

The Atom Room

by

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Characters:

SARAH, an astrophysicist for Envirocorp

DANNY, a team leader for Envirocorp

MARGARET, the CEO of Envirocorp

The deep future is where we locate the action of this play.

It's a time when space travel is routine, where going to the Moon is like going from Auckland to London for us now; while going from Auckland to London is almost instantaneous because of teleport technology. Various space stations have been set up all around Earth's orbit and further abroad, right up to Mars.

When DANNY and SARAH are together, it's either in reality, as in the past scenes, or the Atom Room, which is a highly advanced computer programme.

Notes:

I have sometimes written a line that contains words in brackets. This is to indicate a thought half-completed. The words in brackets are not meant to be spoken, just to help the actor understand what the character's thought was.

Generally, when their dialogue is broken up it's because they can't articulate themselves as well because it's cutting closer to the bone.

A dash (—) indicates the dialogue is cut off sharply by the following speaker.

An ellipsis (...) means the character's line trails off.

The set can be elaborate, or it can be very simple. A few projections could do the same job as rows of screens.

Act 1

Visuals that replicate the patterns of space. When the dust settles, two people stand in the middle of the stage wearing space helmets and oxygen tanks, but otherwise dressed in regular clothes. The dust clears.

SCENE 1

DANNY takes off his helmet, puts it on a rack, and sits down.

SARAH takes hers off, puts it on a rack on the other side, and sits down. This should be done in a stylised way.

The action of the scene begins: they are both in front of futuristic-looking computers.

DANNY and SARAH are talking on the Link-Up. There is a sense that they are not really connecting with each other (the reason for this, as will later be explained, is that there's a delay between Earth and Mars, but it's not necessary for the audience to know this right now).

SARAH

I keep having this dream.

Do you dream ... about things?

I wonder what you dream about these days?

(vulnerable) I miss you.

I miss cuddling you.

You're a good cuddler.

I dream that you've left me.

I miss sex too.

It's OK, you can say it.

But that can be remedied.

(Long pause)

The Atom Room.

DANNY

What dream?

I have some dreams

I don't pay that much attention.

Do you miss, you know, cuddling with extras?

(slightly angry) This again? I'm not gonna leave you.

How?

(Long pause)

How can it be remedied?

SCENE 2

A bar at a staff party.

SARAH is sitting by herself, having a drink. DANNY walks in, takes off his helmet, goes to the bar and orders a drink. He sees SARAH and looks intrigued. She sees him and looks moderately interested.

He breathes into a little machine. The machine beeps, making a declining noise. He looks a little embarrassed. SARAH has noticed. He breathes again into the machine. It makes the declining noise again. He now looks very embarrassed, while trying to maintain a 'cool' demeanour. SARAH looks unimpressed. He breathes into his hand and tries to smell it, then breathes a third time into the machine, and this time it makes a positive noise. He looks relieved.

This is the first time they meet. Everything they say is coloured by a playful feeling/tone – they are clearly both attracted to each other, though she is playing a little more stand-offish than him.

SARAH (Have a) bit of trouble there?

DANNY Huh?

SARAH With the detoxinator?

DANNY No, no, it's ...
Are you ... are you waiting for someone?

SARAH (*confused*) No. Are you?

DANNY No. Just ...

SARAH Conversation starter?

DANNY Bit ham-fisted, sorry.

SARAH Yeah, I see where you fell down there.

DANNY It was a bad start, but I think there might be time to salvage it.
I'm Danny.

SARAH Sarah.

He holds out his hand to shake. She regards it with caution. He holds his hand over the same machine, or similar, that he breathed into. It beeps. She looks satisfied, and shakes it.

DANNY Are you part of this little organisation of ours?

SARAH does a little mocking salute.

SARAH Envirocorp: Off-World Operations, sir!

DANNY Ah!
 (*Points to himself*)
 Lowly ground-dweller. Environment.
 (*Pause*)
 What do you think of the party?

SARAH The usual. They try too hard. (*Gesturing*) Space ships and,
 and bad polystyrene – what is that? What is that even –
 alien landscapes? It's cheesy.

DANNY I'm sure it's fine.

He looks over and can't see it properly. He presses the palm of his hand.

SARAH Neural implant?

DANNY I'm still playing with it. Trying to get the zoom function to —
 ah! (*In relation to the polystyrene*) Yeah, it's cheesy.

SARAH Cheesy alien landscapes made of polystyrene.

DANNY Unforgivable. Well – I like the little Edwardian telescope.

SARAH The telescope's cool. But the rest of it –

DANNY Oh! Forget about the rest of it!
 (*Beat*) What's your uh ... particular ... job?

She laughs.

SARAH See, now, was that really the best strategy?

DANNY It's conventional, I'll admit, but it covers some generic
 ground early on. Gives me options for later.

She laughs.

SARAH I'm an engineer.

DANNY looks surprised.

DANNY What kind?

SARAH Geomatics. I specialise in geo-spatial engineering, working with the challenges of gravity, atmospheric pressures, and implementing design solutions in off-planet settlements.

Pause. DANNY doesn't know what to say.

DANNY I'm quite good at grammar.
That's basically my job.

SARAH Grammar?

DANNY I write policy. Environmental. Content generator.

SARAH *(not very interested, trying to pretend she is)* Oh.

Both of them have reached an impasse.

SARAH See, this is what happens when I tell people about my job.
There's a real danger of running out of steam here.

DANNY No no, just thinking through my next question ...
(Slightly sarcastic)
I suppose you'd be all about getting to Mars, would you?

SARAH Well, that'd be ... *incredible* ... but –

DANNY *(dark)* It's all we hear about.
(brighter) Have you been to the moon?

SARAH Yup. Going there again in a few weeks, I think.

DANNY You think?

SARAH Three-month contract. I'm trying to decide whether to take it
... been there three times now, and it starts to get a bit ...

DANNY Old?

SARAH Not so much old ... just ... you need a challenge.

DANNY Challenges are good.

Pause.

SARAH I sense a bit of unease about Mars?

DANNY No, it's ... Would you like to go there?

SARAH laughs.

DANNY That not a thing?

SARAH shakes her head.

DANNY You can't apply?

SARAH You have to be asked.
All on the QT.
Way above my ... (pay grade).

Beat.

DANNY Still. Whatever you're doing, it's better than my job. It's mostly trying to convince the government, or what's left of it, that the planet is worth preserving.

(Beat)

It's like bailing water out of the Titanic with a coffee mug.

SARAH You've been saving that one up?

DANNY I tried being a standup comedian for a while.

SARAH How did that work out?

He gestures around. Pause.

SARAH looks nervous.

DANNY looks at SARAH presses his temple and winks. When he does, a camera shutter sound happens.

SARAH Did it work?

DANNY presses his temple, then his palm.

DANNY Yes! Ha!

SARAH Let me see.

He presses a button on his hand, making a swiping movement to show he's 'sending' the photo to her. She looks through her visual implants. She isn't impressed.

DANNY What?

SARAH My skin's all ...

DANNY It's fine! You look gorgeous!

SARAH Delete it.

DANNY I don't want to.

SARAH It'll find its way to the neural net.

DANNY I'll put it in a personal folder.

SARAH Nothing's personal anymore.

DANNY groans.

DANNY Alright, if you must.

He presses something on his hand/temple and deletes it, perhaps making a deleting sound.

SARAH Sorry.

SARAH (*surprised*) Kids!

DANNY You want kids don't you?

She starts to bristle under this questioning.

SARAH Look, Danny, you're a really nice guy, and these last three weeks have been (great) —

DANNY Uh-oh ...

SARAH No, no, it's not —
I mean, yeah, I want kids. I want all that.
But I — with my job — it's difficult to — I mean, I'm going to the Moon in a few days.

DANNY looks at her for a few moments in a piercing way.

DANNY No you're not.

SCENE 5

DANNY and SARAH are in the middle of a field, their visors on. This is some way out of Wellington, in the western hills of Mount Kau Kau. DANNY takes his visor off.

DANNY It's OK, really.

SARAH Really?

DANNY Look – I'm breathing.

She takes off her visor, a little sheepishly. She clicks a button on her hand palm.

SARAH Radiation seems OK.

DANNY I think it's something to do with the altitude. Just one of those places where you can actually breathe.

SARAH looks around.

He takes deep breaths, luxuriating in the freedom. He turns to her. He pulls something out of his pocket – it's a box.

DANNY You can see out all over Wellington Island, across Hutt Island even. See all the Moon Liners taking off.

SARAH Mum said they'd stare at the stars for hours back before the meltdowns – that was before metric time, though –

DANNY That seems so weird –

SARAH I know! Sixty minutes in an hour? A hundred makes so much more sense.

She looks out

SARAH When I was eighteen my parents bought me a trip on a liner. I looked out at space, from out of the window of the ship, and I thought, the world –

He gets up, having retrieved the box.

DANNY Oh, don't get me started on the world. The world's a fucking madhouse.

SARAH I thought, 'the world can fuck off!'

DANNY is surprised and amused. He runs out (to the audience) shouting ...

DANNY Fuck you, world!

SARAH *(also shouting)* Yeah! Fuck you, you stupid, sick, polluted, stupid ... world!

They both laugh at what they've done. He takes her and looks in her eyes.

DANNY We don't need the *world*. (We've got each other).

He looks out.

DANNY See it?

They are bathed in lights. The Southern Lights have made an appearance.

SARAH (*stunned*) Wow!

DANNY Aurora Australis. Southern Lights.

SARAH You knew?

She stares out. Pause.

DANNY I ... I don't even know how to do this.

He gets the box he dropped.

DANNY I ... I got you ...

He presents it to her.

SARAH Danny, this ...
On top of Mount Kau Kau!

DANNY With the lights bearing down ...

She looks at the ring inside.

DANNY It's only ... that's all I can afford at the moment, but I figured,
I'll get you a better one later on, if ...

SARAH We've only – Three months! People will talk!

DANNY People wait so long to get married, you know? Why wait?

SARAH It's so —

DANNY What?

SARAH I dunno, *conventional*.

DANNY But that's the whole point — no one gets married anymore — there's not even a point to it — so getting married is like, subversive.

SARAH And *staying* married ... that's like ... punk!

She looks at the ring.

SARAH I love it!

DANNY It's — it's only cheap. I'll get a better one when I can afford it.

She looks at the ring, goes to put it on, hovers for a moment.

SARAH Has it been sanctified?

DANNY Course.

She puts it on.

SARAH It fits! Sort of ...

DANNY I can get it resized. Do you like it?

