

out of orbit

by

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The setting:

A unit set that can easily transform from Sara and Lis's house, to their car, to the locker room, to Jet Propulsion Lab and to Mars, with simple set pieces that won't interrupt the flow.

Two clocks hover over the stage newsroom style – one on Earth time, one on Mars time, giving the date and sol. A sol is a Martian day, slightly longer than a day on earth, thus over time, the worlds disconnect, leaving Sara and Lis out of sync with each other.

Cast:

Sara - late 40s. JPL scientist.

Lis - 17. Sara's daughter. Pronounced “Leese”

Victoria - 17, Lis's best friend.

Edgar2330/Computer Voices – played by same male actor

Chris - 32, grad student (all but dissertation) in mechanical engineering.
Rover driver

..... connotes a character's reaction without dialogue

note: Sols are calculated for corresponding Pacific Standard Time.

OUT OF ORBIT is dedicated to the memory of Howard Maisel

**part one:
the beginning**

COUNTDOWN

(The Mars Rover launch at the Kennedy Space Center, Florida. June 10, 2003. Outside. Dusk approaching. 5:35 pm. SARA – jittery, body surging with anxiety, and LIS – bored or doing her best to look it).

VOICE

30 seconds...

(Sara looks at her hands. They are shaking. She shows them to Lis. Lis is unimpressed)

...We're on a hold.

(Sara, literally jumping out of her skin.

Lis, just the slightest smirk, not a real one but liking seeing her mother unsettled.

They wait.)

And we're back. 30 seconds.

(Sara grabs Lis's arm in excitement. Lis pulls away a little but Sara pulls her into a hug. -I'm-going-to-hold-you-damnit-whether-you-like-it-or-not-kind-of-hug. She needs this. She NEEDS this.

Lis tolerates. Gives in. Wouldn't admit she likes it with a gun to her head. It's all in the choreography.

And then the Voice.)

10.

9.

8.

7.

6. - greenboard

5.

4.

(and it's Sara hopinghopinghoping who disentangles herself from Lis, pulling away, and can'tbreathecan'tbreathecan'tbreathe taking a few steps forward toward -)

3.

(Lis, left behind, baffled at the emptiness of her arms)

2.

1.

VOICE(CONT)

Engine start
and
liftoff

of the Delta 2 Rocket carrying Spirit from Earth to the Planet Mars.

*(Sara, hands to mouth, an involuntary leap of joy, of potential, of this hurdle hurdled.
Lis watches her mother, face of joy to the sky, bathed in the glare of the liftoff)*

SARA CONTEMPLATES THE INNER DEPTHS OF THE REFRIGERATOR

(SARA and LIS's home. Pasadena, California.)

SARA

First, be the girl in your class who is misunderstood. Possess a brain that does not configure around prom dresses and blusher. Wish it would. Hear the talk about the football game and celebrity hairstyles as if it is an ancient language you have evolved past understanding. Look for a guidebook to life on this planet at the library but never find one. Wonder if you are alone in the universe because you obviously don't belong on earth.

Second, do not raise your hand from the back of the room even though you know the answer. Excel only on tests and at lab work. Become the secretary of the honor society. Become the secretary of the science club. Become the secretary of the chess club. Get elected school secretary. Collect rocks and don't tell anyone you dream about the secrets they hold within. Say they're pretty. Perfect a smile of gracious amusement to mask your boredom.

Third, wear the badge of your scientific obsession as your very own scarlet S rather than a red badge of courage. Hope some boy will cover said S with an orchid corsage and lead you out on to the gymnasium floor under the disco ball, overcoming your clumsiness with strong John Travolta-like moves. Know you will actually spend that evening baby-sitting to buy a microscope and that that will not make you unhappy. As you approach the podium to give the valedictory speech hear several students whisper - who the hell is that? Leave for college the next day.

Agree with your roommate you signed up for rocks for jocks because it is a gut and the boys are delicious – but really it's the first time your rocks, your pretty rocks, are appreciated for what they are, history sitting in your hand.

SARA(CONT)

Because you know, you know that locked inside each stone is the only way to find out what the earth was like at a time we can't go back to.

Without even knowing it you are playing "Destination Mars". Switch majors from Human Ecology to Geology and don't tell your parents. One point. Raise your hand, answer the question, shine. One point. Plaster that red S all over your clothes. Two points.

Worship the only professor who treats you like one of the boys. Lose a turn. Have fervent sex with him just after office hours and call it love - lose a turn - but later recognize it was just unflinching gratitude - move ahead 4 spaces. Have revelations about your dissertation with his head between your legs - 10 points. Publish. Publish. Publish. The phone call from Jet Propulsion Lab comes that you can't believe is for you - "you like rocks? What do you think about rocks on Mars?" It's your turn. The other alone-in-the-universe people are calling you. Land on dream come true and roll the dice towards Jet Propulsion Lab.

Encounter a man at three diners on your drive cross country and take these chance encounters as fate. Marry him, have a daughter, and on your ninth anniversary use your genius sense of deduction to reason he is having an affair, pray you're wrong, be right -

....

It is you and her now -

....

.....

Pull the right-place-at-the-right-time card and jump a level into uncharted territory. Start small but go big. Be offered a taste of the possibility of life somewhere else and become addicted to finding out. Tag along for the Launch of the Polar Lander. Fail. Be part of the team to launch the Climate Orbiter. Fail. Assume all is lost but - roll the dice and hit the jackpot: Take Another Turn. Land on advance-your-career and the Principal Investigator crowns you Project Scientist for the Mars

SARA(*CONT*)

Exploration Rover Mission. This isn't a game anymore. This is six years of work, thousands of people's souls, 820 million dollars of possibility, the destiny of the human race - that you could fuck up in a heartbeat.

Come to understand that sending a rover to Mars is incalculably easier than dealing with a teenage daughter. Take a step off the precipice and find you are horribly out of orbit.

TESTING 1 2 3

(The streets of Pasadena. Fall. SARA drives. LIS stares out the window. Something 80s offends her ears. She reaches to the car radio.)

SARA

Don't touch that. Please.

LIS

Even NPR would be better.

SARA

Don't start with me.

LIS

I'll just see what's /on/

SARA

Driver's choice. When you /get your license/

LIS

/Right. New rules/ start -

SARA

It's/ a good rule -

LIS

-the moment you want.

SARA

Because I'm the mother.
(silence. Lis reaches again.)

SARA

Lis - damnit what did I say -
(Lis holds up a hand.)

LIS

Reflex. Really.
(They listen/drive/sulk. Lis sings to the tune.)
Stul-ti-fying.

SARA

Gasp! Did I hear -

LIS

S.A.T. word. Yes.

SARA

Oh my god.

LIS

Applause applause encore.

SARA

For seven hundred dollars, I'm allowed to expect more than/ 45 Verbal.
And the math -

LIS

It was the/ PSAT, the practice S.A.T. Practice. I choked.

SARA

It's just - You're /better -

LIS

(mimicking)

You're better -

SARA/LIS

-than that.
(Sara turns off the radio.....silence. Then rapid-fire.)

Amiable.	SARA
Friendly.	LIS
Proselytize.	SARA
Preach.	LIS
Coagulate.	SARA
Stop -	LIS
Misanthrope.	SARA
Testing -	LIS
Brevity.	SARA
Me! God!	LIS
I'm /not/	SARA
/Take off the freaking lab coat/	LIS
-testing you -	SARA

LIS

Let me out of the fucking cage!

I. Can't. Perform. On. Cue. Like you.

The question goes into your brain and the gears go into motion and and and out spins the answer that is never anything but correct.

SARA

Lis – you just have to -

LIS

Apply myself? Every frigging minute of the day you echo in my head. You want me to be like one of your geeky JPL people but I'm not that. You want me to be like you but I'm not you –

SARA

I don't want you to be –

LIS

I know those words. I know them.

SARA

I know you know them. It would just be nice if you let the rest of the world know you know them.

LIS

Why?

SARA

Why? Really? You want to have that talk again?

LIS

.....

SARA

You don't want to hear that again. I don't even want to hear myself say it again.

LIS

You think I have to try to be like you -

SARA

I do not.

LIS

Good, because I'm not going to be –

SARA

You don't know /that –

LIS

/I know that –/

SARA

When I was/ your age I had no idea that I was going to end up here –

LIS

Well then I'm smarter than you were then at least.

How do I measure up to someone integral – yes S.A.T. word – integral to us going to Mars? Beat that.

SARA

You don't have to beat that.

LIS

Right.

SARA

I do what I do. And you'll do what you'll do. It's just you need to – I want you to – to burn for something, to want to do something.

LIS

You mean want to do something bigger and better and further out of this world that nobody else has done.

SARA

Having ambition is not a sin -

LIS

I'm Sara. I look at 3 down and spit out 8 letters - conflate or three across - curmudgeon - in pen - and you finish the fucking thing before I'm out of the shower every morning for gods sake and you leave it by your plate just to prove to me you can conquer Monday through Sunday without having finished your first cup of coffee and I look at the white squares filled with letters and I know what you're telling me. You want me to try to be like you just to prove I will never be as good as you.

SARA

Where is this coming from? Lis - I -
(Sara starts to pull over -)

LIS

Don't pull over and perform some sort of Hallmark maneuver. Drive.
(Sara gives her a look, pulls back out. Drives.)
You leave the crossword out so you can start off the day better than someone else and that's why you test me all the time, for the adrenaline rush of the ego boost.

SARA

....
I didn't know you felt that way.

LIS

You know everything else, I'm sure you knew that too.

SARA

...
I test you because that's what mothers do.
....
I'm trying to help you. I push you maybe, yes - but because I want to help you.

LIS

Dad doesn't do that.

SARA

Because your father doesn't give a shit.

LIS

....

SARA

....

LIS

There's something not right, Ma.
(Sara pulls over.)

SARA

I don't know, the way I think about it...it was like, like dogs...

LIS

What?

SARA

The way when dogs get old they become kind of mangy? And if they get wet, forget about it. Somewhere along the line, the old dogs cross over from that irresistible new puppy thing into, well, into old dogs. How you run your hand over them and it always feels like there's some residue left on your fingers. That's what life was like with your father.

LIS

Wet dog?

SARA

Oh, I'm not saying this right. It was incredible in the beginning and joyous and exploratory and then it became mangy, wet mangy and it is really hard to get rid of that feeling about whatever was left behind in me.

LIS

It's not about you – or him – it's about me.

There's something not right with me.

(Finally. A moment. An admission of technical failure. Sara can't say anything.)

I know those words. I know them. I listen to them and I can tell you any definition right back but I look, I look, I look at the page and the letters and the clumps, they're clumps, and they don't come in and go out the way it seems like it does for everyone else. They get caught inside like anything

LIS *(CONT)*

entering through my eyes has a special fast-pass into this maze that I can't ever find the exit or the center of. I can't get them out.

....

SARA

.....

LIS

....

SARA

...OK. OK. We need to figure out what we want to do about this.

