basket. It's now smashed to smithereens at the front of the "Men's" bathroom door.

EXT. WOOLRICH LABS - HEAT OF THE NIGHT

Bill runs out of the building - looks both ways. He hears HIGH HEELS RUNNING half a block away. Bolts down a winding campus path toward the sound.

Bill reaches Brooklyn. Eases her to a stop.

BILL

Whoa, ladybug. You're gonna snap an ankle running in those things.

Brooklyn leans on him to take her heels off. Throws them into a hedge. Collapses into thick grass by the path.

BROOKLYN

What do you care?

Bill fishes her shoes out of the hedge. Gently tucks them into her backpack. She's shivering with suppressed jealousy.

BROOKLYN

What was that back there? Sending me shopping.

Brooklyn wipes away tears welling in her eyes. Bill eases down to sit beside her. She scoots away from him.

BILL

Melba? She's just buttering me up for a passing grade.

BROOKLYN

Sounds to me like *cute noir's* going to get it.

There's a giant cooling tower nearby. A gentle breeze blows water droplets into a light fog all around them.

BILL

You mean, she - I was only being nice. Wasn't I?

The old steel returns to Brooklyn's voice.

BROOKLYN
 Stop the presses, *bon vivant*
 finally figured out hormones.

Brooklyn digs into her backpack. Yanks out the high heels.
 Tugs them on. She stands up to walk away, but one HEEL
 BUCKLES.

Bill hurries to catch her from falling. Eases her down.

BILL
 I - I'm sorry about the alt-science
 column. I had no idea.

BROOKLYN
 Regretting this whole *gateau*,
 letting you vent in the paper.

BILL
 Hey. Fess up, lady. Talk to the
 fist.

He gives a Roman salute: clenched fist punch to the heart.

BROOKLYN
 Dean Trotzky came down on me, never
 felt pressure like that before. And
 now this. It's *coup de etat* for me.

Bill stands her up. Takes her arm. Gently helps her to a
 nearby park bench. She lets him guide her, relaxing into his
 arms. He eases down beside her, arm around her shoulders.

BILL
 You get used to the pressure. No,
 you don't. You collapse. Been there
 - doing that.

BROOKLYN
 Like that really helps.

Brooklyn throws her shoes back into the hedge. Petulant.

Bill goes to get the shoes again. He takes one look at
 Brooklyn. Stuffs her shoes into his backpack.

BROOKLYN
 Am I too young? Too physical? Do my
 nice clothes remind you of that
confederate consulting firm?

Bill sits down beside her. Brooklyn curls her legs up under
 her. He strokes her hair. Her cheek. He talks gently:

BILL
Baby alligator's all stressed out.

Bill wipes a single tear trickling down her cheek. He feels the moisture of her tear between his fingers.

BROOKLYN
Who's got the time for meditation?
Aerobics? Sleep.

Bill massages her shoulders. She closes her eyes, comfy.

BILL
I'll sign up for a night class in
subtext. With all the engineers on
campus, they've just got to have
one, right?

BROOKLYN
I'll buy some ratty old clothes to
wear. No more ballet shoes.

Brooklyn relaxes, resting her head on his shoulder. They roll back and stretch out on the bench. They stare up at the cosmos.

BILL
Saw Dr. Z the other day. I sure
like that old coot. He's like a
father and grandfather all rolled
into a gummy bear. Never had
either.

BROOKLYN
Does that mean you're gonna stay in
grad school?

They stare at her bare feet - his ragged sneakers. Bill takes his shoes off. Slides them onto her feet. Ties the frayed laces for her.

BILL
Never had anything to fight for
before.

BROOKLYN
This is new. I like. Passion.
Drive. Gets my juices going.

Bill winces badly. He puts drops in, blinking rapidly to acclimate them.

BROOKLYN

There's the eyes again. It's not allergies season either. Bill.

BILL

The doctor at the health center said I should see a specialist.

She's concerned and grabs his hand.

BROOKLYN

I agree. *Beaucoup* stress makes your body attack itself, just to make the stress go away.

BILL

You get used to it - or else.

Bill stands Brooklyn up. They head toward ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC blaring in the distance.

BROOKLYN

All these dark troubles. Are you staying here, on campus, in the program, because of me, *comme ci*?

BILL

Nonsense.

BROOKLYN

Boor. Neanderthal boor.

She acts outraged. Hurt.

BILL

It's nice to have a pretty lady to impress, though.

She relaxes - a little bit.

BROOKLYN

That was a deft recovery, for a *chevette*.

BILL

Dame *celeste* inspires me.

Bill loops his arm into hers and leads her away.

BROOKLYN

Can you explain to me your theory about why opposite charges attract?

BILL

Once two bodies get locked in a
hyperbolic orbit, there's no
escaping the gravity of it.

Inching closer, they cozy along the walkway.

BROOKLYN

I downloaded your Mars computer
program from the web. It's very
fun. I learned many things.

(quietly)

What is wrong with those people?

BILL

You tell me. You're the psych
major.

(beat)

Now there's an idea. Have you
settled on your dissertation topic
yet?

BROOKLYN

NASA, the mega-ego H. Ross Perot
corporate, ten-foot-tall Goliath?

BILL

We both know I'll never win, B.K.
So we might as well get you a Ph.D.
At least we'll be batters-up.
Cajuns one, Longhorns zero.

She guides him toward a park bench deep in the shadows.

BILL

Never felt drawn to somebody? A
relentless attraction? Inescapable?

BROOKLYN

That draws you into an orbit, round
and round you go - closer and
closer. No matter what you dare.

BILL

You try to escape, but it takes
more energy than you can muster. So
you just give up and - crash.

They ease down onto the bench and get comfortable.

BROOKLYN

Maybe your new advisor is just
pushing you to do more.

BILL

Same bullish indifference as the principals at my old job. Closed mind. Narrow eyes? Short temper.

BROOKLYN

My editor tried to get his comment on the last Mars failure. He damn near assaulted her. Rude. Arrogant.

BILL

Exact same with yours truly.

BROOKLYN

So it's full steam ahead? Not gonna find a new topic? Stick with Mars?

BILL

You want to see how they react to finding out I'm schizophrenic, don't you? I know you're dying to find out.

Beat.

BILL

You with me, here? Two frogs in a lily pond?

BROOKLYN

Guinea pig with benefits?

BILL

Let's do this. Show that world you don't F with no Cajuns.

They lean together and kiss, a long, wet kiss. Hands going everywhere. Moving to be more comfortable.

Noticing his bare feet, Bill gets fancy sneakers out of his backpack - looks at them curiously.