SARAH (*with conviction*) This is it. This is my ring.

(*Pause*)

Are you actually going to — (ask me)?

DANNY I — I'm not gonna — I mean, my knees (are a bit weak) ... but ... you know, an answer about now would be good.

SARAH Of course! Of course I will!

They both smile and laugh like naughty kids. They hug.

DANNY What's that you're wearing?

SARAH Huh?

DANNY Your neck smells nice. What are you wearing?

SARAH It's my neck. I'm not wearing anything on my neck.

DANNY So it's just natural?

SARAH Natural neck.

DANNY Just 'essence of neck'?

SARAH 'Essence of Neck.'

Lights go down, and the stars light up the stage, with SARAH and DANNY in the middle, hand in hand.

SCENE 6

DANNY at home. SARAH comes in looking very disappointed.

DANNY No?

SARAH (*downcast*) No.

DANNY tries to sound consoling.

DANNY We can try again. We've got time.
It'll work out in the end.

SCENE 7

Lights up. SARAH and MARGARET. This is two scenes: one between SARAH and MARGARET and the other between SARAH and DANNY. SARAH is torn between the two worlds.

MARGARET You're a brilliant engineer, Sarah.
The whole package. Engineering, yes. Technical skills, all that. But something extra. A flair. You're an *artist*. So own it.

SARAH Why do people have to 'own' everything now?

Now lights shine on the other part of the stage. DANNY enters and SARAH has her scene with him. From now on the two scenes intermingle.

SARAH Do you remember Margaret?

DANNY Who?

SARAH My boss? You met her at the last Christmas party.

DANNY Oh, her. When we met she was eating a piece of cake and she wiped her hands wiped her hands on her pants before she shook my hand.

Pause. SARAH looks confused.

DANNY It was disgusting.

SARAH She was saying to me –

DANNY Hasn't she heard of a detoxinator?

SARAH She said she's gonna set up a time to touch base.

DANNY I hate that term.

SARAH To talk to you.

DANNY I've seen what she touches.

SARAH She said she might be able to swing a promotion for you. You could be, I dunno ... managing director.

DANNY *(laughs)* Managing director?

SARAH Well I don't know – whatever you call those roles ...
(Uncomfortable pause – she doesn't know how to approach this)

She's also been talking to me about a role ...

Back to MARGARET.

MARGARET I can't have weak people on my team —

SARAH I'm not weak.

Pause.

SARAH I'm not weak!

Pause.

SARAH I don't care anyway. Happier where I am.

MARGARET Mars.

Back to the scene with SARAH and DANNY. DANNY is shocked.

DANNY Mars?

SARAH Mars.

Pause. DANNY can't quite take it in.

DANNY Sometimes people say ... 'my husband or wife's gone to Sweden for three months ... they might as well be on another planet' ... but now with me —

SARAH *(realises where he's going with this)* It really will be, yeah —

DANNY *(mundane, flat tone)* On another planet.

SARAH *(same tone, overlapping him)* — another planet, yeah.

Long pause.

DANNY That's ... huh, that's ... a good opportunity, right?

SARAH Good opportunity?

DANNY Like ... it's ... what you —

SARAH *(small)* It's ... it's more than I ever —

DANNY Good!

SARAH — expected to —

DANNY Well that's good, isn't it?

SARAH Well, it's ...
(*Beat — about to launch into a pros and cons list, thinks better of it*)
(*Flatly*) Yeah. Yeah, it's good.

Long pause.

SARAH You don't want me to go.

DANNY I never said that.

SARAH Didn't need to.

DANNY I didn't even think it.

SARAH You were thinking it. I saw it in your eyes.

DANNY You're a mind reader now?

SARAH Look, if you —

DANNY Or an eye-reader?

SARAH — want me to say no —

DANNY Go! Go if you want to!

Pause.

SARAH (*slightly hurt*) Do you ... do you *want* me to go?

DANNY I can't win here!
(*Beat*)
Sure, if it were up to me —

SARAH I knew it!

DANNY I didn't say anything!

Pause.

DANNY OK, alright, I don't want you to go.

SARAH I knew it!

DANNY But I can't – (deny you).
I married you.
I always knew that maybe ...

SARAH I didn't! I'd put it out of my mind.

DANNY That's when ... things happen.

Pause.

SARAH *(Almost by way of justification)* Margaret's got a partner
she's (leaving behind).
(Changes tone) They were supposed to be getting married.
They're gonna leave it until she gets back.

DANNY Everyone waits to get married.

SARAH We didn't.

DANNY They're like, 'Let's wait until I'm back from Mars,' or
whatever.

SARAH When I'm back, we'll renew our vows.

DANNY So you are going?

SARAH I mean, *if* I go.

Back to SARAH and MARGARET.

SARAH *(stunned)* I thought this was — (an interview for) Senior
Engineer.

MARGARET We need people like you.

SARAH I thought maybe ... slightly higher salary. Some perks?
(*Beat*)
Mars?

MARGARET Colony nine's the big one.
They've set up the Citadel.
Don't need to look too far ahead.
Corporations are flocking.
(*Pause*)
You can't pretend you don't want it.

Back to SARAH and DANNY.

DANNY Is ... is there a time limit on this trip?

Pause.

SARAH (*reluctantly*) Four years.

DANNY Wow. OK.

SARAH (*defensive*) Well, Earth and Mars are on different orbits: they
only align every 26 months, so it's two Martian cycles.

DANNY So four years and two months, then ...

SARAH Including transport time ...

Pause.

SARAH (*defensive*) It's two Martian cycles.
They're investing a lot in us.

They're both silent.

SARAH I won't go.

Back to SARAH and MARGARET.

SARAH No thanks.

MARGARET Your husband?

SARAH My life!

MARGARET You're trying for a child.

SARAH nods.

MARGARET It's not working.
Been quite a long time, hasn't it?
Just saying, it's been a while?
Even with help from medical science?

Pause. SARAH stares at her.

MARGARET Think about it.
Carefully.

Back to SARAH and DANNY.

DANNY Have you read the contract properly?

SARAH They haven't given it to me yet.

DANNY Well when they do, give it to me to read.

SARAH OK ...

DANNY You don't read things properly. Gotta make sure —

SARAH I'll give it to you.

DANNY Could I ... could I come and visit?

SARAH It ... it's not a bus service!

Pause — she sounds guilty.

SARAH I mean, the fuel it takes to get there, the time. Security clearances and radiation treatment –

DANNY So 'no' then?
And I guess you don't get to come back for a holiday?

She tries to soften the blow, but can't.

SARAH Sometimes you can come back if there's a strong reason, like bereavement ...

Pause. DANNY looks disappointed.

DANNY Ah! So if I *die* you'll be allowed ...
They didn't think that one through.

SARAH I, I feel sorry for the early settlers, when I think of it — they could *never* come back.
Never see their families again.
That must've been ...

DANNY It's just ... kids, I ...

SARAH Well, you know ... that isn't ... (happening). The Earth is ... we've all been ... all been exposed ...

DANNY The doctor said to keep trying.

SARAH What else could he say?

DANNY But that is what he said.

Pause.

DANNY It's a dead planet.
Mars, I mean.
How can you love a dead thing?

SARAH It wants to be alive again.

Pause. DANNY doesn't know what to say.

SARAH I dunno, I just love it.
 I've ... I dunno —
 Always felt like I belong there, in a weird sort of way.

DANNY (*with resolve*) Then you should definitely go.

SARAH looks tormented. DANNY tries to make it seem like a good thing.

DANNY Alright: I'm busy with the Cleaning the Planet initiative. I can
 make a real ... I can change things if ...
 Then when you come back, we'll be set up ...
 We'll grow.
 Closer together.

SARAH Yeah.

DANNY When is this gonna ever come around again? Huh?

SARAH is silent.

DANNY Ever?

Pause.

SARAH If ... if you don't go when you get called, they just shove you
 to the back of the pile. I don't think they ever think of you
 again, to be honest.

DANNY Exactly!

Pause.

SARAH Yeah, and maybe it's better, with the problems we've been
 having —

DANNY Problems?

SARAH You know, I mean ...

DANNY What?

SARAH You can't deny ... maybe some time apart will —

DANNY What problems?

SARAH Well, I mean, we couldn't conceive ...

DANNY The environment!

SARAH Maybe.

DANNY What do you mean, maybe?

SARAH The whole thing, it's put a strain on us.
(Pause)
Look, maybe you're right, maybe we're not having problems.

DANNY We're having problems if you think we are!

SARAH But you don't!

Pause.

DANNY No, look, it's probably better. That you go I mean, kids!
Like that was ever gonna happen! You! A mother!

She's suddenly hurt by that.

SARAH Huh?

DANNY Well, you know, I didn't — you've got this amazing career.

SARAH I'd still be a good mother!

DANNY I know! I didn't —

SARAH I wouldn't neglect a child.

DANNY No! Come on, I just mean —

SARAH At least I'm good for something.

DANNY Exactly!
(*Correcting himself*)
You're good for lots of things! That's your problem. Too many things.

Pause.

He kisses her affectionately. They laugh together.

SARAH Am I seriously doing this?

DANNY I think you are.

SARAH You ... you'll be alright, here? We'll have the Link-Up.

DANNY Oh God, those things are terrible! There's always a huge delay.

SARAH Well, yeah, but there's this other thing they're developing — it's like advanced VR, but like, so advanced you wouldn't even ... it's called The Atom Room.

DANNY Oh, like an image room?

SARAH Have you seen one?

DANNY I tried one out at your work, remember?

SARAH Oh! Oh, that — that's nothing! With this one, it's like you're really there. You *are* there, pretty much. It's physical.
Like it's physical.
They brought one to work to show us.

DANNY Really?

SARAH It's like a perk. You're away from your loved ones. It's only fair. They're building this new one, specially for staff at the Citadel. (*Excited*) Look, look ...

She touches her hand.

SARAH They actually gave us some of the tech at work —

DANNY (*suspicious*) Uh-huh —

SARAH You just — what you do is —

She presses a button. He jumps back.

DANNY Ow!

SARAH It's fine! It's completely harmless! Just a software patch beamed to your neural receptor.

DANNY What about radiation?

SARAH (*dismissive*) Radiation! Hold still.

She presses the button.

SARAH So all that happens is you can be anywhere, lying down, whatever, and you turn it on, and, and you're there — there's a perception filter, so no delay.

DANNY looks spaced out. He's entered the atom room.

DANNY I can see ... everything!

SARAH You can be anywhere you want to be. It feels real, right?