LIS

I'm late for practice.

(Lis grabs her bag and goes. A beat. Sara leans over, throws the passenger door open.)

SARA

Lis – let me drive you. Lis!!!

(Lis doesn't return. Sara stares straight ahead but does not drive away.)

LIS LAUNCHING

(Girls locker room. LIS and her friend, VICTORIA.

Lis lying on the bench in running clothes. Victoria changing clothes.)

VICTORIA

Maybe she just needs to get laid.

LIS

Oh, ugh, Victoria.

VICTORIA

Just think about it.

LIS

I don't want to think about it and now that you've said it I can't un-think about it. She's not going to do that.

VICTORIA

My mom says it keeps her periods regular and that as long as she's doing it menopause won't happen.

LIS

Your mom discloses way too much.

VICTORIA

I know. But still, your mom - What does she have going on in her life that's like, real?

(Lis looks at her, disbelieving)

LIS

Seriously? She's coordinating the zillion people who are sending two rovers to Mars. She's like Magellan or something.

VICTORIA

Since your dad, you know?

LIS

Conquering the universe versus getting laid. Where are her priorities?

VICTORIA

If she just tried.

LIS

All my mother ever does is try. If she's not trying she's dead.

VICTORIA

That's not what I'm talking about trying for -

LIS

Uch - I'm not listening to you. I am on the field. I am warming up.

VICTORIA

Besides - Kevin says the Mars thing is just a whole copycat thing of the moon landing and now we're so good at special effects, that there's no need to actually go to Mars or the sun -

LIS

Nobody's claiming they're going to the sun -

VICTORIA

Kevin says our political regimes are doing this to recreate Manifest Destiny because they figure that was the last time anyone was excited about anything.

LIS

Kevin needs to get his head out of his ass.
(a moment. They continue to dress/stretch.)

VICTORIA

But if she just got laid -

LIS

Oh - Victoria!/ so not -

VICTORIA

She could,/ you know, reacquaint herself with touch.

LIS

/so not going there/

My muscles are stretched. I'm going to blow you away, V. I stand at the starting point. Feet on the starting blocks, fingertips to the earth.

VICTORIA

I mean there's going to be 32 million miles between her and her rover at the closest point. Not much going on there.
She could get into something real. With a person. She works all the time.

LIS

/Breath. Bang./

VICTORIA

/She wouldn't have/ to be so removed.

LIS

Blur. And the world has narrowed now to the lane to the hurdle, hurdle, hurdle, step step step step.

VICTORIA

She wouldn't have to be so distant. Neither would you.

LIS

(stung)

Those weird-ass seminars your mom makes you take - I'm highly suspect. Scrubbing that cerebral cortex but good.

VICTORIA

It could make her a much nicer person to be around, Lis.

LIS

Step step step soar./ Step step step soar. Step step step soar.

VICTORIA

She's not old, you know. And I know you really can't admit it /but she's a human being too.

LIS

I know that. What I don't know is whose side you're on anymore. At all.
(Victoria slams her locker shut)

VICTORIA

I'll beat your ass off in this race - just because I know I can.
(She goes)

LIS

My breath is not mine anymore. My feet have become birds. I cross the finish line but I do not stop. I launch. I enter the atmosphere. I fucking triumph.

SARA LAUNCHING

(Jet Propulsion Lab. The Mars Yard. A simulated Mars terrain – a camouflage netting across it may be the only thing that tells us that this is not the real thing. An interview.)

SARA

Wait – can we stop a sec? Can I start over? It’s just, you know, I’m usually the one who hides behind a tree every time I see a camera come out. And now – I’m your Mars Exploration Rover Project Scientist/spokesmodel which is kind of crazy because there was absolutely no point in my life where I ever could have seen this coming – I mean people relying on me to be the one coordinating the science objectives with the engineering realities at Jet Propulsion lab? A job that didn’t even exist when I was making the what-I-want-to-do-when-I-grow-up lists. The closest I envisioned it was this crazy hot summer day - my dad sprawled out on the grass, newspaper over his face. Asleep. And rising and falling with his breath were the first photos taken from Mariner 4. Of Mars. The red planet in blurry black and white. I cut out the photo, and drew a picture of myself on Mars, waving to earth. But you know, me having something to do with that possibility? Never could have imagined it but – here I am.

OK – let’s go again -

(SARA bends down and picks up a rock from the ground.)

All right – you’re going to tell me it’s just a rock. But to me it’s a storyteller. Wind erosion – that tells me one story. Water erosion, that’s another. Pressure, lava flows, temperature – a history of the surrounding environment is stored deep inside this. I see the rock I want, I pick it up, and it gives me the clues to dig out the history locked inside.

And with the rovers Spirit and Opportunity – this is exactly what I – we - will be doing on Mars. It’s incredible - The rovers are our robot geologists who carry our investigative toolkit. The IDD – the instrument deployment device – is a robotic arm - just like yours or mine, touching what the heart desires. The way you and I see the world -

(Sara turns 360 degrees – taking in the view)

-that’s what our panoramic camera does.

(she brings the rock closer to her line of vision)

And the Microscopic Imager – it’s the magnifying glass held in my hand. And my personal favorite, the RAT – the rock abrasion tool – it’s our rock hammer, exposing the treasures inside.

They may be mechanical geologists but Spirit and Opportunity have souls comprised of hundreds of people within them. The engineers, the scientists, the builders, the technicians, the software designers who created them are their life-force. And all we souls are dying to do is to walk on Mars and find evidence of liquid water in Mars’ past.

SARA(*CONT*)

Because that's the story we need to hear. That's how we pave the way for future generations to transform human destiny and expand into the universe. We follow the water. We follow the water – because if we find it, maybe, someday we can stand on Mars and wave to Earth.

OK? OK.

APPROACH

(JPL grounds, outside. Late December. Nighttime – SARA stands, lit cigarette in her hand, shivering, looking at the sky. CHRIS approaches.)

CHRIS

Can I glom one?

(She passes him the pack.)

There's a much better view from inside.

SARA

I just, I just needed a moment. Every once in a while it kicks in and I can't breathe in there. I look at all these people and I think, one little screw up, one little metric instead of customary system and it's over. I mean, this is pretty much our last chance and then I think of everything that needs to be done before EDL even though it's been six years leading up til now and - oh my god –

CHRIS

Breathe.

SARA

I feel like I could breathe up there.

I'm sorry. It's been a long day. It's about to be a long ninety sols. Wait til Mars Time hits you –

CHRIS

I never get jet lagged –

SARA

You are not going to know which end is up.

CHRIS

I can't wait.

(He lifts her hand holding her lit cigarette to his to light it. The touch surprises her.)

I spent the whole day in the Mars Yard running Operational Readiness Tests. You know my family - they gave me an incredibly hard time about dumping the rat race to go Carnegie for robotics, and then when I bailed on my dissertation to come here? Crazy.... They think I found the easy way out - a fake grown-up version of my remote control trucks - they call it playing with toys. And now I tell them I just spent my entire day in the sandbox, which seems to only validate their point. But they have no idea how insanely lucky I feel. I'm in Drivers Ed to drive a rover. On Mars. Maybe no remote control involved, definitely no joystick, but even writing the command sequences, considering all the permutations of what could happen. Contemplating the possibilities for a day's operations - I am perfecting the art of popping a wheelie on another planet. I can't wait.

(SARA glances at him.)

Shit - I've still got that newbie smell, don't I?

SARA

First mission. All google-y eyed. No fear. You reek of it.

CHRIS

And I thought I had that all covered up with jaded perpetual PhD candidate stench.

SARA

Sorry, no such luck. Welcome to the red planet. Almost. Maybe.

CHRIS

Have a little faith.

SARA

I don't think you get how big this is.

CHRIS

I get it.

SARA

No. How big this is. We lose the rovers. That's it. The PR nightmare, the public support that's basically non-existent now goes completely and irrevocably away. They call Mars the death planet, for god's sake. Nobody gets why we need a space program any more. It's not sexy anymore. They don't care if anyone's out there. That's why NASA banked two rovers instead of one – a last ditch effort so we have half a chance to get it right. But then that's it – we're through.

CHRIS

I get it. I am getting it. I listen – and I can feel it in there too. It's rank with some combination of anticipation, hubris and terror.

SARA

Hubris?

CHRIS

Really, what the hell else are we all full of, thinking let's go there (*points to the sky*) and actually doing it? Hubris and other people's money.

SARA

(*overwhelmed*)

Oh god.

CHRIS

You need a hobby.

SARA

I have a kid.

CHRIS

That's mutually exclusive?

SARA

You don't have kids.

For anyone else - any other woman, or any other time in history, this would be my hobby, peering at distant planets and contemplating the hypothetical,

SARA(*CONT*)

wishing there was someone standing on the pebbly red dust raising a hand to me in recognition. So I don't need a hobby. I've got it all. I'm so lucky. You too.

CHRIS

I play fantasy baseball.

SARA

That's a hobby?

CHRIS

That's a distraction. You could enjoy the ride. Play in the sandbox.

SARA

You won't get this - there was a one-armed boy I saw when I was pregnant that sucked every fear to the surface – and that's how I feel now, breath caught here –

(she gestures to her heart)

CHRIS

Maybe you should stop smoking.

SARA

Oh – I don't actually smoke it, I've just never come up with the non-nicotine addict equivalent for the 5 minute excuse to take a break outside without anyone questioning.

(She looks at the cigarette, burning down to the butt.)

Time's up.

CHRIS

Me either.

SARA

What?

CHRIS

Smoking. Don't believe in it.

I've just never come up with the non-nicotine addict excuse to talk one on one to the person I've been dying to talk to.

SARA

....

Oh.

CHRIS

You're always surrounded. I've been watching you in action – how you manage the team, keep the big picture in sight and never forget the minutiae.

I know it's you scientists pointing the way and us drivers formulating code to get you where you want to go, but I think of it as long drives on Mars. I thought I should stop worshipping from afar and get to know the person who's in my passenger seat.

SARA

....

Oh.

CHRIS

Oh and oh? All that and I get "oh and oh"?
Huh.

SARA

What?

CHRIS

You're usually so - in command.
I never could have imagined I could have thrown you off course.

SARA

Well...

CHRIS

I like it.

SARA

It's just that you've only ever witnessed Sara Scientist.

CHRIS

Sara Scientist?

SARA

Her alter ego – she must have peeked out there for a second.
Bad alter ego, bad.

CHRIS

And that's Sara ____?

SARA

Oh no, first rule in the handbook, never never reveal your human counterpart to anyone.
(She starts to go.)

CHRIS

To anyone?

SARA

Though my alter ego may be the kind to break the rules.
(Hand over her mouth in that "I can't believe I just said that" way. Quickly goes. Chris looks to the stars.)

CHRIS

Ultimate road-trip.

CORRECTING TRAJECTORY

(the car – Lis drives, Sara, passenger seat, barely hiding panic, trying to be cool mom.)