BILL

That's odd. Why did I have an extra pair of shoes in my backpack?

BROOKLYN

Are you kidding me?

Bill checks his watch. Panics.

BILL

Ach. I've got a racquetball game
with the *Reichsfuhrer* in ten
minutes. *Auf wiedersehen.*

Bill gives her a quick kiss. Bolts into the night - in his
stocking feet. She yells after him - scandalizing passers-by:

BROOKLYN

She kisses the prince and he turns
into a frog.

But she's smiling - then pensive... She scoots after him.

INT. CAMPUS GYMNASIUM - RACQUETBALL COURTS - NIGHT

Bill and Dunne wrangle an expert volley. A crowd (including
Brooklyn) watches from outside the glass back wall.

DUNNE

I pulled your military record. Two
years at the U.S. Naval Academy,
and *zweibeck* quits?

Bill SMACKS a BALL into the bottom of the front wall. Slowly,
very slowly, the ball rolls out...

BILL

Maybe I just got bored.

DUNNE

Nobody likes a quitter.

BILL

Nobody likes Bubba's Mars program
neither. Why not? It's elegant.
Simple. Brilliant.

DUNNE

Maybe your professors are just
insanely jealous of your computer
programming skills.

Beat.

DUNNE

It's just a lousy computer game.
Never be anything more than an
educational tool.

BILL

Isn't that enough? Teaching kids
all about orbital mechanics. Mars.

DUNNE

Six Mars failures in the last two
years? Splashed all over the news?
Who needs to educate kids? We got
prime time T.V. locked up.

Bill stops. Stares at him.

BILL

Teaching kids failure is - good?
That's insane. Hurray. We fucked up
again. We. Are. The. Greatest.

Dunne flexes his wrist. Gets into an aggressive stance.

DUNNE

Maybe they can't read your Fortran.
Nobody uses that anymore. C-plus?

Bill POPS the BALL with his racquet. The ball bounces upward.
Bill grabs the ball with a cocky snatch.

BILL

I have my own software company. Bar
X Software. Named after Legion X,
the most feared fighting force in
antiquity. I don't do failure. Sir.

Bill winds up and - NAILS a killer SERVE. Dunne stares at the
ball rolling out from the wall, shoulders drooping:

BILL

You afraid I'll build that little
program into three dimensions, for
a seamless, real-time trajectory to
Mars? Humiliate NASA.

Bill gets morbidly quiet, thinking hard. Thinking.

BILL

(to himself)

Not such a bad idea, actually. Huh.
Thanks, old man.

DUNNE

Stop *fotzing* around. Play ball.

They square off for another competitive volley.

EXT. AUSTIN - VA HOSPITAL - DAY

Bill's faded blue Geo Metro pulls into the parking lot.

Bill gets out. Shows his ID to a security guard at the door.
Disappears inside, going about half speed, if that.

INT. VA HOSPITAL - EYE CLINIC - DAY

Bill's in an exam chair in a dark room. The eye DOCTOR
examines Bill's eyes with a series of scanning lasers.

DOCTOR
You're almost blind, Gunny.

BILL
Almost is the operative word, doc.

The doctor writes out a prescription and hands it over.

DOCTOR
Cut back on the academic abuse or
you'll be shuffling in the dark
with a blind man's walking cane.

BILL
Too late now. I'm going for it.

The doctor nods grimly, fear in his eyes.

BILL
I do my job - graduate. And you do
yours - find me a better eye drop
so I can survive all this.

The doctor turns to his computer, searching a database.

INT. VA HOSPITAL - MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC - DAY

An orderly escorts Bill through double glass doors toward the
nurse's desk. As the orderly sits him down he mutters:

BILL
Always figured the worse to ever
happen would be to go blind.

Dr. Carter, standing behind the reception desk, spots Bill -
studies him. Not at all liking what she sees.

Bill talks to a stranger in the next seat:

BILL

All I have to do is give up this great Mars project, and it all goes away. All the anger, angst, stress pressure. Poof. Suddenly bliss.

The stranger gets up and hurries away, using a walker. Dr. Carter steps over and slides into a seat next to Bill.

DR. CARTER

How have you been? I haven't seen you since, gosh - Cromwell and Associates.

Dr. Carter studies Bill's eyes. His face. His defensive body posture.

DR. CARTER

Your graduate advisor called me last week. Dr. Watts? Yes, I see stress everywhere.

BILL

What does he know? He won't even talk to me. The campus trajectory optimization expert? A killer Mars trajectory solution? Go. Away.

Bill crosses his arms. Looks away.

DR. CARTER

I have to scoot. But here, take these.

Dr. Carter hands Bill two "VA SUICIDE HOTLINE" cards.

DR. CARTER

Don't screw up again. If you can't call me, buzz the suicide squad on that V.A. hotline.

Dr. Carter studies his face. Waiting. Worried. Bill stares at the cards, his face contorted in a grimace.

BILL

Thanks, doc. You shouldn't have. I haven't had suicide ideations since, gosh - the Army psych ward.

Dr. Carter stands up. Hurries away.

Bill sits quietly, watching the busy clinic. He stares at his hands in his lap, a GRUESOME SCAR on one wrist - peels back his sleeve, and another GRUESOME SCAR.

INT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOME - NIGHT

Bill blinks hard at the computer screen in his tiny home office - eyes bloodshot, a solid red.

Schrodinger lounges on a shelf above Bill's desk. Frustrated, Bill throws a big math book across the room. Startled, Schrodinger jumps down. Scurries away.

BILL
I done found a new infirmity,
Schrodinger. Mars madness.
(bitter rage)
A lifetime of computer skills...
Years creating that Mars program.

Bill rips his shirt off (buttons fly). Pulls on a NAVY BOXING sweatshirt. Steps out into the carport through a door in the hallway.

EXT. BILL'S HOME - CARPORT - NIGHT

Bill manhandles free weights on a universal gym in sync with loud DANCE MUSIC. The weights are huge. The pace is frantic.

BILL
Behold. The starfighter.

He does some pushups, with his fingers extended. He jabs and thrusts with barbells as if they weighed nothing at all.

INT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOME - NIGHT

Bill collapses at his desk. Studies his palms: a mess of blisters. He picks at the GRUESOME SCAR on one wrist.

BILL
Always wondered why they even have
that stupid phone number.

Bill stares at the "VA SUICIDE HOTLINE" card pinned on a bulletin board next to a large computer monitor.

BILL
Finally figured it out.

In a sudden fit of frustration, Bill slams his fist into the computer monitor, smashing it to smithereens.