DANNY reaches out to touch something. A goofy smile comes over his face and he makes little noises as he examines what he's 'touching'. His hands are all over it. The audience can decide what this might be.

SARAH We can be together!

He's not responding.

SARAH Right?

Still not responding – he's too interested in what he's 'touching'. She presses her palm and brings him out of it with a jolt. He jumps back, and tries to regain his composure.

SARAH Not so bad, right?

DANNY pulls himself together.

DANNY And you just uh, happened to have these?

SARAH They were handing out the codes at work ... so we could try them out ...

DANNY 'We' being the ones going to, to Mars, or — ?

Pause.

SARAH That telescope you got me – the old Edwardian –
The anniversary one.

DANNY Oh yeah! Where is that?

SARAH In storage somewhere.
But I thought, we could set it up so you can see Mars.

DANNY I remember when I got you that.

SARAH I loved it.
We could set it up so you could see me out there.

DANNY Will I see you waving at me?

SARAH Maybe.

DANNY nods sadly.

DANNY These things, they make you grow.

Pause. He hugs her.

SARAH Hey, hey: marry me.

DANNY looks confused.

DANNY We're already married.

SARAH I know, but let's pretend like we're one of those couples that always puts it off. Marry me.

DANNY Not until you're back from Mars.

SCENE 8

Lights, sound, music, replicating a rocket taking off, to indicate that SARAH has taken off for Mars.

SCENE 9

A bar at a staff party. We are now in the Atom Room, replicating the night they met.

SARAH is sitting by herself, having a drink. DANNY walks in, takes off his helmet, goes to the bar and orders a drink, strutting and looking composed.

He breathes into the detoxinator, and this time beeps to his satisfaction the first time. He strolls over with a swagger.

He sees her. She sits there playing the part.

DANNY Are you ... are you waiting for someone?

SARAH *(confused)* No. Are you?

DANNY No. Just ...

SARAH Trying to — ?

DANNY Just getting things rolling.

DANNY I'm Danny.

SARAH Sarah.

They both look at each other then smile knowingly.

SCENE 10

In the Atom Room: DANNY and SARAH stand in the middle, as images flash past of mountains, lakes, valleys: all the things they do together in the room.

SCENE 11

The Atom Room version of the field on Mount Kau Kau. DANNY and SARAH hike up to it, wearing normal clothes, without their helmets. They look out over the landscape.

SARAH You like it?

DANNY That must've been what it used to be like.

SARAH looks to the sky.

SARAH Blue skies ... although apparently it rained a lot.

DANNY (*sarcastic*) Better than reality.

SARAH That's how the Atom Room works. Everything's better.

DANNY There's a slight humming noise.

SARAH Yeah, it emits a low-level hum.

Pause. He takes it in.

DANNY So, are you enjoying it? Is there life on Mars?

SARAH You've been saving that one up, haven't you?

DANNY My stand-up aspirations.

She takes a pause to think.

SARAH It's alright. Lots of challenges.

DANNY (*skeptical*) Really?

SARAH (*genuinely delighted, talking at a mile a minute*) Oh alright, I love it! It's amazing! You look out over the red sand and the red sky, and Earth is way over in the distance, and you say to yourself, 'I'm here now: I'm on another planet!'

DANNY I felt like that when I first went to London.

SARAH And your brain doesn't believe it, it doesn't compute, like you've stepped out of yourself —

DANNY I was in Hyde Park weather dome, watching a squirrel munch on a nut. What are those nuts called that squirrels like?

SARAH (*not listening, too wrapped up in her description*) — so you say it again, 'I'm here now' and you look outside and you know if you stepped out there, if you took one step without a suit your eyes would get sucked out of your head; the planet doesn't want you here, it'd just as soon kill you, and you have to respect it and learn to tame it ...

She sees he is not following, but being good natured.

SARAH But yeah, so it's alright.

Pause.

SARAH There's something ... something I've always wanted.

DANNY Yeah?

She presses a button and the 'Southern Lights' shimmer around them, but they're a little glitchy: they flicker, and that makes DANNY jump.

DANNY What the hell is that?

SARAH The Southern Lights! You know, like on that night?

DANNY looks disapproving.

SARAH I guess it didn't quite ...

She presses a button and they flicker off.

SARAH Anyway, look in your pocket.

DANNY does so. He finds a box. He opens it. There's a beautiful diamond ring inside. He looks at her, confused.

SARAH Well: aren't you gonna propose?

DANNY Oh!

SARAH I want the full version this time.

DANNY Down on my knees?

SARAH Yes please.

DANNY gets down on his knees.

DANNY OK, here we ... here we, uh ... Sarah —
(Thinks) Hang on, let me get myself ... together ... OK ...
(Theatrically) Sarah —

Suddenly DANNY freezes and his voice cuts out.

SARAH *(amused)* Come on! Get on with it!

But DANNY is frozen to the spot.

SARAH Danny? Oh ...

She starts frantically pressing her palm.

SARAH Damn.

She tries tapping in a few things, but nothing happens. DANNY remains frozen.

SARAH Shit!

She frantically tries more taps. Then DANNY un-freezes.

DANNY — to marry me?

SARAH Oh no!

That was not the response he was expecting.

DANNY Well, you don't ... have to?

SARAH Sorry. You dropped out.

DANNY I — ?

SARAH The system froze. Must've lost the signal for a moment.
Probably an update.

DANNY So you missed the whole thing?

She looks guilty.

DANNY I did a whole thing!

SARAH *(talking a mile a minute again)* Other people have told me
this happens in their rooms too, the signal drops, something
to do with bouncing a photovoltaic cell optimiser off Phobos
— that's what they opted for in the end, which I think is
maybe not practical, bouncing a signal 78 million kilometres
instead of — *(She realises she's rambling again and he's
staring at her)* Sorry.
(In relation to the ring) Yes.

He takes out the ring and puts it on her finger.

SARAH You like it?

DANNY It's quite ... flashy.

SARAH I like it.

DANNY I didn't ...

SARAH Huh?

DANNY No, it's just ... I didn't know you were a 'ring girl'.

SARAH A 'ring girl'?

DANNY Thought all that was all a bit ... you know, you're a scientist.

SARAH I can't be a scientist and a woman?

He shrugs.

DANNY Just, it's very ...

SARAH What?

DANNY You know, elaborate.

SARAH Exactly.

DANNY When ... when I gave you my ring, my cheap little ... you said you liked it. Loved it, in fact.

SARAH I did. And I like this one.

DANNY I just kinda thought my one was, you know, special.

SARAH It was special!

DANNY But you would've preferred this one.

Pause.

SARAH Danny, I loved the one you gave me. You said it was kind of a place holder until you could afford a better one.

DANNY Yeah, but then you said you loved that one.

SARAH I did! I loved what it *meant*.
(*Pause*)
Come on, this is silly. We're having a silly conversation.

Pause.

DANNY Sorry, I'm ...

SARAH No, it's just ... the room's for us, you know?

DANNY Yeah, of course.

SARAH To enjoy ourselves.

DANNY (*uncertain*) Yeah.

SCENE 12

DANNY and SARAH on the Link-Up.

SARAH	DANNY
I'm still having that dream.	What dream?
You've left me.	Come on. That's silly.
Or, not so much that you've left me, just that you're not there.	Not there?
It's work. I think it's just work.	
Anyway, I sort of have to go — I've got this thing to deal with. It's just a thing.	I haven't been having the greatest time either — just work bullshit — oh — What's the thing?
So — Oh, hi!	
(<i>MARGARET has entered with a bottle of champagne</i>)	What — what's happening?
MARGARET	
Did you tell him?	

SARAH

Uh, no —

MARGARET

(calling out) Your wife's a genius!

She pops the bottle.

SARAH

What's that? Oh, champagne. We can't get that down here ...

Come on!

(to DANNY) Uh, it's just a bit of a gathering.

MARGARET

More than that! It's a party!

SARAH

I just did an equation — *(to MARGARET)* he doesn't need to —

MARGARET

Listen to this! 'Just an equation'!

(to DANNY)

Her 'little equation' has saved us weeks of work!

Oh, well that sounds ...

SARAH

Oh, come on!

MARGARET

It's (true) — *(to DANNY)* Someone forgot to factor in the low gravity when designing the hover bridge on Earth, so everyone's scratching their heads, how can we adjust the co-ordinates? And she comes along, your little lady here, and she only scribbles the equation on a piece of — what was it?

DANNY
Oh, great.

SARAH

Napkin –

MARGARET

It was a napkin! She literally scribbled down this (equation on a napkin!) – these engineers, some of them have Nobel prizes! And she comes along, scribbles it down on a bloody napkin!

(to SARAH)

Come on! You've gotta finish your speech!

SARAH

I'll talk to you later, OK sweetie? Sorry about this. I'll see you in the room, OK? Sorry.

They walk out. DANNY is left sitting by himself.

SCENE 13

Two scenes are simultaneously happening, as earlier. To start with, SARAH is having an interview with MARGARET. They are in the middle of a conversation.

MARGARET What you did the other day was astonishing.

Now DANNY enters, in a dressing-gown. He sits in another part of the stage. This scene is after they've had sex in the Atom Room simulation of their apartment. The spotlight goes on him for a moment.

DANNY You know, I wouldn't normally use the word 'epic'. It's a risk, but I'm gonna say, that was epic. It was amazing ... no, *better* than amazing. That was what amazing *aspires* to be.

Back to SARAH and MARGARET. MARGARET is looking through a checklist.

MARGARET People come up here, and they find, 'Hey, this isn't what I expected.' And it tests you, I'm not gonna lie. You'll have

tests, you'll face challenges ...

The question I keep coming back to is: is it worth it?

Lights on SARAH and DANNY. SARAH remains sitting where she is, but talking to DANNY.

SARAH Thought you'd like it.

DANNY The things you did ...

They sit in silence for a moment.

DANNY You never actually did that in, you know, real life.

SARAH This is real life.

DANNY You know what I mean.

Lights back on SARAH and MARGARET.

MARGARET So here's my challenge. We want you to join a new team we're putting together. Engineering A. More of a theoretical angle. Control loops in megastructures, holomorphic functions ... theoretical yes, but a chance to apply it in real time. There'll be a payrise, obviously, but greater responsibilities. *(Beat)* Thoughts?

Lights back on SARAH and DANNY. SARAH moves over to where DANNY is.

SARAH I think ... I think you look nice in a dressing gown.

DANNY Really?

SARAH I don't know what it is, I just really ...

She plays with his chest.

SARAH I like it.

Lights back on SARAH and MARGARET.

MARGARET Sarah?