SARA

Brake.

LIS

I'm braking.

SARA

If you did it earlier you wouldn't stop so –

LIS

- What?!
(they stop short)

SARA

Short.
It's not like running, you can't barrel ahead. You have to look both ways -

LIS

I did.

SARA

This isn't about you being a champion. Winning is pulling up to your destination alive.

LIS

But I did -

SARA

I didn't see.

LIS

But I did.

SARA

Not so -

LIS

Mom!

SARA

Shit -
You're right.

LIS

It's a learners permit.
....
You're supposed to let me learn.

SARA

Right.

(Lis reaches for the radio. Sara slaps her hand away.)

No.

LIS

Driver's choice.

SARA

When you've learned to actually drive.

It's distracting.

LIS

You're distracting.

Now what?

SARA

Drive.

(silence. Lis drives. Sara visibly trying to relax.)

Good, that's good.

LIS

What?

SARA

Checking the rear view -
watch that guy!

LIS

I am!

SARA

Christ!

(swerve)

LIS

It wasn't my —

SARA

(at the guy)

Asshole! What do you think you're doing?! She's learning to drive and she's better than you, you moron.

LIS

Mom!

SARA

What?!

(calms. They glance at each other. They laugh.

Lis moves her hand to the radio. Sara slaps it away.)

You weren't that good. No.

(drive)

LIS

So I heard about this thing and it's like a real thing. There's this company that when people die they can get cremated and this place will take the...the cremated stuff and send them out into space, you know, into a satellite. I guess sending actual bodies into space takes up too much weight or space in space actually - And there you'll be, wafting through the stars forever and chances are the mechanics of the whole thing will be pretty shoddy so the rocket ship will crash land somewhere -

And maybe it'll be Mars and you'll finally get where you want to go -

They have a "buy now at today's prices" deal thing going through the end of the year so I thought, maybe, for your birthday?

SARA

Wow.

LIS

Right.

SARA

Any excuse not to visit?

LIS

Mom. That's not it.

SARA

It's sweet baby. It's really sweet.

.....

.....

Don't think I didn't get what you said.

LIS

I get it, I'm sweet.

SARA

No. The other day.

I ordered this program that got amazing reviews. I got some referrals. Specialists. Set up the first appointment I could get.

LIS

....

SARA

We'll figure it out Lis. Get you on track.

LIS

.....

SARA

OK?

LIS

...OK.

(Lis moves her hand to the radio.)

SARA

And yet still no.

Nice try.

(They drive on)

SIX MINUTES

(The Mars Yard at JPL. An interview.)

SARA

Entry, descent and landing. EDL. First Spirit – and then three weeks later, Opportunity. From the moment a rover finishes its seven month journey through space and hits the atmosphere of Mars, there are six minutes, six minutes that comprise Entry, Descent and Landing. Six minutes of terror. It's where we say, OK, Spirit, we've sent you out to this new world because you're ready to run the gauntlet. We try to sound convinced but really, we're shitting our pants because – well you're moving at 12,000 miles an hour when you hit the atmosphere. You're supposed to send us a tone. Send us a tone. From the moment you send it it takes 10 minutes for us to get it so sendit sendit sendit. Tone. Your heat shield is turning as hot as the sun. Send us another tone. Damn it - Where's the tone, where's the tone? OK. OK. Heat and deceleration pulses are slowing you down to Mach 2. Tone. Your parachute is opening. Can't hear you. Can't hear you. I can't hear you! OK...Tone. Now you're at 1000 miles an hour. 500. 250. Tone. Tone. Tone. Heat shield gone. Lander launched. Tone. Don't forget to fire your retro-rockets. Tone. Inflate your airbags. Are you there? Are you there? Oh my god. You're there. Slam the ground and bounce. Be careful – be careful of the rocks – they're sharp, don't -. Please please please please please. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Slam. Roll. Rest.

Waiting. Waiting waiting waiting. Tell us you're OK!

Tone.

ENTRY, DESCENT and LANDING (not necessarily in that order)

(JPL – side office - and home.

LIS, lying on the couch at home, with blue light of the television flickering over her face.)

SARA enters - we hear an ecstatic celebration going on nearby.

(The Earth and Mars calendar clocks start to keep their own time)

EARTH TIME (PST): SATURDAY JANUARY 3, 2004 (Day 1), 11:52pm
MARS TIME: SOL 1 2:46 PM (17:46:26)

Sara – overcome, overwhelmed, trying to take a private moment in the middle of all the madness. She composes herself. She takes out her cell phone. Dials. With every ring she gets more anxious to speak to Lis. Lis picks up.

SARA

Did you see it?

LIS

...huh?

SARA

We touched down. It's miraculous. Well, not miraculous because that supposes divine intervention but miraculous in kind of a human way of miracles which means that no one majorly screwed up, nobody minorly screwed up. They threw the first pictures up on the screen and - It finally came true, Lis. It finally came true.

...A heartbeat on a place we've never walked...

LIS

...Mom?

SARA

Were you sleeping?

LIS

Not intentionally.

SARA

Lis!

LIS

I didn't mean to. The TV is on. I'm in front of it.

SARA

Use the TiVo. Replay the TiVo - it's not exactly the same thing but...

LIS

....

SARA

.....

LIS

....

SARA

I left you a note to set the TiVo.

LIS

I didn't want to sit through all that NASA-TV lead-in blah blah so I was going to switch the channels for the important stuff - I was watching so why -

SARA

Because something might happen.

LIS

What could happen -

Oh...

I'll replay the news. A lot. You can burn me a DVD. Or I'll watch in three weeks when Opportunity lands – how different can it be?

I'm not freaked out you missed my meet today -

SARA

Lis, you race every weekend. This is something I've worked for for years -

LIS

Gee, Mom, that totally slipped my attention.

SARA

(snapping)

Don't be a (bitch) - brat.

LIS

I said I was sorry.

SARA

No. You didn't.

LIS

Are you - you're not crying?

SARA

....

LIS

Happy tears?

SARA

I'm, I'm - I wanted you to share the moment with me.

LIS

I will - later.

SARA

With me - my moment. In the moment.

LIS

The thing landed like ten minutes before you could even find out about it – so when the hell exactly was your moment?

SARA

.....

LIS

....

SARA

....

LIS

....

SARA

Did you win?

LIS

New school record.

SARA

That's my girl.

....

There's food in the fridge.

I ate.

LIS

I'll be home later.
Smell the meat first.

SARA

Smell the meat?

LIS

Before you eat it. I bought it. I don't know when I bought it so -

LIS

I ate it.
(*beat*)

SARA

Maybe it was Monday. I don't know.

LIS

Does your lack of competency when it comes down to the mundane ever embarrass you?

SARA

Not til this very moment.
....

Small grin?

LIS

On the inside.

SARA

Don't wait up.
Sol 1.
Officially.
Finally.

LIS

I won't.

(CHRIS comes into Sara's room, carrying two glasses and bottle of seltzer.)

CHRIS

Un-fucking believable. EDL complete, next step egress, then we drive. No more sandbox. The real thing. The real thing.

SARA

Won't what?

LIS

Wait. Up.

CHRIS

Nothing else ever like this –

SARA

(into phone)

Sleep tight bug.

LIS

Mom?

(SARA is gone. LIS turns back to the TV. Scanning channels, we see the lights shift over her face. Sara turns to Chris.)

CHRIS

Oh my god.

SARA

I know.

CHRIS

Oh my god.

SARA

I know.

I know. I know. Nothing at all.

Fizzy water?

CHRIS

Government sanctioned bubbly. We are golden.

SARA

Not until we make Minimum Success Criteria. Ninety sols. One kilometer on Mars – then we're golden.

(He holds up his arm – he has three watches on. She holds up her arm. Three watches.)

CHRIS

Mars time – I am officially living on Mars time.

(She puts away the phone.)

Virtual celebration with a loved one ?

SARA

Not quite the next best thing to being there.

CHRIS

Ahh the advantage to my own warped inability to maintain a relationship – nobody to be pissed off I'd rather be here than with them.

SARA

Well revel in this golden period of time when no one expects you to commit because it doesn't last.

....

(She makes to go.)

CHRIS

I feel like -

SARA

I know. I know -

(He holds his glass of bubbly water to Sara's lips, unexpectedly. She has to sip.)

CHRIS

To Spirit –

(He puts the glass to his own lips.)

SARA

To Spirit.

(a moment between them)

(Lis finds what she's looking for on the TV. The first photos from Spirit flood over her body, the couch, the room. Her face.)

CHRIS

And here?

(He touches the place over Sara's heart she said her breath was caught.)

SARA

Everyone always said you won't be able to breathe on Mars, but I always knew I could.

(He kisses her. She kisses back, then pulls away. She backs away.)

*The IM sound comes from Lis's computer. And again. And again.
The computer speaks to Lis in a sexy man's voice we'll call EDGAR2330.*

EDGAR2330

Hello...

You there....

(Chris raises the glass to Sara.)

CHRIS

To driving Miss Sara.

(Sara goes. Edgar2330 slowly draws Lis in.)

EDGAR2330

Are you there?
Because I'm here.
I'm right where you want me to be.

LIS

How do you know that?

EDGAR2330

Well...aren't I?

I liked "meeting" you last week.

LIS

You're one of those, aren't you?

EDGAR2330

One of who?

LIS

One of those guys I'm supposed to block. One of those men prowling the air waves, seeking - leching - leaching - searching for someone more -

EDGAR2330

More what?

LIS

More blank slate.

EDGAR2330

No, I'm just Edgar2330. Edgar.

LIS

Lis -

EDGAR2330

You don't have to -

LIS

I don't have to what?

EDGAR2330

Respond.

LIS

I know -

EDGAR2330

But you always do –

LIS

...

EDGAR2330

....

LIS

Now what?

EDGAR2330

Tell me –

LIS

Tell you what?

EDGAR2330

Tell me about you –

(Lis hesitates before starting to type.)

DEPLOYMENT

Hallway outside learning specialist's office

EARTH TIME: JAN 8, 2004, (Day 6) 3:46pm

MARS TIME: SOL 5, 6:33 am

(LIS sitting on the floor against the wall. Sara rushes on, almost past her.)

LIS

You missed it.

Ain't payback a bitch?

SARA

I'm not that passive aggressive. I got confused.

LIS

Thursday at 3pm, that's so hard.

SARA

I lost track of time and my cell phone, I left it somewhere

LIS

-is at work, I know. Some Mars geek finally picked up because they were tired of it ringing. Incessantly. He thought it might be important. Chris. You've got on three goddamn watches – one of them has to be California time.

SARA

I read the wrong arm.

LIS

It's only just beginning, Ma. Not even 6 days.

SARA

It's like relentless jet lag already - adding 39 minutes and 35 seconds on to each of our days - trying to capitalize on every second of Spirit's daylight hours. It's the downside of solar power, we're all working her nights so she can work her next day. I'm trying to function like I'm there when I'm here – You know what they say about us being on the Mars schedule? That it's closest to how teenagers sleep so I guess you and your friends are really some sort of aliens after all.