Bill stares at the monitor, massaging his bloody knuckles.

BILL
 No more Cromwell flashbacks.
 (depressed)
 No more computer. No more Mars
 website. No more fan base. No more -
 hope.

Hands shaking, Bill picks up a big, boxy cellphone (small antenna) to dial the number on the "VA SUICIDE HOTLINE" card.

A lusty female voice, SUZIE, answers.

SUZIE (V.O.)
 (on phone)
 Bill?

Bill freezes, speechless - paranoid.

SUZIE (V.O.)
 Hey, stupid. Can't the V.A. have
 caller I.D.? Computer records?
 (gently)
 Suzie. Call me Suzie. Please?

BILL
 Suzie? You one of those floozie sci-
 fi robot algorithms?

SUZIE (V.O.)
 Like they have on those fucking
 nine-hundred porn lines?

Bill laughs. He stands up and paces around the house as they talk. Working dumbbells. Stretchy rope. A stress ball.

BILL
 You - the V.A. lets you talk like
 that? Four letter words?

SUZIE (V.O.)
 Sure. If that's what it takes to
 keep you on the line.

LATER

Bill's sitting down now, working a spring hand exerciser.

SUZIE (V.O.)
 Bottom line? You're rated ten
 percent for schizophrenia. If you
 get any worse, we got your back.

BILL
 Even if I self-destruct?

SUZIE (V.O.)

We want you to succeed. That's our
entire purpose in life. If you win.
We win. Nice talking to you, Mr.
Bill. Suzie, out.

Bill hangs up the phone. Thoughtful - lips pursed.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - FIRST FLOOR - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dr. Z steps out of the elevator. Shuffles down the hallway.
Pauses to rest, crossing himself.

DR. Z

Why he won't just take the easy way
out, God only knows. But if he's
hell-bent on going to Mars, I'm
going to Mars, too.

Dr. Z takes a small tin out of his sports coat pocket and
pops a TINY PILL. He breathes hard. Straightens himself up.
Shuffles a few more feet.

Dr. Z pauses to read a burnt-orange "UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS"
flyer announcing "THE MARS TRAJECTORY AS A FOUR BODY
PROBLEM." Standing taller, he slips into the room,
invigorated.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - FACULTY LOUNGE - NIGHT

Bill (threadbare sports coat, thin black tie) is at the
podium. He indicates an elaborate trajectory drawing on the
overhead projector.

BILL

My new Mars Pathfinder two point oh
finds a solution that's faster,
better, and cheaper. Input how much
fuel you have, it gets you to Mars
faster than anybody. No exceptions.

Bill steps back to watch a series of elaborate, color
graphics play out on the screen, eyes darting around the
room.

BILL

This is a full windows program,
people. All the bells and whistles.
Everything you find in any
commercial package. More!

Bill pauses to take a long, nervous drink of water.

BILL

No shortcuts. No tricks. No taking
four years to arrive. Give me
NASA's best solution and mine gets
there in the same time, with ten
percent less fuel. NASA's best!

Bill puts a slide on an overhead projector with a graphic for
the splash page of his "MARS PATHFINDER 2.0" website.

BILL

Download my program online and try
it yourself. It has full graphics
and all the data. Flow charts. It's
a self-extracting executable file.
Hundreds of people have tried it.
Think Mars. The Mars Society.

Dr. ABACUS (35, Hindu Indian) stands up, his hand raised.

ABACUS

Seems like a very exact trajectory.
Is there any room for adjustments -
like moving the mid-course
correction to and fro?

The whole room gets very quiet. All eyes are on Bill. For the
first time, we see Brooklyn, taking photos, scribbling notes.

BILL

Hi, Dr. Abacus. My solution is on
the final Mars approach. You can
tack on my result to any Mars
trajectory - without exception.
(louder)
I repeat. Give me any Mars
solution, my method lowers fuel use
by ten percent. Guaranteed.

Watts stands up, pointing angrily at Bill.

WATTS

Stop, Mr. Clark. Or more to point -
DR. DOOM.

Bill steps closer to Dr. Abacus, talking directly to him.

BILL

You can even apply the same methods
for the Earth escape - on any
flight path - to double the
savings. That's twenty percent
total. Maybe more. Probably more.

Brooklyn sneaks up to the podium to try the program.

Dr. Watts circulates around the room, talking urgently to
other faculty. TEMPERATURES ARE ELEVATING.

WATTS

A result that good needs a whole
new goddamn theory.

ABACUS

Applications are one thing, but a
whole new theory? That's absurd.

Bill points to a graphic printout on the screen.

BILL

Here's what the trajectory looks
like in real-time. Hard data.

People stare. Whisper amongst themselves.

BILL

Don't believe me? Step up to the
podium here. I have the program all
set up. Put your numbers in and
watch the results on the screen.

Brooklyn steps aside, and Dr. Abacus steps up to the display.
He types in a couple of numbers. Looks up. Seconds later a
complete solution is on the projection screen.

Several people GASP, eyes big and wide, staring at the
screen.

Suddenly the whole room stands up, arguing.

Brooklyn hurdles into the mayhem, waving her arms.

BROOKLYN

Austin, we have a problem.

Dr. Z scurries up to the podium (Dr. Abacus, recognizing him,
steps aside, and hovers nearby), and inputs numbers -
studying the output projected on the big screen, fascinated.

(For the rest of this scene, the figures on the big screen
keep changing, as Dr. Z works one solution after another.)

Watts pushes Dr. Abacus toward the door.

WATTS

You. Go back to my cubicle at the
Space Center and leave the politics
to the tenured experts.

DR. ABACUS

So you can crash into Mars again?
And again. And again?

WATTS

Out. Now.

Dr. Abacus hurries out of the room.

WATTS

(yelling)

I'm calling for a formal vote by
the Faculty Committee.

Dunne, wearing a NASA jacket, stands up. The room goes quiet.

DUNNE

(to Bill)

Gotterdammerung, NASA personnel are
modest. A super-fast Mars mission
- now you double your claims -
more yet shenanigans still?
Insanity. Pure insanity.

BILL

So much for the safe landing on
Mars.

Bill yells into the room:

BILL

I thought academia was supposed to
foster new ideas. I thought grad
school is where you were supposed
to -

Bill hurries to stand by Dr. Z, who musters his last ounce of
strength and yells:

DR. Z

To boldly go where no one has dared
to stick their neck out before.

Bill yells across room:

BILL
Exxxcuuuusssse us, while we go
check in with corporate.

The room goes deathly quiet, as Dr. Z confronts Watts.