SARAH Huh?

MARGARET I said, what do you think?

SCENE 14

A restaurant — though there's nothing actually there apart from a couple of chairs and a table. DANNY and SARAH are sitting at the table.

SARAH This is ...

DANNY *(disappointed)* It's a mess.

They both stare for a moment. She laughs sympathetically. He looks upset.

SARAH Come on, it's ... What happened?

DANNY Don't say it like that.

SARAH Like what?

DANNY Like you sort of expected it to not work.

SARAH That's not what I was expressing.

DANNY You *express* things now?

Pause.

DANNY I mean, I dunno, I followed the instructions, but the software wouldn't download properly. I left the thing on all night and when I got up in the morning it wasn't even up to fifteen percent!

SARAH is looking on a device and only half-paying attention. She puts the device away and looks around.

SARAH It works our end.

DANNY Maybe that's the problem? Downloading it from Mars?

SARAH That shouldn't be a problem if you left it on all night.
 Bounces off the stations. Should be (fine) — are you sure
 you got the CLX code right?

DANNY Absolutely!

Pause.

DANNY What's a CLX code?

She presses buttons on her palm and looks around, analysing the data.

DANNY I'm not bad with technology. I'm not a technophobe.

*SARAH is looking around and trying to look at the device as well, thus not
paying attention. DANNY notices. He's looking for reassurance.*

DANNY I'm not a technophobe.

She doesn't comment.

DANNY You could say something!

SARAH *(routine)* You're not a technophobe.

DANNY slumps down on a chair. SARAH sits on the opposite one.

DANNY I stayed up all night ... I had it all sorted out, even down to
 the annoying waiter who keeps coming and asking if your
 meal's OK when you're in the middle of a conversation.

SARAH looks blank, staring into the distance.

DANNY So ...

She still doesn't respond.

DANNY Hello?

SARAH Hmm? Oh, sorry. (*Taps her temples*) Neural net connection
— just looking at some stuff.

DANNY Some stuff?

SARAH Work stuff.
(Distracted)
'Colony Nine Net': it's our localised media hub. Hang on ...

DANNY looks annoyed. SARAH finishes what she's looking at, using a device (not unlike the wearable keyboards they have now) to type something in and scrolling 'in the air' on a screen only she can see. It takes an excruciatingly long time and we can see DANNY getting irritated. Every time he tries to talk she holds up her hand. Finally she notices.

SARAH *(defensive)* I've gotta (keep up) — there's a lot of pressure
with this new team.

DANNY New team?

SARAH *(vague)* Yeah, didn't I ... ? Must've sipped ... (my mind).
Engineering A. We're dealing with the big jobs. Theoretical
stuff, you wouldn't (understand).
(She realises she's being patronising and tries to back-track)
Kind of a big thing.

She looks around.

DANNY doesn't answer.

He looks downcast. She takes his hand. She takes a pause then starts talking, which begins normally but slowly morphs into an over-the-top infomercial voice. During the talk she produces a bottle of some kind of soda.

SARAH Danny ... do you ever feel like, no matter how much you
drink, you're never satisfied?

DANNY What?

SARAH *(building into infomercial voice)* Try Phobos Spring:
produced from the natural springs on the Martian moon
Phobos; Phobos Spring is sure to satisfy your thirst with its
pure spring water from a low-gravity atmosphere. Try it:
you'll float away!

DANNY *(confused)* Alright ...

He takes the drink. SARAH stops him.

SARAH No, don't drink it!

DANNY You just told me I should!

SARAH That was just ad-ware — pop-up cortex ads, they take you
over for a second. Sorry. But don't drink it — they'll add it to
your user profile and you'll never hear the end of it.

DANNY *(downcast)* Everything's turning to shit in here!

She looks at him sympathetically.

SARAH Come on ... do you wanna recreate our meeting again?
That's already a pre-loaded scenario, so we don't have to
(re-code it) —

DANNY Nah, it gets boring.

SARAH *(offended)* Boring?

DANNY Well, I mean, there's only so many times I can strut over and
say pithy things to you.

SARAH is a little offended, but moves on.

SARAH Look, let's have a proper drink.

DANNY Drink what?

SARAH Beer?

DANNY Don't have any.

SARAH Pretend there's one on the table.

She pretends to hand him a beer. He pretends to drink it.

DANNY *(sarcastic)* Refreshing.

They laugh together. She presses a few buttons on her hand. DANNY swallows and looks shocked.

DANNY God, I actually can taste it! How did you do that?

She signals to her hand. She goes back to staring at her 'neural net'.

DANNY My contract's been cut.

She suddenly laughs. He looks at her, surprised.

DANNY What's — ?

SARAH *(snaps out of it)* Sorry, what?

DANNY You were laughing?

She types something.

SARAH Oh, sorry, it was ...

She taps her forehead. She quickly types something in.

DANNY *(accusing tone)* Work stuff?

SARAH Sorry, what did you say?

DANNY My contract's been cut.

That's what I brought you here to ... (tell you).

That's why I wanted it to be ... (nice).

I've got three weeks left.

SARAH sighs and takes a pause.

SARAH Oh, Danny!

She gently takes his hand.

DANNY And I wanted this to be (nice). You know, it's just this, it's ...
it's not real, it's not reality.
It's not where I live.
This whole picture, it's breaking down for me. And us, we're
...

SARAH We're what?

DANNY We're here, but we're ... you're advertising fizzy drinks, I
mean ...

SARAH That was just adware.

She takes his hand.

DANNY (*very unsure of himself*) I ... I order you to come home.

SARAH You *order* me?

DANNY You've been gone long enough.
Enough's enough.
You have to –
You've got to come home now.

SARAH looks at him for a while.

SARAH Listen: I'll fix it. I'll make it right.

*She hugs him. At first the hug is a little uncomfortable, but then it becomes
deep and tender.*

DANNY I used to bury my face in your shoulder when we hugged,
and I could smell you. This ... this room thing doesn't do
smell. It can't do smell.

SCENE 15

SARAH in an interview with MARGARET. This will once again work with the next scene, so that the two flow in and out of each other.

MARGARET Thing is, in a situation like this, we have to say, 'Hey, what's my priority here?' We have to weigh things up.

SARAH looks unhappy.

MARGARET He, he, look, he doesn't have anything on the skills shortage list —

SARAH So what?

MARGARET I'd have to make up a job —

SARAH I thought that was the idea!

Pause.

DANNY comes out in his dressing gown. Light on him: the scene switches over to the one between him and SARAH. He sits down, looking dissatisfied.

DANNY That was ... that wasn't ideal.

Light back to SARAH and MARGARET.

MARGARET Look, we all want our partners up here, of *course* we do, it's only *natural*.

Me and my partner, the reality is we've been trying to plan this bloody wedding for a year now!

The mother, she thought she was rid of me when I told her I was going to Mars. She said, 'Well, it's nice you have a *hobby*.' A *hobby*! I felt like saying, 'no, love, *you've* got a hobby, it's called London Dry. What I've got is a *career*.'

I think it's just that she looks at me and sees a threat: only

five years older than me and she knows she's pissed her life away. Anyway —

SARAH You just don't want him up here. Truth is, you don't like him.

Pause.

MARGARET We've got people *clambering* — realistically, there are lists I haven't even *looked at* yet — and what you're asking me — to bring up a — what? A team leader? With what? Good grammar? You're telling me I present to the board and they ask me, what his skills are, and I say, 'he's a demon with a semicolon'?

SARAH He's got people skills. Soft skills.

MARGARET (*dismissive*) Soft skills!

SARAH That's gonna be needed, that's, that'll be something that's needed.

Light on DANNY and SARAH. SARAH remains sitting where she is, but talking to DANNY.

SARAH We'll try something else next time. You can programme anything into that machine.

DANNY Yeah.

SARAH You know what I mean? Like, the things they do on the porn you watch, would you expect that to happen in reality? Would it even be possible?

DANNY I don't watch porn.

SARAH I'm sure you've seen porn at some stage ...?

DANNY Do *you* watch porn?

SARAH I've seen it. And the kinds of things they do ...

DANNY They're like athletes.

SARAH Right.

DANNY Contortionists.

SARAH I thought you didn't watch it?

DANNY *(Beat)* I've seen it.

SARAH Anyway, my point is, if it's not working we can reprogramme it. This isn't reality. It doesn't have to be messy and uncomfortable.

DANNY So why was it?

Lights back on SARAH and MARGARET.

MARGARET But always with these things, you've got to ask yourself, hey: am I future-focused, or do I look back to the past? That dying planet you left behind?

Pause.

SARAH *(ruefully: something she doesn't want to admit)* I left it behind a long time ago.

SARAH goes to where DANNY is.

SARAH I get so stressed at work.

DANNY It's –

SARAH I guess some of that carries over.

DANNY You don't have to explain.

Pause.

DANNY We have so little time here as it is.

SARAH I know. I'm sorry.

DANNY No, don't be sorry. This isn't ... that's not what I meant. I just
meant it's a shame. When we have so little time.
It's not us.
It's cause of *this* ... it's the *machine* ... it's not *real*.

Pause. DANNY starts to laugh slightly.

SARAH What?

DANNY It's ...

He waves it away.

SARAH No, come on.

DANNY No, really.

SARAH Come on!

DANNY shrugs.

DANNY I remember ... sometimes when we used to ... you would
fart.

SARAH What?

DANNY You used to fart. Sometimes. When we had sex, you'd let
one off. Sometimes a fanny fart. Sometimes a normal one.

SARAH I did not!

DANNY You've always had slightly bad digestion, so I guess it
loosened things up.

SARAH I didn't fart!

Pause.

DANNY I kind of liked it.

SARAH What?

DANNY It just ... it gave me the sense that you were really into it. I liked it.

SARAH That's ... I'm not altering the settings to make myself fart! I'm not doing that.

DANNY Wouldn't work anyway – this thing doesn't do smell.

She gives him an evil stare. He shuts up.

SARAH We hardly ever have time to come here, and when we do, you tell me I have poor hygiene?

DANNY Come on! I didn't say –

SARAH Now I've gotta look back over my life and wonder if I ever farted inappropriately before without realising it. Did my friends find it too difficult to raise with me? Do I have a nickname, like 'Silent but violent Sarah?'

DANNY That's a long nickname.

SARAH What?

DANNY I'm just saying, it'd probably be more like something short, like 'Farty'.

SARAH Farty?

DANNY I dunno. You know, if there was a nickname. Which I'm sure there wasn't.

Look! We tried to make something happen, it didn't work out, we're both stressed, and now we're having an argument about nothing!