LIS

Hah.

SARA

Look - I feel blessed you're old enough to get out of bed and get to school and make your own breakfast. That you're not some toddler anymore - I really appreciate where you are right now.

LIS

Oh my god.

SARA

An extra 39 minutes and 35 seconds per day. You don't think there's going to be a cumulative effect. But there is. Already. Obviously.

LIS

You made the appointment.

SARA

And I screwed up – OK? I mis-read my watch. Watches. As if you've never done the same thing!

LIS

....

SARA

....

(Lis slowly waves a sheaf of papers at her)

She gave them to you?

LIS

They're my results.

SARA

I know I just thought – that an adult, a parent would have to be there to –
(Lis shrugs, loving this.)

So –

What did Dr. West say?

LIS

...

SARA

Fine – I'll find out myself –
(goes to knock on the door.)

LIS

She's in with the next client now.

(Sara stops – hand poised.)

You are rescheduled, for tomorrow afternoon - the 9th - at 4:30. Earth Time. Pacific Standard Time. My time. Where I live.

And what time will that be on Mars?

SARA

Lis - just let me see.

(Lis plays keep away from Sara with the results... Lis gleeful, Sara exasperated. Lis is more athletic, Sara jumping.)

SARA

There was a time, you know, when you liked me. You may even like me again.

LIS

I may -

SARA

I know I'm supposed to be the mature one but I find it extremely difficult to like you right now.

LIS

I am smart.

SARA

I know that. You think I don't fucking know that?

LIS

You don't act like it. On my case about working harder, all over my ass about applying myself -

SARA

If you had been stupid I would have left you alone!

LIS

....

SARA

....

LIS

Well, you can't blame it on me anymore.

SARA

What?

LIS

I'm hardwired this way. A Visual Processing Disorder. That you should be able to understand. A receptive problem. It's computer-like and vaguely scientific. Maybe now we can bond.

SARA

....

LIS

You can obsess about what you ate when I was inside you or what you smoked or what you drank or what you thought or what you fed me or how long you let me watch TV. You just can't blame me.

SARA

You think I blame -?

LIS

Why didn't you –

How come you didn't –

Why did you just assume it was a lack of something in me, in who I am, rather than –

Dr. West says my scores are off the fucking charts. I am off the fucking charts. Just very few people know this particular frigging chart.

(She throws the sheaf of papers at Sara. And goes. Sara looks at the results lying on the ground.)

SARA

I knew that.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH EARTH

(LIS's Bedroom)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 11th (Day 9), 7:32 pm

MARS TIME: Sol 9, 8:25 am (08:25:09)

(LIS sits at her computer, trying out a new program.

VICTORIA doing some sort of ablution on Lis's bed.)

VICTORIA

Try Fred.

(Lis types, making a Voice - computer Fred - come from the computer.)

COMPUTER FRED

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

LIS

Zone. Imagine Fred reading me a chapter of history. *(Imitating Fred's Voice)*
“The term Manifest Destiny was first used in 1845 by John O’Sullivan to encourage Westward expansion of the - Zzzzz....”

VICTORIA

I still think you’re refusing to see the advantages of your...disadvantage.
That program rocks. Hands free. Eyes free. Doesn’t suck. Bubbles.

LIS

I don’t like Bubbles.

VICTORIA

Bubbles. Bubbles. Bubbles!
(Lis types – a computer voice, Bubbles, speaks)

COMPUTER BUBBLES

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

VICTORIA

Kind of peaceful.

LIS

If drowning is peaceful.

VICTORIA

This is so fucking cool – I can’t get anyone to buy me anything.

LIS

It’s to help me with my homework. It’s a consolation prize.
(She types, Echo’s voice comes from the computer)

COMPUTER ECHO

The quack brown fuck jumps over the lazy god god god.

VICTORIA

It's cool.

LIS

It's not cool, it's technology.

VICTORIA

Hey I would be stoked to have someone read all this U.S. History shit to me.

LIS

Someone. Some one. Not Irma.

(She types – Irma's voice comes from the computer.)

COMPUTER IRMA

The quack brown boring fuck humps the lazy god.

LIS

Not Troy.

(Troy's voice comes from the computer)

COMPUTER TROY

The quick boring fuckhead humps god.

LIS

There's no interest. There's no feeling.

(She looks at Victoria longingly.)

VICTORIA

There's no way I am reading the hist book. Out loud or otherwise.

LIS

Friend?

VICTORIA

Yeah, right. Think - you'll never get those squinty lines at your eyes from reading too much. You don't need your hands. You don't have to stay in

VICTORIA(*CONT*)

one place. You can do anything. You can move and absorb. You can sleep and let it all come in through halitosis.

LIS

Osmosis. God! It's just so pathetic.

VICTORIA

It just is what it is. I can't eat kiwi. Everybody has their thing. It's better than faking.

LIS

I didn't fake.

VICTORIA

....

LIS

To fake you have to know and I just thought....I just thought -

VICTORIA

You just thought if people knew that learning was all screwed up for you they'd think you were stupid. Like it matters what they think anyway. Like anyone could ever think you weren't smart.

COMPUTER/DIFFERENT VOICES

The lazy god The lazy god The lazy god The lazy god.
(Sara bursts into the room – somewhat discombobulated.)

SARA

Lis - what the -?

LIS

Knocking - hello?

SARA

It sounded like a - Victoria -

VICTORIA

Hi.

LIS

Just don't look under the bed. You might find...nothing.

SARA

/We have a rule/

LIS

You /have a rule./

SARA

- no boys in your room without me knowing.

LIS

My very own Hays code.

SARA

I don't know where I heard what I heard but it sounded like -
How do you know about - ?

LIS

Turner classics.

SARA

I was sleeping.

VICTORIA

Lazy Sunday.

SARA

(to Victoria)

Even when I have time to sleep I can't sleep - I'm kind of - my circadian rhythms are a mess. Spirit is solar powered so we uplink driving instructions to her when we wake her up in the Mars morning, we downlink what she's done all day before she goes to sleep at night. And there's the way her day shifts around our clock - so we're up during her night -
It's hard for me to know. Where I am. When I am?

LIS

She gets it - even when you're here you're not here.

VICTORIA

Lis! *(to Sara)* And my mom complains coordinating the track snack schedule is hard.

SARA

Yeah, umm, thank her for stepping in for me will you? Technically I should be excused because I'm in a different time zone, but still -
(Holds out her arm with the three watches to Victoria.)

VICTORIA

Cool.

SARA

West Coast, Universal Time, Mars Time – and when Opportunity lands she'll be on the other side of the planet so maybe I'll get another. No real weekends right now and with staying to work late yestersol I -

LIS

Yestersol?

SARA

It's a word. Now.

LIS

We're doing homework.
(Sara looks from one to the other.)

SARA

Victoria.

VICTORIA

Oh no, wouldn't want to spoil my record.

LIS

I'm listening to a bedtime story. The quick boring fuckhead humped god. Best seller, got to read it.
(she points to the computer)
Party on.

SARA

Oh. And...and the program, it's working? It's top of the line – and I researched.

LIS

Dr. West said a real person reading is the best way. Better than a computer program. A real person –(*quoting*) familiar with the text, from whom you can pick up other cues, audio, affect, body language.

(*Sara looks at Victoria.*)

VICTORIA

Don't go here.

SARA

Lis, Dr. West did say these programs, this technology is right on the cutting edge. A good alternative.

It should work...it should help...

LIS

You should help –

SARA

(*snapping*)

I did. I researched. I bought. That's helping.

LIS

Technically. Yes.

SARA

Let me get through this time, Lis. Primary mission goes to April 5th.

VICTORIA

All that work for just three months?

SARA

I know - Spirit's solar powered, Mars is a dusty place – we've only got about ninety sols – before her panels get covered and she stops working.

Ninety sols, Lis, give or take. April 5th. Let me have this time.

LIS

Before April 5th it was let me get through the seven months til landing.
Before that it was the launch is coming at me way too fast Lis, I'm all yours
once Spirit and Opportunity are on their way. Before that –

SARA

I'm not a horrible human being for having something in my life that's
important to me other than you.

LIS

....

SARA

Not as important to me as you but – pressing. Urgent. It doesn't make me
terrible –
Or maybe it does. Fuck it, I'm never winning this one.

LIS

Why can't you just sell real estate like everyone else I go to school with's
moms?

SARA

Stop making me feel bad about who I am.

LIS

Stop making me!

SARA

....

VICTORIA

(trying to break the tension)

Romantically it's not so hot. The blah blah blah jumped over the blah blah
blah.

SARA/LIS

What?

VICTORIA

Computer voice –not such a turn-on.

SARA

Ninety sols. April 5th. OK?

LIS

- OK –

SARA

Give or take. Want me to bake you guys some cookies or something? I think I have one of those dough things in the freezer.

LIS

You really shouldn't miss any more sleep than you already have.

SARA

No it's ok. I mean, I'm up.

LIS

Hint.

SARA

What? Oh. I swear to God there was a point in time when I was a cool mom. I swear to God.

(Sara goes. Victoria and Lis look at each other and erupt in giggles, hand over mouth.)

LIS

You can come out now...Kevin!

(Sara barges back in.)

Forget something?

(Sara goes.)

VICTORIA

Jesus.

LIS

Fucking.

VICTORIA

Christ.

GROUND CONTROL

(Late at night. SARA sitting at JPL, images taken by the Rover on the screen in front of her. CHRIS enters, mainlining junk food.

At home, LIS sleeps in her bed.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 15 (Day 13), 1:12 AM,

MARS TIME: SOL 12, 12 pm

CHRIS

Egress. I still can't believe it.

SARA

I know! Spirit looked like she'd rolled off the lander a thousand times before.

CHRIS

Practice makes perfect.

SARA

Six wheels on Mars.

CHRIS

Three meters on Mars. History. We're part of history.

(In Lis's room the IM sound comes from her computer. She sits up. Another IM sound.)

The tracking is exactly what we want. Just came from the downlink assessment meeting – telemetry's coming through – we should have it for you in a few minutes. It's a thing of beauty.

SARA

I know I have to wait to get moving - but trying to pin down where to go with such limited time – I have a SOWG (*pronounced saag*) meeting in a few minutes, everybody has their agenda - and -

(She looks at him for the first time.)

What the hell are you eating?

CHRIS

Coffee followed by a red bull chaser, with a side shot of dark chocolate. Whatever gets me through the sol...

SARA

No jet lag, huh?

(He grins at her. Holds some out to her. She declines.)

All that caffeine seems wrong - rumor has it there's stars hovering over the freeway out there -

(Edgar2330's voice pours out of Lis's computer.)

EDGAR2330

I am the world's greatest -

LIS

The world's greatest what?

EDGAR2330

Whatever you want me to be.

SARA

-crickets, night blooming jasmine, prime time television.