DR. Z
Feel the rage course through your
veins. Transfer all your hatred
onto LeForge - feel the power.

Several students hustle Dr. Z out of the room.

EXT. WOOLRICH LABS - HALLWAY

Dr. Z sits down in a wooden chair, depressed. Bill's
distressed too, pacing.

DR. Z
It's like we just flew into an
asteroid field at warp speed. Aaak.

BILL
Another crashdown on Mars.

Dr. Z's eyes bulge out. He fights a sudden heart spasm.
Reaches into his pants pocket. Pulls out his tin of
nitroglycerin pills.

Dr. Z DROPS the tin. The pills FLY everywhere. The old man
falls to his knees, lurching for the pills.

Bill drops to his knees to help Dr. Z. The old man motions
for Bill to come close. Dr. Z whispers:

DR. Z
You made it to Mars. Wow.

Dr. Brown steps from the elevator nearby. Runs to help - then
stops, staring at Bill.

BROWN
You drove him to this. You and your
irrational compulsion with Mars.

Dr. Brown helps students haul Dr. Z away on a makeshift
stretcher.

Watts steps up to Bill. Grabs him. Pushes him toward the
exit.

WATTS

Go home. Come by my office
tomorrow. Scoot.

Bill staggers, backing away. His back hits a wall.

Bill squats down to pick up a nitro pill off the floor -
stares at it.

INT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOME - NIGHT

Both gloomy, Brooklyn and Bill fidget in the living room.

BILL

Thanks for giving me a ride home
last night.

BROOKLYN

Had no idea engineers could be so -
angry. Confrontational.

(quietly)

Tons of observations for my NASA
Cult research. Thanks, guy. You put
on a real show.

Schrodinger jumps into Bill's lap for a good scratch.

BROOKLYN

I can't babysit no more, *chere*. I'm
meeting with my advisor. After last
night, I'm sure she'll sign on.

BILL

You're leaving? I was gonna fix us
a homemade pizza.

BROOKLYN

To celebrate that disaster? Not my
style.

BILL

What about your - success?

Brooklyn grabs a small overnight bag. Heads out the door.

EXT. BILL'S HOME - SUNSET

Brooklyn throws her things into a small sedan in the
driveway. Bill stands mute behind her.

BROOKLYN

I'd really like to stay. You're smart, fun, *bon appetite*.

BILL

Dr. Z has a sailboat at our marina. Said I could use it anytime. Never been sailing? It's a hoot.

Bill points at sailboats on Lake Travis a block away, resplendent in the oblique sunlight.

She nods, shyly.

BILL

Lots to talk about. Please?

BROOKLYN

You enjoyed the seminar from hell.

BILL

I'm tired of all this, B.K. Just plain tired.

BROOKLYN

Oh, hell. You're stressed out the wazoo. I so forgot. Come on, love.

He hurries her down a winding road. To a lake-side park. With a row of boat docks on one side. A boat ramp.

EXT. LAGO VISTA - MARINA - NIGHT

Bill leads her to the CELESTE MECHANIQUE. They get on. She helps him unfurl the sails. They make way under sail.

BROOKLYN

This better be good or it's *au revoir*. Bling.

BILL

Does that mean - are you breaking up with me?

Bill stops, choking hard.

He adjusts the sails. They settle on a long tack across the lake.

BILL
You're right, of course. I'm
finished on campus after that
fiasco. Back to the treadmill,
consulting. Nix the social life.

Brooklyn is incredulous. Her knees wobble. She sits, hard.

BROOKLYN
I did this. Shame on me. How could
I?

BILL
Relax, B.K. The Mars program is
only a fraction of my research.

BROOKLYN
What's that supposed to mean?

BILL
Dr. Z told me a long time ago
they'd ask for a theory to explain
my super-fast Mars solution. I
found one - and it's a doozy.

Brooklyn is extremely skeptical - outraged even.

BILL
A new model of the semiconductor
junction. Exact same as the
structure of my Mars algorithm.
That's why it runs so damn fast.

Brooklyn's eyes bug out.

She rushes to the side and

HEAVES, up-chugging.

Bill makes a hard turn. Heads for shore under full sail.

EXT. LAGO VISTA - FISHING DOCK - NIGHT

Bill and Brooklyn step onto the dock. He eases her down, to
sit with her feet hanging over the edge into the water.

They watch DUCKLINGS paddling behind their mother down a
bubbly creek. QUACK. QUACK.

BROOKLYN
Did I hear you right?

BILL

Semiconductor models are based on statistics. Mine is pure D one hundred percent - mathematics. Wow.

BROOKLYN

You're joking with me. Not cool.

Brooklyn rolls her eyes. Drums her fingers on the deck.

BILL

My Solid State Physics professor loved the idea. Dr. Abacus, too. Except. I'm in pretty deep shit after that damn seminar.

Bill gets up with a groan. Reaches down to help her up. Brooklyn graces onto her feet.

BROOKLYN

You never mentioned that project to me. How dare you.

Bill jams his hands in his pockets. Slumps forward.

BILL

Another big battle to fight? Not sure I got it in me.

Shaking her head sadly, she guides him toward his house.

BROOKLYN

I thought you had more *piquante* than that. But. I do understand.

Brooklyn abruptly picks up the pace. She hurries to her car, reaching into her purse for her car keys.

Bill stumbles.

BILL

Wait. In all my telenovelas, when the lady throws up, she's well, you know - baby on board?

BROOKLYN

No, silly. Your girl's got to have sex first. Catch me soonest, yes?

BILL

Wait, please? How do I dig myself out of this hole? I gotta see Dr. Watts tomorrow. Game plan?

BROOKLYN

The longer you can maintain face
time, the better. Just be you. Yap.
Chat. Be stupid. Pop their balloon.
Wait for the air to whoosh out.

BILL

But. I don't do social -

BROOKLYN

Better learn quick. *Ciao bella.*

She gives Bill a good hug. Grabs him playfully in the crotch.

BROOKLYN

Just one thing.

(quietly)

I need documents. Proof. Can you do
that for me? Please?

BILL

Does a duck quack?

She steals a kiss. Jumps in the car, and drives away.

BILL

Everybody loves a winner.

He jams his hands in his pockets and heads inside, head hung
low and shoulders drooping.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - GRADUATE ADVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill knocks on the open door. Dr. Watts grunts him in. Bill
looks ragged - points to a large photo on one wall.

BILL

That's the outside rocket museum at
White Sands. I was there, enlisted -
at C-Station. Ninety-three echo.
Loved working the night shift.