Pause. She suddenly hugs him tight.

SARAH I miss you.

DANNY But I'm right here.

SARAH I'm right here too.

DANNY Let's get married.

SARAH Not until I sort out my digestive problems.

Light changes: she goes back with MARGARET.

MARGARET I've thought about it, and I've made a decision.

(Pause)

No.

SARAH *(disappointed)* Really?

MARGARET Your performance appraisal was excellent, your work overall has been exemplary. But to bring him up, I mean, conflict of interest anyone?

SARAH But he's my husband! And he's alone down there, with no job, with no-one!

MARGARET He'll only do something stupid. He's a liability.

MARGARET looks pained.

MARGARET The reality is, it can't be done. Sorry.

SARAH stares at MARGARET then gets up and walks out.

MARGARET Sarah. Sarah, hang on!

SCENE 16

SARAH walks out in the Martian atmosphere in a space suit. There's a thundering sound of something approaching that blows everything around it. She looks at the thing contemplatively, then turns back and looks at the Citadel. She is torn. She hesitates. A voice calls out to her. In response she shakes her head.

SARAH No. No, I can't.

Finally she turns around and goes back.

SCENE 17

A room. MARGARET enters, then SARAH.

MARGARET You've got the form?

SARAH reluctantly hands it to her. MARGARET checks that it's been signed.

SARAH You'll talk to him?

MARGARET You're right, I don't like him. But I told you: I changed my mind. For my sins.

SCENE 18

The Atom Room. DANNY walks in and can't see SARAH. He's dressed in his dressing gown.

DANNY Sarah? Sarah, I'm sorry.

He sits down, looking uncomfortable.

DANNY I know things have got a bit tense recently. I decided ...
You said you liked me ...

He gestures to his dressing-gown. He gets up and looks around.

DANNY I thought I'd – aah! –

– as the door opens and MARGARET walks in. DANNY is embarrassed. He covers himself up as much as he can.

MARGARET Hi Danny.

DANNY looks confused.

MARGARET Remember me? Margaret. Sarah's boss — she says modestly! — we met at the Christmas party last year.

DANNY Where's Sarah?

MARGARET She can't come.

DANNY Why?

MARGARET sits down.

MARGARET It's good actually, I wanted to touch base. Really sorry for the impromptu uh, nature of –

He furiously presses buttons on his palm, trying to change his clothing.

DANNY *(talking to his palm)* Business attire! Where's business attire?

MARGARET Oh, don't worry about that!

DANNY *(still pressing the buttons: to palm)* Haven't you even got dress casual?

MARGARET Just relax. I can see — I realise it's uh – But I just couldn't find the time anywhere else. As you can imagine – Mars!

She gestures for DANNY to sit. DANNY does so, uncomfortably

DANNY is deeply uncomfortable.

MARGARET Listen, sorry about your
'job'.
Look, let me explain a few things —

DANNY What the hell is the company — ?

MARGARET It wasn't our fault ... all this.
You know, sometimes I think ...

She gestures to outside.

MARGARET My parents were teenagers, yours were probably kids.
Nothing to do with us, is what I'm saying.
Floods, earthquakes, wars, meltdowns.
What are you gonna do?
But we've got ourselves out there.
We had to.
What we've gone and done, is we've said, 'bugger it!'
All took off, didn't it?
All happened very quickly.
It had to.
Once we said, 'Right! I'm not gonna let this ... (get me
down!)'
Humans. That's what we do, y'see.
We get out there.
But it comes at a cost.

He gets up.

DANNY I think it's best I get a lawyer before we resume.

He walks away, but his dressing-gown belt is caught on something and unravels, leaving his dressing-gown open and him in his boxers.

MARGARET You've um ...

She ties his belt back on for him.

MARGARET I think you should sit down: there have been quite a few changes, and —

DANNY What changes?

MARGARET I'm trying to tell you something here. The Earth ... the funding ...

DANNY You've done us over!

MARGARET More and more, funding is being filtered from terrestrial projects to off-world ones.

DANNY And that's ... good? I mean, is that what you want?

MARGARET Good? Want?

Let me tell you about life on Mars: the atmosphere's thin, the gravity's weak, we're constantly dealing with new forms of bacteria. It's a struggle not to lose bone mass. We've traded a dying planet for a dead one. How does that make any sense?

DANNY Well then, why?

MARGARET You ever heard the phrase, 'Too big to fail'?

DANNY This ... this is bullshit! I have to talk to Sarah.

MARGARET I know it's frustrating, but we have to be realistic. Things are shifting, outsourcing. Earth ... it's an indulgence.

DANNY Indulgence?

MARGARET A luxury.

DANNY And like all luxuries, we can't afford it?

MARGARET There is a finite amount of money, and the Mars programme is using a lot of resources. [x] The Earth is, well, dead.
From a financial standpoint –

DANNY Fuck you! Fuck this company!

MARGARET And because we're expanding up here, Sarah's contract has been renewed and extended. Indefinitely. We need her here.

DANNY And she's agreed to this?

Pause

DANNY I need to talk to her.

MARGARET She's moved on in her thinking.

DANNY So you came here to tell me that? Thought you'd humiliate me here, in my dressing gown?

He stands up.

MARGARET No. I came here to offer you a job! So fuck you!

Pause.

DANNY A ... a job?

MARGARET Sarah's been begging me for it. At first I said no, then I changed my mind.
But I think it's a bit late for all that, don't you?

DANNY doesn't know what to think.

MARGARET She's never coming back, Danny.
The reality is, you'll never see your wife again.

DANNY gets up and walks out.

SCENE 19

DANNY has his oxygen helmet on. He is walking through Wellington's streets. He stops and takes off his helmet. He deliberately takes one, then two, deep breaths. He falls to his knees and starts to suffocate. He gasps for air. He claws at his helmet and tries to put it back on. He manages to get his helmet back on, starts to regain his breath, struggles up and walks off.

While that is happening, SARAH's voice can simultaneously be heard. It's reproduced through an electronic signal. It sounds like an answer phone message. She sounds quite anxious and agitated.

SARAH

Danny? Are you there? Turn the Link Up on if you are. I've kinda ... there's something ... it'd just be good if we could talk right now, like, urgently. I talked to Margaret – she said your meeting didn't go ... it should've ... she said you were rude to her – turn on the Link-Up if you're there ... I had another talk with her, Danny. She'll reconsider. But you've got to be willing to ... you've got to meet her half-way. Danny, I want you to come up here!

Act 2

SCENE 20

SARAH is wandering around in a café version of the Atom Room, looking around, becoming frustrated. Outside is a view of the Martian landscape. She fumbles. She looks on various devices.

Finally DANNY enters, flustered.

SARAH What the hell?

DANNY Hey: I know! I know!

SARAH Where have you — ?

DANNY Nowhere!

SARAH So why — ?

DANNY I'm about to explain!

He turns to her, staring accusingly.

DANNY Retinal scan! I mean, what the hell?

SARAH Retinal scan?

DANNY Suddenly! Outta nowhere!

SARAH What ... oh! The new security protocols! Sorry.

DANNY I mean — !

SARAH Forgot to tell you. There — they've been having a bit of trouble — few problems with hackers.

DANNY I'm like, retinal scan? Really?

SARAH Couple of rooms got hacked. Transcripts of information.
More embarrassing than anything else, to be honest.

DANNY Go to punch in my code and it locks me out! This little voice
of some woman comes on and says, 'I'm sorry, your code
has been declined.'

SARAH Take a minute to breathe — look!

She shows him out the window to the Martian landscape.

DANNY 'And now' — it says, 'now, we require your retinal scan
information.'

SARAH Sit down: breathe from your diaphragm. Do you know how to
do that?

*She demonstrates by putting her hand on her diaphragm and gently tries to
guide his hand to do the same. He doesn't really notice, he's too tied up with
his story.*

DANNY She was very polite, this voice, but still. I had to call the
control room through the personator, and they said they'd
have to give me this, this 'temporary clearance', they called
it. They sounded angry, like I'd put them out!

SARAH I guess they've been getting a lot of it.

DANNY And suspicious. I might be a terrorist after all!

SARAH Well, you're here now. Look! Mars!

She once again shows him outside.

DANNY *(flat)* Looks like bad CGI.

She's slightly disappointed by his response.

SARAH The red sky, I still can't get over it.

DANNY It's getting bluer.

SARAH Well, it's still reddish.

DANNY Reddish-blue.

SARAH I think it's beautiful.

DANNY If you like CG.

DANNY sits down. She pushes a coffee to him.

SARAH Latte.

DANNY is agitated. He sips his coffee.

DANNY It's cold.

SARAH That's weird. Hang on.

She looks at her palm.

DANNY Doesn't matter.

He pushes it aside.

SARAH Listen, Margaret: hear me out —

DANNY Oh, Margaret! Yeah, Margaret. The funny thing is ... she said your contract has changed ... it's now open-ended.

SARAH takes a deep breath.

SARAH I wanted to tell you.

He takes her hand sincerely.

DANNY It's OK, I know ... I know you wouldn't have signed it if ... you probably didn't read it properly, right?

SARAH Listen —

SARAH No? I don't know?
 It's just ... normal.

DANNY Well, I find it weird.
 You get used to things and you don't notice anymore, and
 there they are.

SARAH Why did you take it off?

DANNY I just wanted to breathe air, real air.

SARAH *Contaminated* air!

DANNY I was literally only out there for a few seconds. I think it'll be
fine. To get proper radiation poisoning you'd need to stand
there for, like, half an hour.
You'd actually have to make an *effort* to get sick.
(*Less sure*) The doctor said you'd really have to make an
effort.

SARAH (*agitated*) Earth doctors!

Pause.

DANNY Turns out I breathed in some ions I shouldn't have, or
something. Radiation levels or something. And this'll be ...
I've got health insurance: God knows you need it these
days, so I'll be ...

SARAH looks absolutely horrified. She stands up and paces.

DANNY Nothing will happen to me. It's just ... they say never to take
off your helmet, but that's just health and safety bullshit ...
it's not as bad as —

She snaps around.

SARAH Do you know how many radioactive isotopes are in the air down there? Traces of strontium 137, caesium 90, I mean —

DANNY How was I supposed to know that?

SARAH How were you supposed to know not to kill yourself?
Is that what you're asking me?

Pause.

SARAH I called you, on the Link Up, to talk about it! Talk about Margaret, and and the offer ...

DANNY Huh?

SARAH It was one of our scheduled times. I called you and you weren't there!