CHRIS

Nope, you get rocks and duricrust - you're on Mars time baby - high noon for you -

SARA

High noon. That's apt.

EDGAR2330

Hi again.

LIS

Hi.

EDGAR2330

What did you do today?

LIS

I won.

EDGAR2330

I knew it.

LIS

You did not.

EDGAR2330

Triumphant tone to your typing.

SARA

High noon. Show down – we're in the middle of a duel and my prospects don't look good. My daughter.

CHRIS

Do I get to meet this stalwart adversary?

SARA

Oh –

CHRIS

When two worlds collide?

EDGAR2330

Every time you took a hurdle did you soar just a little higher? Every second did you accelerate? Did you set yourself free?

CHRIS

Ah...two worlds aren't colliding any time in the near future?

LIS

You don't ask me the obvious like everyone else.

SARA

It's not personal – well, at least not for you.

EDGAR2330

The obvious.

LIS

The “what are you wearing right now?” The “where are you sitting right now? Are you in bed? Are you undressed? What color panties are wearing?” You don’t want to know that.

EDGAR2330

No. I wouldn’t mind knowing what you’re thinking. I wouldn’t mind knowing you.

SARA

Is it wrong to wish I could send her to boarding school in another solar system?

CHRIS

No it’s incredibly cool.

SARA

Not to her.

EDGAR2330

I could tell you a mean bedtime story.

LIS

I could tell you a mean bedtime story.

EDGAR2330

Sweet.

CHRIS

Oh. Geek mom blessed with non-geek kid. It all skips a generation. Your parents didn’t get you either, did they?

SARA

Never.

CHRIS

Maybe you’ll introduce her to me and she’ll develop some age-inappropriate mega crush – wouldn’t that be awkward?

SARA

Yeah because if she's so into hearing about my day of doing spectral analysis, she'll be dying to hear about yours.

EDGAR2330

Once upon a time?

CHRIS

Sequencing and visualization. Autonomous navigation codes.

SARA

You'll have her at do a super-res MiniTES and PANCAM on that rock.

CHRIS

HAZCAM the rover tracks.

LIS

Once upon a time -

SARA

(giddy tired laughter)

Oh yes...yes.

CHRIS

Alter the mobility sequence.

SARA

Absolutely -

CHRIS

Deploy the IDD. Stow the IDD. RAT the rock.
(A moment. Sara recovers a bit...)

SARA

When you were her age I was yours. Kind of. Not really.

EDGAR2330

Tell me.

LIS

Once there was - I wouldn't call her a princess, I would call her a -

EDGAR2330

Brat -

SARA

I don't know. I don't know how to do the right thing for her right now -

CHRIS

It's all good.

SARA

....

CHRIS

It is.

LIS

No - a girl dressed up like a princess. Not exactly a costume but like a facade because princesses, they have a veneer of perfection and this one, you could see the cracks like right off, cracks isn't right, but you know what I mean. You can dress up like someone but that doesn't mean that's what you are...

SARA

OK - I'd better prepare for battle.

(She starts gathering her stuff, then stops.)

We're all talking about keeping our expectations low. After god knows how many years and how many billions of dollars we're calling six hundred meters Minimum Success Criteria. We're playing it so safe. And I know that's the game, but now, now that we're actually there -.

LIS

I have photos of me in this fairy princess dress but I don't think it really fit me. But at the time, I thought - I don't know. I was that. And then I see the pictures and I don't know what to make of them any more....

CHRIS

What?

SARA

I just want to say fuck the MSC. Let's not play it safe. We got where we wanted to go, we defied expectations, let's push full out and go as hard as we can. Fuck playing it safe. Don't tell anyone I said that.

EDGAR2330

I'll tell you.

LIS

-who I am?

EDGAR2330

I'll tell you.

LIS

You'll, tell me --

SARA

(she gestures to the images before them).

They're talking about naming them the Columbia Hills. And that's where I want to go. It's a pipe dream. They're at least three kilometers away, Spirit won't make it but...but what if she could?

EDGAR2330

I want to see you like that. Scan me one.

CHRIS

So...let's go.

SARA

Not in the game plan.

CHRIS

So – it'll be our game plan.

EDGAR2330

Scan me one.

CHRIS

Tell me where you want to go.

LIS

Really.

EDGAR2330

Really.

LIS

I was like six.

EDGAR2330

And brave.

LIS

And fucking fearless.

EDGAR2330

Scan me one.

GROUND CONTROLLED

(Home. SARA at the table eating pizza.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 16th (DAY 14) 6 am

MARS TIME: SOL 13, 4:02 pm (16:02:15)

(LIS stumbles in in pajamas, sleepy.)

LIS

The doorbell.

SARA

Delivery. Sorry.

LIS

You ordered in? It's 6 A.M.

SARA

Want some?

LIS

Uch, no.

SARA

You used to beg me for pizza for breakfast.

LIS

Cold pizza.

(looks at Sara eating.)

Ugh.

(Sara pulls out a slice, throws it in the freezer compartment, sets the oven timer).

SARA

Breakfast of champions.

LIS

I was sleeping in.

SARA

On a school day.

LIS

It's Saturday.

SARA

It's not Saturday. I'm not that screwed up.

LIS

Somewhere, some planet, it's Saturday.

SARA

Cute. On this planet, it's parent-student-teacher conference day.

I finally managed to hot-sync my blackberry to both time zones.

(Lis pulls out a box of cereal and starts eating it from the box, Sara puts a bowl in front of her but Lis ignores it.)

What do you think your teacher will say?

LIS

Dunno.

SARA

You do feel there's been progress, right? You're doing the exercises. You're using the eye patch.

LIS

Aargh. It's been like a week.

SARA

Dr. West said even after three sessions there'd be an indication of progress.

LIS

Define progress.

SARA

I want to get you set straight. Get you caught up.

LIS

But what if I can't?

SARA

It's my job to tell you that you can.

LIS

It's your job – so you don't necessarily believe that I can.

SARA

I thought we could have lunch/midnight snack at Tambour afterwards. And shopping maybe.

LIS

You mean shopping if you deem my progress acceptable.

SARA

....

LIS

....

So - I read this book –

SARA

A book?

LIS

About /learning –

SARA

/A book?/

LIS

And/ there's this website that –

SARA

Why do you have to read a book about me?

LIS

Lis!

SARA

I'm from you. You never fucking let me forget that so why do you?

LIS

I'm from fill in the blank, fill in the oval, regurgitate the standard answer with introductory sentences and three paragraphs and closing statements. I'm from Wrigley's gum and diet coke with French fries with gravy. I'm from SpongeBob and powerpuff girls and from vibrating cell phones meaning somebody wants something from me.

I'm from a father who wants nothing from me and don't get started in on that's the roots of my problem because that's just fine I don't want anything from him anymore either.

I'm stopwatches regimenting my thundering feet but you don't know that I can fly just as good as your other kids can –

SARA

Lis –

LIS

Don't deny it – you might as well have given birth to them. Spirit's your other daughter – Opportunity is the son you'll never have.

SARA

OK – so I read books about you. An aspect of you that I don't know. What would I know about processing disorders if I didn't - It's unfamiliar I research. I'm trying to catch up to you. So I'm reading books, I'm going on-line and I'm talking to specialists –

LIS

But you're not talking to me!

SARA

Would you even listen?

I know I didn't get it before now – maybe I don't even get it now, maybe I can never get it, god forbid I can never get you and the idea of that, that kills me, it kills me - but fuck it, I'm trying.

LIS

Try harder!

(They stare at each other.)

Shit.

SARA

What?

LIS

Now I know how it feels. To think you could do better when deep down inside I know you can't.

SARA

Dangerous territory.

LIS

I don't want to go today, Mom. I don't want to be measured up and compared to and encouraged. I just want to be. Not forever. For a while.

SARA

OK.

LIS

OK?

SARA

Yeah. OK.

LIS

We could go shopping right now – well, when stores actually open -

SARA

I've still got to go baby. Every once in a while I have to do something that's vaguely parental.

(The oven timer rings. Sara pulls the piece of pizza out of the freezer).

Breakfast is served.

SURFACE OPERATIONS

EARTH TIME: SUNDAY, JANUARY 18th (DAY 16) 2:33 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 15 11:04 pm.

(Lis's bedroom. VICTORIA dances to her iPod.)

LIS

Where did you get that?

(Victoria dances)

- where did you get that?

VICTORIA

You talking -

LIS

Where did you -

VICTORIA

Sold my panties on the net.

LIS

God.

VICTORIA

True entrepreneur-ship on my part. This way I don't have to worry about an athletic scholarship.

LIS

You are cracked.

VICTORIA

Oh, come on. Do a little happy dance with me.

LIS

Your mom will kill you.

VICTORIA

No. Your mom would kill you.

LIS

She knows?

VICTORIA

She's looking into incorporating.

LIS

Victoria.

VICTORIA

She doesn't know. But strangely, if she found out, I think I'd only be in trouble for like, a heartbeat before she realized it is an idea. It's a great idea. It is a feminist idea.

LIS

Just because it's sexual doesn't mean it's a feminist idea.

VICTORIA

(stung)

....

You're just like her, you know.

LIS

Who?

VICTORIA

Your mom. Wound tight.

LIS

I am not.

VICTORIA

Whose legs remain crossed. When everybody else's-

LIS

- Not everybody else's-

VICTORIA

Not that you have to - but whether you let yourself want to -

LIS

....

I may be, you know.

VICTORIA

May be what?

LIS

Unwinding. I may be being un-wound.

VICTORIA

....

LIS

....

VICTORIA

I don't believe you.

LIS

So, don't believe me.

VICTORIA

Who?

LIS

What?

VICTORIA

Who?

LIS

Just...someone.

VICTORIA

Kevin?

LIS

No one you know.

VICTORIA

Really. Huh. Bravo.

(Victoria puts her headset on Lis and makes her dance ---- close.)

...THE WAITING

(Lis's bedroom. Lis asleep with her books all over her bed. Sara enters, starts going through her drawers as quietly as possible. Lis bolts upright.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 21st, (Day 19) 5am

MARS TIME : SOL 18 11:51 AM *

LIS

...go West...

SARA

Damnit - I didn't want to wake you -

LIS

(sleepy)

I was listening to Bubbles read me – manifest destiny. And then I was on a wagon train that kept going and going with no end in sight.

What are you doing?

SARA

My Police T-shirt. From the Synchronicity tour. I need it back.

LIS

Now?

SARA

It's my lucky shirt – and I need it -

LIS

You said I could keep it –

SARA

I'll give it back. When we find her.

LIS

What?

SARA

She's missing. Spirit's not answering.

They lost the direct-to-Earth telemetry – she just shut off in the middle of a communication pass. Just stopped. Maybe it's the storms in Australia. I don't know. Mars Odyssey listened for a signal from her too and nothing. They need me to consult on the next uplink. See if we can get through to her somehow.

(Lis sits up.)