Watts gets hot under the collar.

BILL

Peace and quiet. Did some great
orbits research there. Apple two E
computer. Wowser. You've read
NASA's letter on my office wall?

WATTS

I'll call custodial and have them
move your desk into the hallway.

Watts levels a knee-jerk rage at him. Bill reels back.

BILL

I just brought all my V.A. health
documents to the Office of Students
with Disabilities. Severe chronic
paranoid schizophrenia? Ouch.

WATTS

You're not schizophrenic.

Bill tenses up - starts to blow up. Then a deadly calm
overcomes him. He says with great conviction:

BILL

Tell that to the disabilities
people. Please.

Bill eases back in his chair, defiant.

WATTS

I'm banning you from registering
for any classes next semester until
you find a new advisor.

Bill stands, to confront Watts across his desk.

BILL

I should be graduating next
semester.

WATTS

You find a new adviser or your time
in grad school is a hundred grand
for naught. Joke's on you.

Bill slams the desk, hard.

BILL

I want your decision in writing -
on University letterhead - signed.

Watts pulls a letter out of a folder. Signs it with a
flourish. Hands it to Bill.

BILL

One day you'll know my name.

Bill grabs the paper and rips out of the room.

INT. TEXAS UNION - FAST FOOD JOINT - DAY

Bill picks at his burger and fries, depressed. Brooklyn slides into a chair next to him, with a green salad. Bill glances up at her, then looks quickly away.

BILL

I can't believe I'm the one with
the mental illness. I mean, really.

Brooklyn reaches over. She touches Bill's arm tenderly, a look of genuine concern on her face.

BROOKLYN

I just heard Dr. Z passed away last
night. I'm so sorry.

Bill stands up, horrified. Brooklyn eases Bill back down into his chair. He's white with shock, hands shaking.

BROOKLYN

Bill? Are you okay, there?

Bill stares at her, eyes raw and gritty.

BILL

Oh, God. I did this. My obsession.
Never realized how stressful it was
on him. I'm such a shit.

Brooklyn scoots closer to him.

BROOKLYN

That's not true. Whenever he saw
you, that old man's eyes lit up
like the high beams.

BILL

Felt the same way about him.

BROOKLYN

Your - magnificent obsession - it
added years to his life. Years.

BILL

Sure. We had some fun, we did.

Bloody tears flow out of Bill's eyes. He wipes them away with the back of his hand, muttering under his breath.

BILL

What do I do now, B.K.? Morph into
an academic clone?

BROOKLYN

What did the Disabilities Office
say? Dr. Watts? By law, they have
to cut you some serious slack here.

Bill scrunches his face up in an angry scowl.

BILL

They said I have to submit a
detailed grievance. Why bother?

A dark strength wells up from within her. A conviction.

BROOKLYN

Disabled veterans got rights here.
Older than average students, too.

BILL

Except it's too late, girl. Dr.
Watts just all but expelled me.

BROOKLYN

Paperwork I need paperwork. Go and
submit the grievance. Email me a
copy and I'll proofread it for you.

He turns away from her, hurt, and hurries away.

BROOKLYN

Don't read anything that isn't
there. Okay? I'm here. For you.

She hurries to follow him. He won't look her in the eye.

BROOKLYN

Wait. Bill. Stop already.

Bill hurries on. She scurries after him.

BROOKLYN

I'm home all night. Call me?

Bill steps quickly ahead - runs to catch a bus. Hops on.
Brooklyn watches him leave, concern in her every feature.

INT. LAGO VISTA - BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Bill's studying at the dinner table (Schrodinger snoozing by
his books). A CAR SPEEDS into his gravel driveway outside.

There's a frantic KNOCKING at the door.

RITA (O.S.)
Bill. Open up.

Bill lets Rita in. She rushes to turn on his TV.

BILL
What's wrong, Rita? You need a ride
to the bus stop? Your T.V. broke?
Missing our favorite telenovela?

Bill sits down as Rita tunes the TV to a news station. Turns
up the volume. Steps back.

CLOSE ON TV

Graphic images of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin
Towers unfold on the screen, at FULL VOLUME.

BACK TO SCENE

BILL
I can't take this no more.

Bill's knees turn to spaghetti. He collapses on the sofa -
hands grasped over his ears.

Rita turns the sound down. Rushes into the kitchen for a
glass of water.

EXT. TEXAS UNION - PATIO - DAY

Sitting at an outside table, alone, Bill picks at his food.
Dr. Watts strides by, spots Bill. Stands above him, jingling
change in his pocket.

BILL
Did you see the news of that
terrorist attack? Just terrible.

WATTS
If you want to stay on campus
you'll have to register as an
undergraduate next semester. You
are hereby expelled.

Bill jumps to his feet.

BILL
The Disabilities Office told me
just now they will investigate. All
your actions.

Watts stares at him, arms crossed defensively.

WATTS

Okay. The registration ban stays.
If you pass the oral qualifying
exam, I'll lift it.

BILL

They said they'd get me extra time.
Didn't they even talk to you?

WATTS

While you're at it, you can take a
night class in anger management.

BILL

Me and everybody else in the free
world.

Scowling to Bill, Dr. Watts jingles loose change in his pants pocket. Bill gets up and hurries away.

INT. CENTER FOR SPACE RESEARCH - BROWN'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill knocks gently on the (open) glass door. Waits at the threshold.

Dr. Brown waves Bill in. Dr. Brown's immersed in a program on a giant computer screen. Bill maneuvers around to get a look.

BILL

You finally decided to try my Mars
program? It's a real hoot. I -

Brown's playing an animated video game called "TORA BORA CAVES" where Osama bin Laden's head pops out of a cartoon cave, and you have to blow his head off to get points.

BILL

They made a game out of capturing
Osama bin Laden?
(sotto voice)
And you're playing it?

Brown keeps playing, addicted to the silly game.

BILL

You'll still be my advisor? At
least until after the oral
qualifying exam? Next week? Please?

BROWN

Get out. Can't you see I'm working?

BILL

Will you help me get ready for the oral exam? All the other advisors help their grad students prepare, with question sessions - a dry run?

Brown shoves Bill out of his office. Slams the door in his face. Bill yells at the door:

BILL

Thank you.

Brown throws a LARGE SOMETHING at the door. THUD.

INT. WOOLRICH HALL - LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Bill studies at a big desk in front of the classroom. He looks worse than ever: unkempt hair and stains on his shirt.

Melba is right there, tapping on his shoulder. He finally looks up. She points at the full classroom.

MELBA

You can commence our class now.