DANNY Why couldn't you wait? You had to make this, this massive, like, life-changing decision without me? I mean, in the scheme of things, it's not a small one, is it?

SARAH You've got no idea how diplomatic I have to be —

DANNY Diplomatic?

SARAH Just to make it worth it! OK?
So don't go —

DANNY Well then don't let me keep you —

SARAH Come on!

DANNY ... from your diplomatic tasks, ambassador.

SARAH I didn't mean that!

DANNY You continue on forever, and I'll just stay here pissing away my life on a dead planet — 'cause that's the truth Sarah: the truth is, the Earth is dead!

SARAH I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE EARTH!

Pause. He is offended.

DANNY Good. Well. We strive for clarity.

SARAH Look, what matters about a planet is the people. I've got no-one left down there.

DANNY I'm still there.

SARAH I know, and that was my big problem!

DANNY Was?

She sits down, puts her head in her hands.

SARAH I was pleading, literally *pleading* —

DANNY Pleading?

SARAH You. Up here. And then you have to go and mess yourself up! Show you're weak!

DANNY Well, I ... weak?

She pulls herself together.

SARAH I've got work to do.

She turns and starts to walk away.

DANNY What if I didn't want to come to Mars? Did you think of that? What if I actually care about the planet we came from? Even if there's no point, even if it's dying and no one else gives a shit?

SARAH This isn't fair!

DANNY You want to know the truth? I took off my helmet because I thought it was all over for me.

SARAH What?

DANNY Far as I knew you'd decided to stay on Mars without me forever, and I had nothing. No job, you were gone. I had nothing. Margaret said that Earth is being – That everything's moving to Mars. The corporations ... Earth is dead, she told me. And that you knew this. So maybe I had a moment of weakness. Maybe I thought it was over for me.

SARAH Well –

DANNY So: what? So you were just gonna leave me down here? You were OK with that?

SARAH Of course I wasn't!

DANNY Then what?

SARAH I knew she'd –

DANNY You knew she'd offer me a job up there?

SARAH (*unsure*) Yeah.

DANNY So, before you signed the form to stay for good, you were absolutely sure she'd bring me up to Mars?

SARAH Yes! We made a deal!

DANNY But before that deal, before that, she offered you this, this promotion, and you didn't tell me about that, you forgot to tell me about that.

SARAH I didn't think it was important.

DANNY You didn't think the next step might be that she'd offer you a long-term contract?

SARAH I don't know! It all happened so quickly!

She sits down. She doesn't know how to say this.

SARAH A few weeks ago a freight ship arrived on the base. I was having a tough time and missing you. Margaret said there's room on the ship to return two people to Earth, or at least to one of the Hercules stations, and then we could get passage to Earth, so did anyone want to go? It'd essentially mean breaking your contract, but they were willing to make exceptions because they knew people were getting homesick and weren't any longer productive ...

DANNY OK.

SARAH So I put my hand up. I was missing you, and I was feeling like ... like they were putting the squeeze on me, making me choose. I was scared they were gonna take everything from me, the Atom Room, everything, if I stayed and played by their rules. And Margaret, she'd said no, at that point. Said you couldn't come up here. But then, as I was walking out to the ship, I, I looked back at the Citadel, and I thought about what you said — that I had to stand up for myself, and I thought about what I'd regret if I went back.

That sense of failure.

And what would I go back to?

I mean, you, of course, of course you, but what in the way of work?

Anything would be a demotion after Mars. People would look at me like I was ... well, from Mars: they wouldn't understand. 'She had the golden ticket and she walked

away?' They were calling out to me, and I really considered it, I did.

But I said no. I said no and I went back.

I went back to the Citadel. I thought, I'm gonna fight this out. I took your advice. It was your advice. They welcomed me back.

And they, they decided to extend my contract. They were 'impressed with my performance.' Maybe since I stood up to them, I don't know.

Pause.

DANNY You realise that was a test, right? They were testing you. And now they know they can make you do anything they want.

Pause.

DANNY I went to the supermarket the other day.

SARAH We don't have supermarkets at the Citadel.

DANNY Well, let me tell you: for the single shopper, they are the loneliest places on Earth. You look around and all you see are families and couples making decisions. And old ladies on their own, asking you to reach for things because you're tall. People making decisions. Chicken. Weather-controlled dome-range? It's cheaper to get factory. Polysynthetic beef, or go with the natural option? What is the natural option these days? Milk. Cloned or natural? Cloned is cheaper. And after I printed my groceries and walked home, I thought to myself, I'm one of those old ladies, shopping on my own.

SARAH That's just ...

DANNY Just what?

SARAH Where's the Danny I knew? The one with the jokes, the stupid sense of humour?
The one who –
The one who stopped me going to the moon because he wanted to be with me?
We were both so *impulsive*. We had this sense of ... that the place is mad, the world's dying, everything's ... but it's (you and me).
Now everything we do is ... *measured*. Planned out.
Scheduled.

DANNY And whose ... (fault is that?).

Pause.

DANNY We've come apart, we've come unstuck.

SARAH I think ... I don't think we should ... I don't think we know each other anymore.

DANNY What? Come on! Things have got in the way, but we ... We can (work through this!)

SARAH This has been building for a while.

DANNY What has?

SARAH holds herself together, appears stoic.

SARAH It'll Easier this way. Less painful. Than if we wait. Don't you think?

She starts to walk away.

DANNY Sarah! Sarah, come on!

She leaves. Lights down.

SCENE 21

SARAH's quarters at the citadel. SARAH comes storming in, sits on the bed. MARGARET comes in after her.

SARAH You can't come in here!

MARGARET What the hell was that?

SARAH These are my quarters!

MARGARET I mean, seriously! Half the time you seem like you're on, well ... (another planet)!

SARAH I've made a few mistakes.

MARGARET That's all we've had from you these past few weeks.
(Beat)
What's *happened*, Sarah?
I've given you ... I mean, the *opportunities* ...

SARAH I'm going through a bad time.

MARGARET We're all ... (going through a bad time). *Mars* is a bad time.

SARAH That's right! We never should've come here!
You go outside without a suit, your eyes would be sucked out of your head!
It *doesn't want* us!

Pause. MARGARET assumes it's about DANNY.

MARGARET You left *him*, didn't you?

SARAH What?

MARGARET The wordsmith. Soft skills.
And fair enough, too.

SARAH This isn't about him.

MARGARET I told you he'd do something stupid, and I was right.
I don't take any pleasure from that ...
(*Checks herself*)
I take a *tiny bit* of pleasure from that.

Pause.

MARGARET Look, don't listen to me. I'm just passing on my own
frustrations.
(*Beat*)
Don't even know why I'm getting married. I don't even
believe in it. My partner, her family's starting to make noises
about having a wedding in the atom room! I mean, the
resources required, the cost! We're facing power issues and
her mother wants a hundred bloody people in the room at
the same time?

(*Beat*)
Look, I know you're going through what you're ... but all the
this erratic behaviour, it's (not a good look) ... if you're
gonna sit in a board meeting and accuse someone of being
the kind of person who probably farts during sex, you're
walking a fine line, is all I'm saying.

SARAH (*small*) It was a joke.

MARGARET I think everyone started imagining the smell, and then the
whole room seemed to stink of someone's bad digestion
while performing intimate acts.

SARAH I'm sorry.

MARGARET That and all the (other things you've been doing) ... you're making mistakes, Sarah. We can't afford it.
(*Pause*)
I'm gonna have to give you some time out.

SARAH What?

MARGARET I'm gonna have to suspend you from your duties.
You need some time to ...
Frankly, you're making me look bad. Making the *team* look bad.

SARAH What am I supposed to do?

MARGARET looks around the room.

MARGARET We've got games, books, simulators.

SARAH The atom room?

MARGARET You can use it, but *he* cant.
He's lost his job. No job, no access rights.

SARAH That's alright. Don't wanna see him anyway. (*But of course she does*).
I'll go on safaris or something.
Bet there's a safari function.
Where you can go on your own.

MARGARET Well then ...

Pause.

MARGARET Look, it won't be long – as soon as you're (back to being yourself again) – you'll be back in the fold.

SARAH (*decisively*) Telescope.

MARGARET Huh?

SARAH I want a telescope. Old-fashioned one.

MARGARET Why?

SARAH shrugs.

SARAH They're fun.
Look through them.
They're fun to look through.

MARGARET *(confused)* OK, we can print you a telescope.

SARAH Edwardian.
I want an Edwardian one.

MARGARET looks confused.

MARGARET Alright.

Pause.

MARGARET I'm sorry, Sarah, I don't want to have to ... (suspend you).
But you're – (making mistakes).
I'm sorry.

SCENE 22

Lights up.

DANNY is sitting by himself, looking like he's been there for days. He presses something on his hand and a TV/film screen comes on. He starts watching it mindlessly. He drinks from a beer. He scans through a lot of screens. (He is in the atom room, but this shouldn't immediately be obvious).

SARAH enters. He turns off the screens.

SARAH *(stern)* I've got something to tell you.

DANNY Hmm?

SARAH *(suddenly changing to an ebullient tone)* I'm pregnant!

DANNY takes a moment to take that in.

DANNY Really?

She nods sweetly.

SARAH All those times we tried. Worked out in the end.

DANNY See? I told you it would.

She smiles and they hug. This moment lingers. Then he presses his palm in a circular gesture. She gets up in a sort of robotic way and walks out. He presses his palm again and she enters. When she sees him she smiles. He smiles and gestures to his knee. She comes and sits on it.

SARAH I've got something to show you.

DANNY What's that?

She pulls out a pregnancy test and shows him.

DANNY Is this what I — ?

She nods.

DANNY That's amazing!

SARAH All those times we tried. Worth it in the end.

He presses something on his hand.

SARAH I'm pregnant. All those times we tried ... I think it was the robe. I can never turn you down when you're wearing it.

He presses a button to correct her.

SARAH I think it was the dressing-gown. I can never turn you down when you're wearing it.

DANNY And you were gonna go off to Mars!

SARAH What a stupid idea!

They kiss.

Lights down. Mechanical sound to indicate a new scene being set up in the atom room. Flickering screens.

DANNY and SARAH are having a drink.

DANNY Hold still.

DANNY looks at SARAH presses his temple and winks. When he does, a camera shutter sound happens.

SARAH Did it work?

DANNY presses his temple, then his palm.

DANNY Yes! Ha!

SARAH Let me see.

He presses a button on his hand, making a swiping movement to show he's 'sending' the photo to her. She looks through her visual implants. She laughs.

DANNY You look radiant.

Pause.