LIS

You're going?

Now?

SARA

You're wearing it.

LIS

What?

SARA

My shirt. My lucky shirt.

(She whips off the shirt she's wearing, throws it to Lis. Lis takes off the T-shirt, throws it to Sara, puts on the one Sara was wearing, all under the covers. Sara sniffs the T-shirt.)

No one will care.

(she puts it on).

LIS

Don't go.

SARA

If you want to come with me you can. I've got that cot in my office.

LIS

You keep talking about the water. Follow the water. Turn on the fucking tap, flush the toilet. There it is. Now you can stay here.

SARA

I'll call Mrs. G and have her come over.

LIS

I'm not six.
Besides I have a test.

SARA

Skip it.

LIS

Skip the test.
Really?
No.

SARA

It's one history test, Lis. And I'm trying to make history. High school American history classes never get past World War Two anyway –

....

....

If this isn't just some little software glitch I will lose everything I've worked for for years. What we've sacrificed for and I know you have – is that what you want?

LIS

No. Sometimes. Yes.

SARA

....

....

I'll be back as soon I can.

LIS

Mom -

SARA

Go back to sleep. I'll be back as soon as I can. Good luck on your test.

(She goes. Lis gets out of bed. She paces. Pent up. She hears her mother's car start. Goes to the window - and raps on it to get her mother's attention)

LIS

Mom!

(Lis accidentally shatters the pane, hurting her hand. There's blood. Lis looks at her hand. She goes to the computer. Sits down. Contacts Edgar.)

(The voice of Edgar2330 comes from the computer.)

EDGAR2330

So there you are.

Be careful of what you do.

Don't play with me.

Don't punish me.

You're punishing me.

You're punishing you.

It's not nice not to respond to my invitation, I mean, if you don't want to meet me fine but let me know. Don't keep a guy hanging. Don't.

You have more of a power over us than you could possibly be aware of. You leave me wanting. You're so good at it. You leave me wanting you.

Breathe the night air, Lis.

I think you're the one I've been waiting for. Do you know that feeling? That someone exists in the world to save you and they are close, imminent, and the moment they arrive, the moment you arrive, I will be....me. Walk through my door. Wash over me.

And I picture you, sweet, hovering, at the keyboard not sure which answer is right – knowing what you want but not knowing it's ok to want that. Not

EDGAR2330(*CONT*)

realizing that is the action of a girl turned woman, going after what you want – listening to the knots inside your soul. They twist when you don't do what you want to do. When you do what you should do - back flips.

I picture you – sweats and socks, fingers at the ready. You need only to type 5 little letters

I – W – I – L – L

Will you meet me? Will you meet me? Will you meet me?

*(Her hands hover over the keyboard. She types 5 letters.
Hits send.)*

- end act one -

part two:

SIGNALS FROM THE UNIVERSE

VENICE, CALIFORNIA

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 22 (Day 20), 7pm

MARS TIME: SOL 20, 12:50 am

A STREET MUSICIAN in his early twenties with a guitar, open case, playing, leaning against a building.

Lis arrives on the corner. Nervous. Standing. Waiting. Looking around. Should she stay? Should she go?

The musician finishes the song. She throws a little money in his case.

He smiles at her – starts another song –

(to hear this song go to <http://www.jennifermaisel.com/jennifermaisel/outoforbit.html>)

STREET MUSICIAN

(singing)

She

She

Walks like

she's waiting to run

away

She can't wait another day

To be gone

Day to be gone

Where are you running baby

What do you think you'll find there?

Who will you know?

And how will they know you?

Will they know you?

I ain't done yet with you girl

I haven't scratched the surface

I haven't scratched your surface

And you haven't scratched mine...

You haven't scratched mine

She

She

STREET MUSICIAN(*CONT*)

Walks like she's waiting
to run away
She can't wait another day
To be gone
Day to be gone

I
I
Wait like the doorbell
Will ring for me
I can't know who it is I'm
Going to see
Going to see...

(He finishes. He waits. She looks at him. He looks at her.)

LIS

It's you.

RADIO SILENCE

(JPL. SARA sits alone in her office.)

During the following the clocks move – from

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 21, (DAY 19) 1:27 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 18, 7:44 pm

to

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 21, (Day 19) 11:35 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 19 4:57 am

(SARA sends a message.)

SARA

Just checking in to see how the test went. Call me when you get home from school.

Lis - Still no word from Spirit. We send out signals – and we get back nothing. Going to be a long sol. We keep reaching out - How was your test?

Lis? Did you get my message? We're still trying to figure this out Spirit was about to RAT a rock called Adirondack – and every time I hear that name I flash back to that summer with Grandpa and that house with the

SARA(*CONT*)

hammock you would nap in. Can you still remember that or is it one of those memories you remember because I've told it to you so many times?

Are you at practice? Was there a meet? I won't be home for dinner but there's money under the delivery menus.

Lis, it's Mom, call me back.

Baby – I don't know where you are. I've been leaving messages for you all day....Is this because of the test? Did something happen with your test?

Lis – there was a robo-call from your school about your unexcused absence on the machine at home. What's going on?

Lis? Lis, please, call me back, let me know you're OK. If I don't hear back from you I'm calling your friends.

I'm looking for Lis, have you seen her? Is Victoria there? Has she seen her?

Hi – it's Sara, Lis's mom? Ummm...can you tell me if my daughter's there?

I'm calling your friends and I'm sounding like that mother no mother ever wants to sound like and I may sound furious and I may be furious but I'm more worried than anything and – where are you?

Lis – this is bullshit. If you're pissed at me at least let me know you're alive and then you can be as pissed as you want.

She's your daughter too, it's entirely possible she could be there. I don't know.

How long has she been gone, ma'am? I – I - I have no idea –

Lis - This is not OK. No matter how much you don't want to talk to me, I need you to answer me! So I don't worry. So I don't - because I can't help but think, you're -

(CHRIS enters)

CHRIS
SOWG meeting in five.

SARA
....

CHRIS
Sara?

(She turns to him, lost.)

INTERPRETING TELEMETRY

(A diner)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23rd (Day 21) 3 am.

MARS TIME: SOL 19, 8:37 am

LIS
This is what she said to me. There was never a time when your father struck me as sincere.

EDGAR2330
She didn't.

LIS
What am I supposed to think of that?
He's my dad.

I know she doesn't like him anymore. I know she's lost all respect for him.

EDGAR2330
But –

LIS
But she said that. Never a time.
It...it....nullifies me.
I was not created in a sincere moment.

EDGAR2330

Maybe she said it in anger.

LIS

Oh she did.

EDGAR2330

So maybe it can't be counted –

LIS

But see – don't you see – anything you say, even if you're pissed, even if you say you didn't mean...it's there. It's in the air. And I can't help but think – if she laid there, she laid there with someone whose motives she never believed in and they screwed and that screwing made me how could she believe in me - because she doesn't.

EDGAR2330

Obviously.

LIS

She doesn't.

EDGAR2330

I know.
Your hand –
(it's bandaged.)

LIS

What?

EDGAR2330

What'd you do to it?

LIS

-oh - something...cracked open.

EDGAR2330

Like a glass?

LIS

Like my heart. It doesn't hurt now.

EDGAR2330

You didn't finish your fries.

LIS

I'm too – I'm too - disillusioned to eat.

EDGAR2330

(amused) Oh.

May I –

LIS

Sure -

(pushes them over)

EDGAR2330

You don't mind?

LIS

No.

EDGAR2330

Some people don't like sharing food.

LIS

They're fries

....

They're shared by definition.

(he eats)

Now what?

EDGAR2330

Now what what?

LIS

What happens now?

EDGAR2330

What do you want to happen?

LIS

We talked about getting something to eat.... I didn't think beyond that.

...

...

...

My parents met in a diner.

EDGAR2330

It's been a real pleasure meeting you.

LIS

...but now what?

EDGAR2330

Since you haven't thought past it -

LIS

We just go home?

EDGAR2330

Well isn't that - ?

LIS

What?

EDGAR2330

What you want -

LIS

I don't know.

EDGAR2330

I think you do.

(He pays the bill, picks up guitar case to go)

LIS

The song.

EDGAR2330

The song what?

LIS

Who were you singing it for?

EDGAR2330

Who did it sound like it was for?

LIS

Me.

(He smiles. He goes. A moment. She follows.)

COMMUNICATIONS ON EARTH

(Home. SARA believes the refrigerator can magically fill the void)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23rd (Day 21) 5am

MARS TIME: SOL 20 10:34 am

(SARA sits with fridge open, she rests her head against the cool interior, eating from a casserole dish with her hands)

SARA

Why is it people think a fucking casserole makes everything better?

(she lifts a note-card attached to the dish)

Preheat oven to 350, bake for 30 minutes covered. Good thing they wrote that down because I doubt I'd be able to figure out stick in oven until hot enough to eat myself. If room allows, stick head in adjacent to dish, no foil covering necessary.

Preheat oven, preheat oven, don't forget to turn the fucking oven on, Sara. We're concerned friends and neighbors and we want to fill your refrigerator so we can suss out your weakness and assure ourselves that the fault-line underlying your competent exterior is indeed that - your fault. Take this lasagna and in return I wrench the reassurance that this could never happen to us.

You must keep your strength up. IF you can eat. How can you eat?

EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE

(Venice Beach. Winter empty. Dirty. They're looking out over the sea.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23rd , (Day 21) 12:32pm

MARS TIME: SOL 20, 5:54 pm

EDGAR2330

You see?

LIS

Yeah.

EDGAR2330

Don't lie.

LIS

I'm - I'm not.

EDGAR2330

And don't say what you think I want to hear.

LIS

I'm not.

EDGAR2330

.....

.....

LIS

I'm not.

EDGAR2330

It doesn't have to speak to you the way it speaks to me.

There are places that make everything right with the world for everyone.

This doesn't have to be yours.

Believe it or not I saw a postcard.

LIS

A postcard?

EDGAR2330

I probably shouldn't tell anyone that. I don't, usually. It wasn't even a postcard for me. In the stack of mail at a friend's house, I was doing that thing where you kind of push through someone else's envelopes wondering if they're getting something more interesting than you ever do. And it was sitting there. Colors blown out bright. Venice Beach, California. Wish you were here. And I thought, why wish?

LIS

.....

EDGAR2330

Goodbye Great Plains. I got here - I stood right here - and I knew, I'll never leave.

LIS

I couldn't do that.

EDGAR2330

What?

LIS

Just go somewhere.

EDGAR2330

You're here, aren't you?
(she looks out over the ocean)

LIS

.....

.....

.....

EDGAR2330

What?

LIS

I want...

EDGAR2330

Stop wanting so hard.

LIS

How the hell do you do that?

EDGAR2330

Choose what's here. Choose what you do - Don't keep looking somewhere else.

(Suddenly, Lis stands – starts to stretch, warm up. She puts her fingers to the ground, in position, as if ready to race.)

What are you doing?