Bill gets his notes together to work on a homework problem on the chalkboard.

AN HOUR LATER

Bill draws a box around the answer, then watches the class finish copying the solution into their notebooks.

BILL

End-of-semester course evaluations are on the desk.

ANTON

One of our other T.A.s said NASA was at your seminar.

Bill's lethargy evaporates in a fury of rage.

BILL

NASA? You want to know about NASA?

Brooklyn slips in. Sits at the back of the room.

BILL

No. I'm not going there. No more science fun for the kiddos.

With a shaking hand, Bill scrawls "PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR" on the board. He looks around the room: confusion reigns.

BILL

I'm a-fixing to resign my professional engineering license. I'm switching my major to psychology.

Bill scrawls a giant "BE MORE THAN YOU CAN BE" on the board. Grabs his backpack. Storms toward the exit.

MELBA

You want us to jump-start our engineering careers - with this?

Bill stops, and backs up - eyes level with Melba.

BILL

You want to be an engineer?

MELBA

I do so swear, you hear? The best female astronaut at NASA.

The TOWER BELL CHIMES. Nobody moves.

MELBA

Who are you gonna be? Huh? A somebody professor or a nobody fell clear down the river?

Bill puts eyedrops in, buying a little time.

BILL

I can't register for classes next semester. Fail the oral exam. And that's all she wrote.

Beat.

BILL

Hey, that's my problem. Scoot, y'all. Go study. Ace the final.

Everybody hurries out of the room as the next class rushes in.

Bill grabs his books and hurries out.

INT. HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Melba scurries to catch up with Bill - as Brooklyn appears.

MELBA
You're giving up?

Brooklyn pushes Melba aside. Melba stands. Her. Ground.

MELBA
What kind of example is that?

BROOKLYN
Go away, child. Grow up.

Brooklyn pushes Melba aside. Grabs Bill. Hauls him away.

BROOKLYN
Come on, Bill. Tomorrow's the big
day - your oral examination. Yay.

Bill and Brooklyn walk quietly down the hallway.

BILL
What's so scary about psychology?

BROOKLYN
Welcome to the dark side of the
web, buckaroo.

BILL
I thought you were kidding when you
dared me to do that.

BROOKLYN
Poor baby raccoon's all stressed
out. Kiss-kiss. Let's go make some
little rascals.

Eyes twinkling, she leads him gently away by the hand.

INT. WOOLRICH LABS - GRADUATE ADVISOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill 2.0 (coat and tie, starched white shirt, military haircut, clean-shaven, clear eyes) knocks on the door.

Bill enters. Eventually, Watts looks up from his desk.

BILL
I'm all ready to take my oral
qualifying exam - where are the
other three exam professors?

Watts glares over his glasses at Bill. Bill sits down.

WATTS

The oral exam committee usually becomes part of your dissertation committee.

BILL

I have another full dissertation committee all set up, with six very well-qualified professors from other universities.

WATTS

You still need one professor on campus. Yesterday I polled every professor in the department. Nobody here will be your advisor.

Bill stands up, shaking his fist at Watts.

BILL

The. Disabilities People? Said.

Now Watts is on his feet, shaking his fist at Bill.

WATTS

With no advisor, your ad hoc dissertation committee at those other universities is null and void. You're hereby expelled.

Bill slides over a stack of printouts.

BILL

Not yet, I'm not. Twenty emails from experts all over the world who downloaded and tested my Mars program. They're fascinated. One of them is even using it in his classes as a teaching tool.

Watts throws the printouts in the trash.

BILL

You won't even read them? Each of those email experts spent more time looking at my Mars research than this whole department combined in the last three fucking years.

WATTS

You're no longer my graduate student. Good bye.

BILL
I want all that in writing. On
university letterhead. Signed.

Watts stands up, jingling change in his pocket.

BILL
Documents? Signed? Please.

Bill takes a small book out of his backpack. Slides it across
the desk.

BILL
I wrote up my Mars research in a
nice, formal dissertation.

Watts grabs the book (fury building) - flips through the
pages, tosses it into the trash.

WATTS
Haven't you figured out yet I won't
ever read anything you ever give
me? No matter what it is.

Bill checks his watch.

BILL
S.H.I.T. I'm late for a meeting at
the State Capitol. With the State
Senator who appointed me to the
Psychology Licensing Board.

Bill stands up - stands tall. - looming over Watts. Bill
slides a formal letter across the table.

BILL
I promised him all your documents,
in writing. Signed by everybody
involved in the food chain. Shall I
just tell him you said fuck you,
and yo' Momma, too?

Sweat beading on his brow from all the suppressed rage -
Watts slams open a filing cabinet. Yanks out a folder. Throws
it at Bill.

Aggravatingly nonchalant, Bill flips documents in the folder.

BILL
You're missing one paper, about
having to take the qualifying exams
after being just one year beyond an
undergraduate degree. Oh, wait. I
found it. Very nice. Bill likes.

Bill holds the paper up to the light to verify the watermark.

BILL
Watermark's authentic. Signed by
the President of the University
himself.
(sotto voice)
Who knew the bureaucracy could
operate at warp speed?

Bill tucks the last paper away. Growls at Watts:

BILL
Everything you write can and will
be used against you in a court of
law.

Bill does a sharp-about face. Strides out of the office.

Watts stares at the door and steps over. Slams it shut.

EXT. PSYCHOLOGY BUILDING - DAY

Bill (same clothing, but looking ever so worn out) sits at a limestone table, paging through a bound document. Brooklyn walks up and sits down next to him.

BROOKLYN
How'd it go?

BILL
I am hereby expelled. With first-
degree malice - premeditated.
Planned.

Brooklyn grabs the thick, heavy volume from Bill.

BROOKLYN
Where'd you get this *file*'?

BILL
It's my P.H.D. dissertation.

Brooklyn fingers the official embossed cover. Cracks the stiff new binding open. Reads the title page. Slowly.

BROOKLYN
The Semiconductor Junction as a
Four Body Problem. *Pshaw.*

Exasperated, Brooklyn flips through the pages, ogling several elaborate illustrations. Bill studies her every nuance, soaks up her every word. Melancholic for what's coming.

BILL

I got one last chance, here.

BROOKLYN

They're already at the boiling point. Still haven't cracked.

BILL

I'm hoping high-pressure steam will do the trick.

BROOKLYN

Surely they'll see through your ruse.

Upset, Bill slams the binder down on the table.

People look toward them, perturbed by the noise. Bill ignores them - talks loud - louder. - for his captive audience.