DANNY Way in the future —

SARAH I don't think about the future.

DANNY Nonetheless, in the future I'm gonna tell you about how I saw this beautiful woman sitting alone. I breathed into the detoxinator —

DANNY processes that.

SARAH You sauntered over, and said hello.

DANNY And then we went out for a drink, and a few more drinks,
and we're gonna laugh. It'll be our first memory.

SARAH We'll tell it to our kids.

DANNY looks surprised.

SARAH I'm pregnant!

DANNY Really?
What about Mars?

SARAH Oh, forget about that! That was a stupid idea.

They hug.

He presses a button. She takes a moment, then walks out.

Lights change to indicate time passing.

*SARAH re-enters. He looks expectant. But this time she's angry. He presses
his hand but nothing happens.*

DANNY You're looking radiant there. Have you got anything to tell
me?

She stands, fuming.

DANNY Maybe about your ... pregna —

SARAH (*much more stern*) You've got really good at this.

DANNY What?

He starts playing around with settings.

SARAH At first I thought you didn't have much chance with using the
system properly, but ...

DANNY *(speaks into his hand)* Uh ... delete? Reformat? ... Where's voice control?

He looks at SARAH.

DANNY What's going — ?

SARAH presses something on the wall (pulls a lever or inserts a device into a machine) and the whole room makes a powering-down noise. All goes black.

Lights come up, and now there's a grid projected on the floor, but everything else is basic.

DANNY Have I broken it?

SARAH It's me! Sarah!

DANNY tries desperately to press his hand, but nothing works.

SARAH You're not getting it. It's me!

DANNY *Actual* you?

SARAH *Actual* me! I've turned off your editing privileges. It's in PictureBasic.

DANNY PictureBasic?

SARAH Simple mode without any coding for graphics. Makes us harder to track.

DANNY Who's tracking us?

She starts opening curtains or doing something to make the place more presentable. But she is also monitoring the place, looking for bugging devices or cameras, perhaps checking with a device.

SARAH You were supposed to have your user privileges revoked.

DANNY Hmm? Oh yeah, I hacked it.
I used a site called Virtual Pirate. It's quite easy to download
a hack code.
Then you just get yourself a Neural Privacy Code and ...

SARAH This is actually serious.
And now you've roped me into it ...

DANNY You didn't have to come in.

She wanders around.

SARAH Ridiculous.

DANNY What's ridiculous?

SARAH How long have you been in here?

DANNY (*embarrassed*) Couple ... weeks ... months ...

SARAH Two months?! And What have you been doing? Let me
guess: real player scenarios?

DANNY I got hooked on being a standup comedian for a while.
You're in the Albert Hall. Or Madison Square Garden. You
can key it in so they laugh at anything you say, no matter
how lame.
I had this bit, it goes, 'How come in science fiction films,
when we're on Earth we're in, I dunno, Wellington: it's really
specific, and we're speaking English, but on other planets
with civilisations it's just "Vulcan" and they speak Vulcan and
they're all Vulcans and they've got one city on the entire
planet called Vulcan? Like, what if our planet was just shown
as "Earth" and we were all "Earthians" who spoke "Earth"? Is
that, like, Planetism?'
(*She doesn't laugh. He tries to explain it*)
Planetism, like racism ... ?

(Beat)

And you said I'd lost my sense of humour!

(Pause)

Anyway, my best jokes were about marriage.

SARAH And this, this, this air-headed housewife pleasure-bot you've made that's s'posed to be me ... I don't even know whether to be insulted or not.

DANNY She's you but without all the sciency bits.

SARAH That bothers me quite a bit more than I can say.

DANNY Well, that's how it started. But then she got all complicated.

SARAH You mean realistic?

DANNY She started telling me what to do, controlling the scenarios. Might as well have been actual you.

SARAH Thanks.

DANNY I can't even control a simulation of you.

SARAH I didn't know it was about control.

DANNY How do I know which is the real you anyway? Is there one?

SARAH Look, we don't have much time.

DANNY *(not really listening)* I did this bit at the London Palladium, it goes, 'My wife hates me so much she can't even stand to see me in a fantasy world! I had to make a digital version of her just so she'd talk to me.'

(Beat)

Yeah, it's not that funny.

SARAH is quite nervous.

SARAH You have to stop all this before anyone notices.

She sits down.

SARAH I've been cautioned, I've been ... suspended.

DANNY What? What for?

SARAH Kinda' complicated.

DANNY One minute you're the golden child ...

SARAH I haven't been ... (myself lately). With all this, it's ... I haven't been pulling my weight. We had a meeting where I ... (*She doesn't want to go there*) Let's just say I said something unpleasant about one of the board members.

DANNY What did you – (say)?

She changes the subject.

SARAH Look, I came in here to say it's got to stop.

DANNY Is that what Margaret told you?

SARAH If I'm found out —

DANNY I'm having fun in here. It's all I've got.

SARAH If I'm found to be here I could — (lose my job!) I know *you've* got nothing to lose, but —

DANNY (I've got nothing to lose) Because of your company, and Mars, and the fact that Earth is (dying) —

SARAH Oh, here we go. That's why I've been dreading coming in here.

Look, it's a drain on the power, it's embarrassing, and it's making me look even worse than I already do!

DANNY looks at her angrily. She feels it. Every time she talks and he doesn't respond, she feels the need to say something more.

SARAH Well, there's only so much power for all the atom rooms.
 (Beat)
 They weren't supposed to be used like this.
 (Beat)
 People are gonna notice. Even with the blocker.
 (Beat)
 Listen, I can't have another ... I can't have one more (upset).
 You have no ... (idea how much trouble I'm in).
 (Beat)
 They weren't built just so you could just ... (please yourself).
 It's an embarrassment, if I'm honest.

DANNY I suppose my death will be an embarrassment too?

SARAH What?

DANNY Yeah, I was just trying to have some fun before ... (I die).

She is deeply saddened but trying to keep calm.

SARAH Radiation poisoning?

Pause. He nods.

SARAH *(concerned)* You don't know how much I — (love you/care about you/worry about you)

He cuts her off before she can say it.

DANNY Met a woman, actually. At the waiting room in the hospital.
 So we're ...
 So she's put me on a vegan diet. She's a vegan. She
 reckons I can heal naturally.

Pause. SARAH doesn't answer, but looks upset.

DANNY Well, you did it first.

SARAH Did what?

DANNY Cheated on me.

SARAH What?

DANNY You fell in love with a planet.

She doesn't respond, but looks angry.

DANNY I ... I was depressed ... I needed ... something.

Pause. She changes tone. Sits down again.

SARAH I have to go.
 What's her name?
 I don't want to know.

DANNY Rachel.

SARAH Rachel? *Rachel* is her name?

DANNY What's wrong with 'Rachel'?

SARAH Nothing. It's fine. It's normal. I don't need to know.

DANNY Sarah's normal. Sarah's a normal name.

Pause.

SARAH I don't care anyway. How long?

DANNY Just since I got sick.

SARAH Have you ...?

DANNY shrugs.

SARAH (wryly) Not too sick for that, then.

DANNY I ...

Pause.

SARAH (with suppressed rage) What does Rachel do?

DANNY Nutritionist.

She nods.

SARAH (again suppressing rage) Food ... very important ...

DANNY She's got a degree in it.

SARAH Very healthy.

She gets up.

DANNY Hey! You're the one who left me!

SARAH turns to him with a penetrating stare.

SARAH I can't be here.
Does she fart?

DANNY What?

SARAH I just wondered if maybe you need someone who farts, you know, because in the room, I don't. Maybe you need someone who farts in real life?

DANNY Actually, you kind of have a point.

SARAH What?

DANNY I do need someone in real life. I'm kinda' sick of living in a fantasy world.

SARAH Fantasy world? You've spent the last three weeks with a computer-generated version of me! How does Rachel feel about that?

DANNY (*embarrassed*) I've got some healing to do.

SARAH does not look impressed.

DANNY I'm going through a transitional period and it's a very confusing time.

Still no comment.

DANNY (*Pathetic*) She's supportive of that.

SARAH You know, here, here's an idea: you give me all of the house, I own most of it anyway, and I let you and Rachel stay there and print tofu and pay me rent. You think she'll be supportive of that?

Pause. DANNY is hurt.

DANNY What about all your things?

SARAH Sell them.

DANNY The antique collection of mp3 players?

SARAH Sell them.

DANNY Your telescope?
The one I –
Anniversary, the –
The one from the antique shop in Greytown?

SARAH Probably get a really good price for it.

DANNY But that's ... that'll leave me with —

SARAH Maybe Rachel can help you out?

DANNY Come on!

SARAH Should've stayed on Earth. Then we could've both sat around feeling sorry for ourselves instead of one of us actually making a difference!

DANNY (*rueful*) What we gave up. A life. Kids –

SARAH You think I don't – (think about that)?

DANNY While I was running these simulations, what I was actually doing –

SARAH Running simulations?

DANNY What I was actually doing was running an experiment.

SARAH That's a grand way of putting it.

DANNY I realised something.
You were *glad* you couldn't get pregnant.

SARAH What?

DANNY Because then you'd have had a reason, a real reason, to stay. You never even *intended* to come back.

An awkward silence that goes on uncomfortably long. SARAH stares at him.

DANNY So ... so, yeah.

SARAH The dream. It was true.

DANNY What?

SARAH That you left me. Except I didn't realise it'd be the other way round. I had to get in there first.

DANNY Sarah –

SARAH In the dream I have a baby.

DANNY I can't listen to this –

SARAH I have this baby. And it's born but it's not normal. There's something wrong with it. The doctors tell me there's something — they don't know what's wrong but there's something wrong. I give birth to it and they show it to me, and it's ... the thing is *deformed*, it's ... the head looks like it's split in two ... split right down the middle ... one eye is missing, it's just, it's grotesque if I'm being ... and then you see it and you run off. You cop one look at it and ... and then I can't get hold of you. I don't know where you've gone, you've just gone, you're not there. I try to ring you but I can't get the numbers on the Link-Up to work, and the baby's crying but it's disgusting. I can't bring myself to feed it 'cause it looks so hideous. It drives me insane with its crying but I can't do anything. I go over to it and start clawing its flesh off, tearing it apart. I tear it into pieces but it won't stop crying. And then I wake up and there's no baby and I can hear my breathing. I can hear it.

(Pause)

And then it happened, in reality I mean. Not the baby, but the part where you ...

You're *not there*.

It had this air of ... it felt *familiar*. It felt like my dream.

They stare at each other in silence.