LIS

I'm at the starting block. I'm going to run. I'm going to hurdle the waves – step step step soar. Step step step soar. I'm going to fly -

EDGAR2330

Take your mark.

Get set.

(she does)

Go.

(she does)

COMMUNICATIONS ON EARTH

(Sara, still in her kitchen)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23nd (Day 21) 3pm

MARS TIME: SOL 20, 8:18 pm

(Victoria holding a large tray of lasagna)

VICTORIA

Sara?

SARA

Victoria, god –

VICTORIA

The door was open –

SARA

I thought – if Lis lost her keys or –

VICTORIA

I didn't think you'd be here –

SARA

Where would I be?

VICTORIA

...work?

SARA

You were hoping I wouldn't be here.

VICTORIA

My mom said you wanted me to come but if it's not a good time –

SARA

It's definitely not a good time, I can tell you that much.

VICTORIA

She sent this. Warm it in the oven at 375 for an hour or 450 for 45 minutes.

SARA

Which?

VICTORIA

One or the other? Or you could freeze it.

(Sara opens the freezer. It's packed.)

Oh.

SARA

They arrived magically as soon as the news put out the alert this morning.

How many people does your mother think are going to eat this?

What does she think I'm going to do? Have a party?

VICTORIA

A search party maybe.

She cooks kind of for the exercise. Seriously, it's how she stays thin – chopping like a maniac, cleaning up like she's doing aerobics, washing the dishes. Since my dad left...that and sex. She looks great.

SARA

(takes the lasagna from her)

Still warm.

Sit down.

VICTORIA

No, I have to -

SARA

Sit.

VICTORIA

I have homework -

SARA

You're expecting me to buy that being the reason?

VICTORIA

Don't you think I want her back too?

SARA

Do you?

VICTORIA

Do you?!

SARA

....

VICTORIA

....

SARA

God I'm an asshole. / I'm sorry./

VICTORIA
(overlapping)

/I'm – I didn't mean/It's OK.
(she sits)

SARA

Put your feet up the way you know I hate it.
(Victoria does it. Reluctantly)
See. There. Perfect. Comfortable. Get your feet off my furniture.
Kidding. I shouldn't be making jokes –

VICTORIA

....

SARA

....

VICTORIA

You can feel her gone.

SARA

....

VICTORIA

....

SARA

....

VICTORIA

....

SARA

I'm drowning in feeling her gone.

VICTORIA

Kids talked to me at school today who never did before – Weird, it's like
I'm popular in a way I'll never be again.

SARA

Did I ever tell you how happy I am about the kind of friends you and Lis are? It's going to sound like I'm blowing smoke up your ass but I'm not. She didn't have a sister – I didn't have a sister and I always thought when I was a kid that that would be wonderful – the close combination of DNA making someone mandatorily love you. I didn't have a lot of friends – but that was OK with me - my whole growing up I really never minded being alone.

But then I had Lis and she wasn't like me – so when you came into her life I was so grateful to see you two glom onto each other to brave junior high and the mall and high school. Better than DNA – soul mates. So you would be the one - I would never want to ask you to betray Lis's trust.

Please tell me she's called you –
And you know where she is and you've been hiding it because you thought you should and I won't be mad, I swear... I won't be mad.

I wouldn't ask but if there's something you know, if you've heard from her, if you've heard just a word or a missed call that – that trumps friendship, that trumps trust. That's everything.
Oh my god, what am I going to do ?

VICTORIA

(torn)

....

A text.

SARA

.....

VICTORIA

I got a text. It didn't make sense. I wanted it to – I dreamt last night that it did – that she said something more to me, talked to me. I told her to come home but I woke up.
It didn't really say anything at all.

SARA

A text.

VICTORIA

Kind of like a blip.
And another one – three words.
Going off grid.

SARA

Going off grid. What does that mean?
Where is it – where /is off grid?

VICTORIA

I don't know/.
I don't.
And I think her phone is off because –

SARA

It is.
The police can't track it.
....
....
I don't know how I didn't see it.

VICTORIA

She didn't want anyone to see it.

SARA

I'm not anyone.

VICTORIA

.....

SARA

.....

VICTORIA

.....

SARA

It's so fucking quiet here.
(Victoria pulls the foil off the lasagna.)

VICTORIA

The crusty cheesy stuff on top - it's really good.

(She holds it out to Sara - they pull crust off. Eat.)

BODIES IN ORBIT

(His apartment. Scant. A computer is the focus. A mattress. His music. They enter. Lis is dripping wet, exhilarated, chilled. She takes it in.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23nd (Day 21) 4:09 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 20, 9:25 pm

EDGAR2330

Not what you expected.

LIS

No. No – this is –

EDGAR2330

Let me find you a towel.

(disappears to the bathroom, returns, gives it to her.)

You can't insult me –

LIS

Oh....I think I probably can –

(she starts drying off but there's really no way to dry her clothes. He digs through a pile of laundry on a chair.)

EDGAR2330

Got wireless. I can do whatever I need to do from here. I can be anywhere I like in a heartbeat. I'm happy here. You had expectations.

(he throws her a shirt. She doesn't know what to do with it.)

LIS

....

EDGAR2330

I just don't have a lot of needs. But you do –

LIS

I –

EDGAR2330

Spoiled –

LIS

I'm not –

EDGAR2330

Just the littlest bit.

LIS

I'm not –

EDGAR2330

Around the edges.

(he throws her a pair of pants. She holds them.)

LIS

...the way you picture someone – a place -

EDGAR2330

Isn't ever the way they actually are. You want socks?

(She nods.)

LIS

What do you do?

EDGAR2330

Do?

LIS

Don't you have to do something?

(he throws her socks.)

EDGAR2330

I do lots of things. I get by. I like my life. I like my world. I've got everything I need.

LIS

....

EDGAR2330

Now.

LIS

....

EDGAR2330

I may like it even more with you in it.

LIS

.....

EDGAR2330

(he picks up his guitar) You play?

LIS

No.

EDGAR2330

I'll show you.

LIS

I don't think -

EDGAR2330

What?

LIS

That I'd be - any good -

EDGAR2330

Sit. I don't bite.

LIS

I don't want you to teach me.

I'm done with being taught.

(he puts down his guitar)

I want –

I want –

....

EDGAR2330

Say it.

LIS

I want you to wash over me.

...I want someone to take a wrench to my head, a soldering iron and forceps, an exacto blade. I want someone to put me in the repair bin and crack me open to uncross my wires. To fix the malfunction, to close me up with clean sutures and adhesive so nobody can see the seam.

EDGAR2330

That might be a bit beyond me.

LIS

....

EDGAR2330

....

LIS

....

I want you to make me a song. Make me a song.

(She kisses him.)

**SARA THINKS THE VOICE IN HER HEAD IS STILL THE VOICE
IN HER HEAD**

(MARS YARD

Sara sitting on the fake Mars landscape, running the sand through her fingers. She takes off her watches.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23rd (Day 21) 5:21pm

MARS TIME: SOL 20, 10:35 pm

(Chris is at the door watching her.)

CHRIS

Sara -

SARA

Mariner 3 lost lost lost. Mariner 8 failed to launch. Mars Observer losing contact...the Polar Lander...the Climate Orbiter. Beagle2... Spirit

The world wants to know what happened to Spirit.

I am the only one who wants to know what happened to Lis.

CHRIS

That's not true - There are people - people here concerned about you.

And her.

SARA

Do you remember when you had to wait by the phone?

CHRIS

Yes.

SARA

You're young.

CHRIS

Not that young.

SARA

(waving cell phone)

I no longer have to wait by the phone. The phone waits by me.

Do you pray?

CHRIS

No.

SARA

When Spirit landed and I was saying pleasepleasepleaseplease I don't know who I was asking. Because I'm asking again. Pleading. I've always thought there was something bigger than me – but I thought of it as history and the future. Not someone who could pull the strings. But now I don't know. Who pulls the strings? We're pulling the strings. And if we are – what's the command sequence?

CHRIS

What?

SARA

For waiting? Write the software. Transmit the uplink. Go on.

CHRIS

Sara –

SARA

Don't comfort me. Do something!
You know how you feel – all this work for a machine that's gone silent? Six minutes of terror doesn't hold a fucking candle – looking for something you can't find and you know can't be where you're looking but you can't stop looking? Decipher the seven doodles in the lower left hand corner in her notebook and that will unlock the answers. I've done what I can do there. And here...here...

CHRIS

We heard from Spirit.

SARA

What?

CHRIS

It made no sense. But we received a transmission.

SARA

What - what did it say?

CHRIS

It babbled. It thinks it's somewhere else. Sometime else. 2053.

SARA

Oh.

CHRIS

But it's something –

SARA

2053. I'll be ---- Lis will be....
God, will she be?

CHRIS

Spirit is sick. She keeps rebooting and rebooting. She can't hear us – process us. If she drains her battery then that's, that's it - that's all. She's dying. If there's any way - Sara - We need you - Spirit needs you -

SARA

What?

CHRIS

We need you – you won't wait. You'll do. Maybe – to keep your mind off Lis – keep your mind on –

SARA

My mind off? You think I want my mind off?

CHRIS

I don't know. I don't know what you want. I don't know how to give you what you need. I wish I did. All I know is Spirit is missing and Opportunity is landing. There was this vastness to explore and I was following you. Right on your heels. Follow the water. Follow me. That's what you said. That's what I did. I liked it better when you were the one telling me where to go. Planning out the day and saying Chris – figure it out – get me there. Because now, now I have no idea what you want me to do for you - at all.

(She kisses him. He responds.)

SARA'S DREAM

(A Mars Rover on the red planet.)

THE CLOCKS STOP

(The Rover speaks)

ROVER

Mom? Mom?

SARA

Where the fuck are you?

ROVER

Doing what you've always wanted me to do – exploring new terrain.

SARA

and –

ROVER

You were right - there is nothing that compares. It's fucking phenomenal.
You can't eve –

SARA

What?

ROVER

Imagine –

SARA

Try me.

ROVER

You'd have to be here.

SARA

Be there -

ROVER

Behind that ridge over there – it looks like mountains it looks like a crystal
mountain –

SARA

Tell me -

ROVER

If I could get a little closer.
Head me in that direction.

SARA

What?

ROVER

Send me. I'm going to go as far as I possibly can – you know, I'm going –

SARA

Come back.

ROVER

That would be against everything you've taught me. I'm going to run. I'm going to leap -
I'm going to be a pioneer.
The only thing Mom –

SARA

Yeah?
(The Rover turns into Lis)

LIS

It's just so lonely here.

SARA

Come home baby.

LIS

You built me, Mom –
Don't you know I can't?

SIGNS OF LIFE

(Sara and Chris on the Mars Yard. Half clothed. Asleep.)
EARTH TIME: JANUARY 23rd (Day 21) 7:14 pm
MARS TIME: SOL 21, 12:25 am
(Sara wakes with a jolt. Turns. Wakes Chris. Panicked.)