BILL

No ruse. Real. It's the Mars algorithm structure - duplicates the semiconductor junction. Just like I told you the other day.

Brooklyn is thunderstruck. She stomps one foot in fury, the other - like a raging bull.

BILL

They wanted a Theory to explain my super-fast Mars trajectory. Well, this is it. Grand and Unified.

She pulls at her hair, pacing back and forth - loco.

BILL

Am I being grandiose?

BROOKLYN

I will not let you do this. Nothing is worth your professional engineering career. *Adieu.*

Brooklyn hoists her backpack to one shoulder, leaving.

BILL

This is on me, girl. Whatever happens, it's not your fault.

Brooklyn wheels around and gets directly into his face.

BROOKLYN

I told you to stop putting words in
my mouth. Now you're putting
sentiments in my heart?

BILL

Lady, we need to bring this
discussion to neutral ground.

Bill grabs her hand. Drags her toward the exit.

EXT. PSYCHOLOGY BUILDING/AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY - DAY

They hurry across the street to a private college. Old stone
buildings. Beautifully landscaped grounds.

BROOKLYN

They won, Bill. They fucking won.
We got nothing. Zero.

BILL

We got us. I got my Mars program.
The theory behind it.

BROOKLYN

Unproven. Un - anything.

Bill picks up the pace. She hurries to keep up.

BROOKLYN

They're supposed to give you a
letter of reprimand? Put you on
academic probation, then wet-nurse
you gently back into the program?

BILL

Yes. That's what their rules say.

BROOKLYN

Like, they're really gonna iron
your sheets, make your bed, and
install you in an all-bills-paid
pad in gumbo-ville. You - you.

Bill slides on dark sunglasses. Mission Impossible voice:

BILL

Your mission, should you choose to
accept it, is to. Go. To. Mars.

Bill unfolds a blind man's walking cane and hobbles along.

BILL

The doctors said I need to save my vision for reading.

Brooklyn takes his arm. Guides him along.

BROOKLYN

Really? Your vision is that bad? That's - just terrible. Why didn't you tell me?

BILL

I will not use my disability to make people feel sorry for me.

BROOKLYN

Don't be absurd. The law says -

BILL

I have no right to practice engineering. I have no right to be here. No right to -

BROOKLYN

You can negotiate. Engineers do that all the time, right? I'll talk to Dean Trotzky.

Bill checks his watch. Turns. Seads back across the street toward the U.T. campus. Brooklyn hurries along beside him.

BILL

Speaking of whom. I have an appointment with the Chief Legal Officer of the University of Texas.

BROOKLYN

Dean Trotzky. She'll eat you alive and floss her rotten teeth with your tendons.

Bill stops and confronts her, looking over the shades.

BILL

I need documents, B.K. Paper. That's the only way to win. I'm doing this. Didn't have any documents to fight Cromwell and Associates. So I lost. Not this time.

Brooklyn tries to hold him back, but he just pulls her along.

BROOKLYN

Look who's calling the picket fence
white.

Bill stops cold and digs in - venting.

BILL

This isn't about you. Us. This is
about my life. They took it.
Cromwell. Texas. I. Want. It. Back.

She lets it all go, too.

BROOKLYN

They expelled you, man. You're
finished. What's to gain now?
(quiet venom)
Vengeance. Is. The. Lords.

BILL

Listen to yourself. Every time I
stand my ground you people call me
crazy. Grandiose. Whatever happened
to assertive? In your rights?

Brooklyn is crestfallen, knees wobbly.

BROOKLYN

You're - driving them into.
overtime? The stress is gonna kill
you, guy. Don't do this. Please.

Bill turns and moves away.

BILL

Sorry. My mind's made up.

BROOKLYN

Damned if I know how to tell the
difference between courage and
outright insanity.

She grabs his arm, but the strength of his fury tows her
along. Tears are welling in her big, brown eyes.

BROOKLYN

Don't leave me here. Please don't.
(desperate rage)
Rug-rat *mosquito* like me? Alone.

Bill wheels around and confronts her, his voice steady.

BILL
I'll get you some good press. I
promise. Love you.

BROOKLYN
Don't put this back on me. Just -
don't. Please?

Bill takes a deep breath. A deep calm washes over him.

BILL
I'll take it from here, Boo.

Bill turns and hurries away. She yells after him:

BROOKLYN
Make me proud. Frontpage story. I
guaron-damn-tee. Documents. Get me
beau coups documents. Paper.

Bill disappears in a crowd of students.

BROOKLYN
Go ahead. Rip my heart out and feed
it to the 'gaters.

Brooklyn stumbles over to a shady park bench and breaks out
in sobbing tears.

EXT./INT. MAIN ADMIN BUILDING - CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill stares at bold black letters on the glass door, "LEE
TROTZKY, JD, Vice President of Legal Affairs, University of
Texas System."

Trotzky glances up from some paperwork.

Bill (same clothes but looking beat, ragged) settles into an
uncomfortable high-back chair across from her Texas-sized
desk, a moronic smile plastered on his face.

Bill slides a copy of the Electrical Design Guide for
Commercial Buildings on the Dean's desk.

BILL
You teach electrical engineering.
Wow. I know double-E. This here is
my trade book from McGraw-Hill. It
only now just came out. Not hardly
to your level. Might interest your
students, though.

He gets up and wanders around the large office, sniff-sniffing the air, not liking what he smells.

Bill morphs into the quintessential consulting engineer doing his difficult job for a clueless client:

BILL

Smells musky in here. Dank. Same odor all over the building on my way up to the stratosphere. Your H.V.A.C. system must be off-kilter.

Dean Trotzky flips through the book, aghast. Hands shaking.

DEAN TROTZKY

Another book from McGraw-Hill? How fucking dare you. They won't give me the time of day.

Bill studies the air vents in the ceiling. A floor vent.

She flips through the book, temperature rising.

Her hands grip the desk, her knuckles white with suppressed anger.

BILL

Clearly, your air quality is badly catawampus.
(inhaling deeply)
Too much carbon dioxide, not enough fresh outside air. Bad air quality can cause Attention Deficit Disorder, you know.

She stands up and slams the book into a wall across the room.

DEAN TROTZKY

Oh My God. You're the columnist in The Daily Texan. DR. FUCKING DOOM. Of all the coffee-picking - bastards.
(very loud)
Sit. Down.

Bill pulls out his burnt-orange dissertation. Gently slides it across her desk.

Dean Trotzky grabs the dissertation. Flips through it.

DEAN TROTZKY

Now what the fuck did you do?

BILL

It's a whole new model of the semiconductor junction. Wow. Faster computers. More efficient solar panels. We. Can. Do. This.

DEAN TROTZKY

Has this been approved by your dissertation committee?

BILL

If your professors don't follow their own fucking rules about counseling, academic probation, qualifying exams - why should I?

DEAN TROTZKY

This is harassment.

Bill stands at a tall window, admiring the view of a GIANT AMERICAN FLAG FLUTTERING in the breeze outside.

BILL

I call it unethical, illegal - treatment of a decorated, disabled Vietnam-era Veteran. Neglect.

Dean Trotzky stands up. Steps over to a side table. Crams the dissertation into a giant commercial SHREDDER.

BILL

The Empire Strikes Back.

Dean Trotzky grabs Bill. Pushes him toward the door.

DEAN TROTZKY

Get out, you *Bolshevik*. Get off my campus. You're expelled already.

BILL

You read my column on The End of Science book? All experts worldwide believe a statistics-based world can go no further. Well. My semiconductor model is hard-core math. Basic math. It's a new beginning. Hope.

Dean Trotzky waves a legal binder in Bill's face. Swats him with it - full of righteous fury. He tries to grab the binder. Can't.

DEAN TROTZKY

You're banned from talking to anybody on this campus involved in your research: professors, post-docs, students - journalists.

BILL

Everybody? On the whole forty acres? Fuck. My friend Brooklyn?

Weathering a crushing sorrow, Bill bucks up. He stares at a GIANT CAMPUS MAP on the wall behind her.

BILL

Surely you reference retaliation, retribution, and discrimination against a member of four protected groups?

Bill follows her every frantic move, as she stuffs the letters into a LEGAL FOLDER. Bill eyes THE FOLDER. Watching it. Wanting it.

DEAN TROTZKY

Out. Get your *troika* off my campus.

Bill maneuvers past Dean Trotzky and sits down in her desk chair. He counts on his fingers.

BILL

Student older than average, mentally disabled, physically disabled, disabled veteran, special Vietnam veteran. Cajun. That's SIX protected classes. Touchdown. Bill six. U.T. zero.

Bill stands up, dancing - with his hands up in a touchdown football signal. Dean Trotzky picks up the phone. Dials.

DEAN TROTZKY

I'm calling security. No access, no emails, no services. *Nyet* anything.

BILL

Listen to yourself. We're in Austin, Texas. Ground zero for the semiconductor industry. And you're expelling me for discovering a new transistor model?

A burly secretary rushes in, grabs hold of Bill's backpack, and tries to yank him out of the room.

BILL

What if you tune in for the K.U.T.
Longhorn Bull Shit Hour at
lunchtime one day and hear about
all this on the radio?

DEAN TROTZKY

The University of Texas will sue
you. We'll take your *dacha*, your
belongings, and all your savings.

BILL

What house? What belongings? You
can have all my goddamn student
loan debts.

Trotzky goes to swat Bill with the LEGAL FOLDER. But. He
grabs the folder. Yanks it away from her.

He flips through the dozens of pages on university
letterhead.

BILL

Look at all this verbiage. You
people spent THOUSANDS of man-hours
investigating my situation.
(quietly)
Don! And not FIVE MINUTES
investigating my Mars research.

Just before he leaves, Bill pauses at the door and gives
Trotzky two (vulgar) fingers - one with each hand.

BILL

Hook 'em horns.

Trotzky grabs a heavy longhorn-bull-shaped bookend and throws
it at him.

EXT. MAIN ADMIN BUILDING - DAY

Bill pushes through big, swinging glass exit doors into
bright sunlight. He sits down and studies the documents.

LATER - BLEEDING HEART SUNSET

There's terrible grief on Bill's countenance. Campus security
shows up, searching.

Bills sees them. Rolls up his shirtsleeves. Ready to rumble.

They rush forward. Grab his arms.

BILL
Can't even talk to Brooklyn. Not
even the Nazis were this cruel.

Bill shakes them off. Unfolds his walking cane.

They follow behind him as he hobbles away from the Tower.

INT. TEMPLE, TEXAS - VA MEDICAL CENTER HOSPITAL - DAY

Bill (disheveled hair, scruffy beard, starched white shirt, cut-off jeans, hiking boots) sits quietly in a waiting room.

It's a brand-new hospital with dramatic glass walls looking out on nicely landscaped grounds.

Dr. Carter steps into the nurse's station. Checks a patient chart. Looks around. She spots Bill huddling in a dark corner, alone - eases quietly around the desk.

INT. OLIN E. TEAGUE MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAYS - DAY

Bill and Dr. Carter pace slowly down a maze of hallways lined with doctor's offices and patient seating.

BILL
I helped design this building, back
in the day. Electrical, mostly.
Drafting. Lighting calcs. Short
circuit calcs. Voltage drop calcs.

Bill takes off his sunglasses and slips them into his pants.

BILL
Wrote industry-standard computer
programs to crunch the numbers.
State of the art. Published tech
papers on them. Two textbooks.

The doctor-patient façade drops away and she smiles.

DR. CARTER
Yes, I well remember when you did
that. We were in therapy then.

BILL
If the V.A. had let you continue
talk therapy, I'd be sitting here
with a doctorate in my hands.

She pulls a document out. Hands it to him. He scans it.

BILL
 You're rating me at one hundred
 percent now? Bummer. Did Texas
 Corporate do a number on me, or
 what?

Deeply ashamed, she leads him to the exit.

INT. PLANETARIUM - NIGHT

Graphic images show the space shuttle Columbia flying across
 the bright blue sky, smoking, disintegrating piece by piece,
 and finally EXPLODING into a million pieces over the heart of
 Texas.

SUPER: "TWO MONTHS LATER"

Dozens of thick smoky contrails shoot out from the
 detonation. Bill sits in the front row, white with shock.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 The NASA space shuttle Columbia
 exploded over Texas earlier this
 year, all hands lost. Shades of the
 Challenger fiasco at Cape Kennedy
 back in 1986. The U.S. Navy
 investigation of the Columbia
 disaster was released today.

A montage of images is 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 process that
 tramples reason, stifles
 professional differences of
 opinion, and that doesn't reflect
 reality, quote-unquote.

A map of Texas shows bits of debris scattered over half the
 state, from San Antonio to Lubbock.

SUPER: "THE SCREENWRITER LEFT AUSTIN AND TEXAS SOON
 THEREAFTER AND HAS NOT SINCE RETURNED. NONE OF HIS RESEARCH
 HAS EVER BEEN PUBLISHED."

FADE OUT.

THE END