What time is it? SARA

What? CHRIS

The time? SARA

(off his watch)
After midnight... CHRIS

midnight?!
Midnight here or midnight there? SARA

What? CHRIS

Midnight here or midnight there?
(looks at her arm)
My watches - where are my watches? SARA

Somewhere around here - There.
(he picks one up – gives it to her.)
It's 12:25 am here – I mean on Mars. Sorry – 7:14 pm, here. CHRIS

We fell asleep - SARA

Barely. I'm sure I conked out before you - biological imperative. CHRIS

I didn't want to sleep with you. SARA

CHRIS

Sara – but we did. Your first move as I recall.

SARA

Fucking yes but sleeping no. God – why did I do this –?

CHRIS

Hold it -

SARA

Where are my clothes?

CHRIS

Hold it –

SARA

My clothes – what did you do with my clothes?

CHRIS

They're where you left them - Gusev Crater. Adirondack. Columbia Hills.
Here.

(tosses her underpants at her)

Work your way backwards.

(she puts them on)

You were exhausted.

SARA

I can't be here. I need to be home
What if she called?–

CHRIS

You have your cell phone.

SARA

What if she didn't call? What if somebody else called – someone who met
her or found her and - -

I should have been home – Somewhere where she could find me -

CHRIS

Sara -

SARA

She could have come home and I wouldn't be there and she would think I wasn't waiting for her, I wasn't trying to find her and that I didn't care enough to be out searching, to be sitting by the phone.
I shouldn't have been –

CHRIS

Enjoying yourself?

SARA

I didn't enjoy myself.

CHRIS

Fuck you - You needed this. You needed me.

SARA

I didn't. I didn't. I didn't.

CHRIS

You sleeping with me is not going to change anything with her. This time there's nothing you can do that you haven't done. You know what I'm thinking - She went off the grid. Lis did it. She walked out the door the way idiot teenagers walk out the door. They leave. I did it. They think they'll find something they don't have - They have a great fucking time –

SARA

Screw you.

CHRIS

They come back. I came back. I think she'll come back.
And while you wait -

SARA

I can't do anything but wait.
What the fuck do you think your parents did except wait?

CHRIS

....

I don't know –

(Sara starts to sob. Chris gathers her clothes. He walks over to her, picks up her bra from the floor, hooks it around her, puts her shirt on and steps her into her pants, into her shoes.)

LIFE ON MARS

(His apartment. LIS in his bed among the tangled sheets. He is at his computer - the light from the screen illuminating his face.

Sara at home. Feet drawn up under her on the couch. Waiting.

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 24th (Day 22) 1:32 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 21 6:13pm

Lis wakes. A moment. She sits up. She looks at herself, her hands. That he isn't next to her. She sees him at the computer. She waits for him to see her. He is absorbed.)

LIS

What are you doing?

EDGAR2330

Working –

LIS

You don't sleep?

EDGAR2330

I don't see the need - you, you were on another planet.

LIS

Oh.

EDGAR2330

I made you a grilled cheese sandwich.

LIS

While I was sleeping?

EDGAR2330

You're still growing.

LIS

....

.....
And now what happens?

EDGAR2330

Why are you asking me?

LIS

Who else is there to ask?

EDGAR2330

(singing)

waking up to wish it was a dream?

LIS

What?

EDGAR2330

You wanted me to make you a song.

LIS

I don't feel that way.

EDGAR2330

You don't?

LIS

I'm just - I'm just - I'm not any...different. Than who I was. Before.

EDGAR2330

Yeah. That doesn't happen.

LIS

It doesn't? Ever?

EDGAR2330

I can't attest to ever, but –
It doesn't mean it wasn't good. Or nice. It doesn't mean it wasn't special –
It was -

LIS

Don't do that –

EDGAR2330

What?

LIS

Say what you think I want to hear. Tell me the truth.

EDGAR2330

Sometimes what you want to hear is the truth.

LIS

I thought you would - I thought you could -

EDGAR2330

You are who you are.

LIS

Oh.

EDGAR2330

You wanted poetry. You wanted a song
(she stares at him).

LIS

I did.

EDGAR2330

At some point – No more poetry. No song. Freaking life.
(he looks back at the computer)

LIS

Edgar -

EDGAR2330

Edgar?

LIS

- What?

EDGAR2330

Who's Edgar?

(Lis is suddenly aware she's naked.)

LIS

.....

.....

Edgar?

Edgar 2330.

....

.....

You?!

EDGAR2330

Edgar? Where the hell did you get Edgar?

(re what's on the screen)

Hey - they found it.

LIS

....

EDGAR2330

That Mars thing. The rover? It's not missing after all. Cool.

LIS

.....

(Lis pulls the covers up around her.)

EDGAR2330

What do you want to do today?

ENTRY - again

(Victoria drives. Lis in the passenger seat.

Sara still waiting on the couch.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 24th, (Day 22) 5:47 pm

MARS TIME: SOL 21, 10:22 pm

VICTORIA

I only have a permit you know.

LIS

I know.

VICTORIA

My mother will kill me if she finds out.

LIS

I know.

Watch that guy –

VICTORIA

I got it.

LIS

Jesus –

VICTORIA

What could be that important?

LIS

I don't know.

VICTORIA

Really.

LIS

.....

VICTORIA

I got so used to none of my texts being from you I didn't believe it was you.

LIS

I know –

VICTORIA

You could have –

LIS

I told you –

VICTORIA

Off the grid?

LIS

I told you –

VICTORIA

Could you have been more – not telling in the telling?

LIS

You're mad.
Don't be mad.

VICTORIA

....

LIS

You're the one I contacted – last and first.

VICTORIA

....

LIS

.....

VICTORIA

Why would you do that?

LIS

You're the one who wanted me to be unwound.

VICTORIA

I don't want that anymore.

LIS

Too late.

I wanted to -

I thought I had -

VICTORIA

.....

.....

Kevin pulled a Romeo and came in through my window. I left him there.

LIS

To come and get me?

VICTORIA

Like I would leave you there. Like I would leave you anywhere.

LIS

Yeah.

(She reaches over and grabs Victoria's hand. Victoria drives one-handed.)

VICTORIA

....

Lis?

LIS

What?

VICTORIA

I really can't do this without 10 and 2.

DESCENT – again

(JPL LIS and CHRIS)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 25th, (Day 23) 12:02 am

MARS TIME: SOL 22, 4:27 am

(At home – SARA still waiting on the couch.)

LIS

You don't have to stare at me like that.

CHRIS

Who does this kind of thing to people?

LIS

Can you just tell me where my mom is?

CHRIS

....

LIS

Please?

CHRIS

That – that isn't even the beginning of knowing what it feels like.

LIS

They said you would know – just tell me where to find her. I know you got Spirit back. I know Opportunity just landed. I need my mom. I know this is where she is.

CHRIS

You know nothing.

Nothing about what it is to find the center of your universe gone without warning, without contact. Without fucking consideration. You don't know what it feels like – like gravity rescinded. Like your heart – like your heart is no longer your own.

CHRIS(*CONT*)

We got Spirit back. And tonight...tonight Opportunity landed and we threw Opportunity's pictures up on the screen and what we saw - what we saw - what we found, it was glorious.

And she missed it.

Because of you.

LIS

I don't even know you.

CHRIS

Oh. You will.

LIS

.....

CHRIS

Come. I'm taking you home.

LANDING - again

(LIS and SARA - at home.)

EARTH TIME: JANUARY 25, (Day 23) 12:27am

MARS TIME: SOL 22, 4:51am

SARA

You're OK.

LIS

Yes.

SARA

Are you OK?

LIS

Yes.

(SARA goes to the refrigerator, takes out the casseroles and dumps them, one by one.)

SARA

I don't think I deserved this. I deserve plenty of shit being thrown at me by you, I've fucked up in ways I hate myself for but I've never been anything but well-intentioned – dense but well intentioned and I don't think I –

LIS

You're right –

SARA

Imagining you – seeing you...longing for –

LIS

You're right.

SARA

I'm right?

LIS

You're right.

SARA

....

LIS

I've spent my whole life watching you not get where you wanted to go. Do you think maybe I didn't want to be surrounded by disappointment again? Now Spirit stopped disappointing you – and I am. Still, I know sorry doesn't cut it – but I'm sorry I made you miss Opportunity landing.

SARA

Yeah, that's the one I'll pull out on special occasions.

Lis -

LIS

I didn't know how to make you hear me, to look at me, to see me without you missing me first.

SARA

That's – that's awful.

LIS

I want you to fix me. The way you fix her.

SARA

Lis – you are anything but broken.

LIS

....

....

How could I do that to you? After everything you -

SARA

Do you want to tell me? I always said you could tell me anything -

LIS

I can't tell you this.

SARA

But you're OK.

LIS

OK enough. For someone smart I am not smart. I can't believe I -
- I do want to tell you but - I –

SARA

- you don't. It's OK. When you're ready.

LIS

I'm not what you want me to be. Mom -
I won't ever be what you want me to be –
(Sara puts out her hand to her. Lis takes it. Pull themselves into each other's arms.)

SARA

No, you're not. You won't.
You're you. A wonderous glorious fucked up you.

LIS

Apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

SARA

Lis, you're just taking off –
Just sometimes, I'd like to be in your passenger seat -

LIS

Without back-seat driving?

SARA

That I can't promise.

LIS

....

SARA

....

LIS

Now what?

SARA

.....

OK. OK.

(Sara opens Lis's textbook, sits, and begins to read.)

The term Manifest Destiny was first used in 1845 by journalist John O'Sullivan to encourage Westward expansion of the United States. O'Sullivan touted America as the chosen one – whose fate was to civilize the wilderness. “Manifest destiny to overspread the continent...” –
(LIS comes to sit next to her.)

LIS

And go to the stars....

SARA

And go to the stars....

(Sara goes to the refrigerator – opens it.)

You are still playing Destination Mars. Your primary mission was to explore the red planet for ninety sols. Say you'll be happy with 60 but secretly pray for more and lose a turn. Hold your breath as April 5th, 2004 – earth time

SARA(*CONT*)

– ninety sols comes and goes – and continue your run. Set off for craters you never dreamed you'd touch, break a wheel, realize you can get just as far rolling backwards – points for ingenuity - and find unimaginable treasures – evidence of water - in the rut you drag behind.

Realize somewhere along the line, you've stopped keeping score. On March 22nd, 2010 get your last message from Spirit, six years, two months, nineteen days in. Twenty five times our minimum success criteria. Say goodbye but be sure that some day you'll have contact with her again. I've moved on to Saturn, still asking if we're alone in the universe, but knowing I'm not alone on earth.

Look over at your daughter. She has wended her way through the labyrinths of high school and college, found love, lost love, found jobs and lost jobs, and found love again. She's written poetry and coached girls to fly using their own two feet.

Keep going keep going keep going - hobbled, yes, but still going...who knows where it will go from here -

Lights fade

End of play