Breaking the silence, MARGARET storms in, in a spacesuit. They both look confused. She takes off her helmet.

MARGARET *(going at quite a clip)* So: the mother-in-law said she's not having a wedding in the Atom Room, she's demanding to come up to Mars and do it in person now. She wouldn't even pay for the fuel to drive over to our place for lunch, but it's

OK for Envirocorp to pay for all her cronies to piss it up on Mars? I feel like telling her there's no gin on Mars, that'd put her off. Mind you, I wouldn't mind seeing her on the Martian surface, as long as someone can persuade her not to wear a helmet, that'd be at least one problem solved. My partner doesn't know what to do, the mother's on her back all the time, so I'm trying to console her at the same time as deal with board meetings and management issues, so I think it's fair to say that you shouldn't pressure me further as I'm FEELING QUITE STRESSED OUT.

(To SARAH)

I hope you realise this will not bode well. Here's me trying to convince the board that your behaviour has just been because of stress and you're a valuable member of the team and here you are colluding with Soft Skills –

SARAH Not *colluding*.

DANNY Soft skills?

She looks around.

MARGARET And well done, trying to hide the signal.
PictureBasic.

SARAH Look, I just had to —

MARGARET Look, my first priority is the peace of mind of my employees
– but (it's not helped when you do things like this)

DANNY She might be your employee but she's my wife!

SARAH *(to DANNY)* Not anymore.

He turns to her.

DANNY What?

SARAH *(totally unconvincing)* Or I won't be, soon.
After the divorce.

DANNY *(hurt)* Divorce?

SARAH Well, if you're with Miss Nutrition –

MARGARET Listen! Now look ... the only way we're going to make this
work –

DANNY Fuck this! *(To MARGARET)* And fuck you!

MARGARET Alright, fine.
I've given you enough chances.
(To SARAH) I'm having him removed — and you: you're off
Engineering A.

SARAH Margaret, come on –

MARGARET *(to DANNY)* So here's a silver lining: maybe she'll be back
home with you, if you're still talking to each other.

SARAH What?

MARGARET I'm seriously considering sending you home.

SARAH Really?

MARGARET It's the only –

DANNY *(to MARGARET)* Don't!

They both turn to face DANNY.

MARGARET Don't what?

DANNY takes a pause.

DANNY *(he signals to the room, but he means Mars)* This is what
matters to her. I've just got to accept that.

SARAH Danny –

DANNY *(to SARAH)* When you first went, you pretended you didn't want to go, but we both knew that was bullshit and we played out the little scene anyway. And you left the planet knowing that, knowing — 'cause you're a scientist after all — knowing what fate you were leaving me with, and that's OK, that's alright: I let you, I *told* you to go. I wanted you to be happy, 'cause God knows you never would be down on Earth.

MARGARET Exactly.

SARAH Margaret!

DANNY And that's OK. I can learn to deal with that.
(To MARGARET) But she came here to stop me using the room. So don't make her suffer 'cause of me.

SARAH *(touched)* Danny, it's ... *(not true.)*

She faces him.

SARAH I would steal a ship and fly back to Earth by myself if you asked me to!

MARGARET *(sarcastic)* I don't think you'll need to at this rate —

SARAH *(to MARGARET)* Shut up!
(To DANNY) You wanna know? You wanna know how much — *(I care about you)?*

DANNY *(trying to be calming)* Hey, it's alright. You don't need this —

SARAH This what?

DANNY Pretence ... how devoted you are ... I think we're a bit *(past that)* —

SARAH It was me!

Beat.

DANNY (*confused*) What?

SARAH is now embarrassed to mention this with MARGARET in the room.

SARAH (*sheepish*) Your little simulations, your experiments. I turned off your editing privileges and –

DANNY I know.

SARAH No, not just that last time. A few times. I started coming in and pretending –

DANNY Pretending to be ... a bot? Pretending to be a pretend version of yourself?

Pause.

SARAH And then I couldn't stop.
At first I came in to have a go at you. Tell you to stop abusing the resources: it was a bad look and I was already in trouble.
But then I started to ... I kind of ... *liked* it.
You were ... *sweet* again.
Only way we could have *fun* ...
Without, y'know, all the bullshit.
Your stupid standup comedy, the bad jokes.
That was the version of you I (fell in love with) –
He got lost. I missed him, and I ... and there he was.
(*Pause*)
So yeah.
That's what I did.

DANNY can't take it in.

SARAH

You deliberately breathed in *radioactive toxins*.

(With all the affection she can muster: she might as well be saying, 'I love you')

You are such a *fucking idiot!*

She hugs him tight.

SCENE 23

DANNY and SARAH on the Link-Up

SARAH

You can do what you like with the house.

I ... the other week. I didn't want it to go that way.

You can have all the money from the sale. I don't care.

I just — I was frustrated, and angry, and ...

The telescope? The anniversary present? A kid? Well I hope he doesn't wreck it.

She should just buy him a cheap one. Stupid to buy an expensive antique telescope —

I mean, it's an antique!

Just for some kid to wreck? Don't sell it to her.

A waiting room? What for?

Danny!

Oh, Danny!

I want to be there!

I don't need any extra money, you can have it.

What?

DANNY

I got someone interested in the telescope the other day, your telescope.

She said — this was a middle aged woman — she said her son might be keen on it. He's about ten, her son.

VOICE: 457.

I — hang on —

Oh — we're OK.

So, I'm in a waiting room.

Waiting for the uh ... a doctor.

My ah ... thing, the ... it's got worse.

They're looking at ... they're thinking ... surgery ... they think it ... I've got some cancer, so ... they don't know if it's connected, but

(*quiet*) I ... it's ... I'm actually quite ... scared.

I've done a will, and so if I ... you'll find that I've left you everything ... so that'll solve that problem ...

I did a will, 'cause you wanted it all sorted out —

I'm sure he'll treasure it, this kid. He seemed like he was really into it. And I've got no use for it.

By the way, the girlfriend. She's not here. That is to say, she never was. She's a fiction. A lie, that is. Fantasy. I just thought ... it'd be easier. The whole thing about her being a vegan. It just seemed to fit. I wouldn't be able to deal with that much tofu, not really.

He was a weird kid. He could name all the planets and their moons and the

Danny that's pathetic!

But, you know, in a sweet way.

Sweet pathetic

I can't stand the thought of you going through this all alone.

'Make you grow'. I always hated your philosophising.

Danny, hold on!

DANNY goes.

SARAH reaches out, but there's nothing to touch.

Lights down.

SCENE 24

Lights up. SARAH and MARGARET. SARAH is looking depressed.

rate of their orbits. Sort of reminded me of you.

And vegetable smoothies. They would fucking do me in.

I was thinking ... something we ... something I said ... 'these things,' I said ... 'make you grow.' but they don't make you grow. They just make you sadder.

(Beat)

It's alright. It sharpens things for you, you know? Like, there's no longer any reason for me not to say that I wish all this hadn't happened and I miss you oh God I miss you more than I can say and this whole thing's bullshit and it's bullshit and –

VOICE: 458.

Ah! That's me.

I should've come to Mars. I shouldn't have been a child.

Listen, I –

I ... I've got to ... I'll talk to you soon.

MARGARET You know the reason we chose you? I mean, you've got skills, you're a genius, but a lot of people have got those. You had someone.

 If someone who's got someone is willing to come up here, the wisdom goes, they must really want it. But it doesn't always work out.

(Pause) You've got some decisions to make, that much is *(clear)* ... Lawrence says you need counselling. Stress at work and with the home life, that sort of thing. I think, what does Lawrence know? He's never had anything to worry about. He came up here without any connections. Without anything. What does he know about longing? So you have to decide. Break your contract, go back down there. I can't speak to your prospects, is all I'm saying.

SARAH What about the atom room?

Pause.

MARGARET As an employer you worry about long-distance relationships, what do you do? You go, 'OK, let's give them a virtual space. Keep them happy.' Why? People's spiritual life? Keeping people grounded? No: to keep them productive. But what if the rooms aren't productive? You shut them down. Management decided they were a failed experiment. You know the issues we've had with power. Couldn't have been foreseen.

SARAH So, no more Atom Rooms?

MARGARET But what does it mean to say something? Realistically, they say a thing like 'the rooms have all been shut down', but of course there's always one ready to go. What if a dignitary visits or something? Businessman with a lot of money to

spend, wants to see what the colonies have to offer. What?
We just say no? Of course not.

SARAH continues to look blank.

MARGARET Sarah. I'm offering you one last chance to use the room.

SARAH perks up.

SARAH You — ?

MARGARET It's being treated, but it's operational. Tomorrow we'll beam a temporary code into your neurals. It'll last a week. And if you're caught, I disavow all knowledge.

Pause.

SARAH Why?

MARGARET Because I don't want to be in the shit?

SARAH No, I mean why are you doing this?

Long pause.

MARGARET The wedding's off. So that's my latest ... (development). I can't help seeing that gin-swilling bitch mother of hers in the background of this picture somewhere. My partner — well, ex-partner — lives on Pembroke road on Wellington Island. Mairangi line gets you there straight from the Aqualiner station on Te Aro island. It's a bugger of a thing, always breaking down. If the tracks aren't buckling from extreme heatwaves, the bloody things get an acid-wash from the rain. *(She says this flatly, matter-of-fact, almost devoid of emotion, but her deep sorrow seeps through)*
You probably didn't know this, but we had — we've got — two kids.
I would talk to my kids on the Link-Up. I'd see my partner

and kids in the Atom Room.

Two: boy's eight, girl's five. Then, just recently, just the other day my ex, she said — she *announced* — it wasn't going to work anymore, this *arrangement*. She said it compromises the children.

She said the child counsellor told her it confuses them too much, the idea that Other Mummy's here but she's not here. So we agreed — which means that she decided — that the only way to protect them was to make a clean break.

Other Mummy isn't around anymore.

She figures they're young enough that I can be cut loose, to float away.

I'll just become a distant ... (memory).

(Pause)

Atom Rooms were shutting down anyway, so I suppose the timing was good.

(Pause, changing back to business-as-usual mode)

We're discussing the hydraulic bridge in an hour. I don't know why people need it, but Lawrence is up my arse about it.

(She walks out. As she leaves)

You know what he's like, so have your notes sorted out and make me look good, and maybe you'll get to keep your job.

SARAH remains, looking stunned.

SCENE 25

The field on Mount Kau Kau where SARAH and DANNY see the stars. They are in the Atom Room, though this isn't immediately obvious. SARAH and DANNY are walking along, hand-in-hand, in their visors. SARAH takes hers off.

SARAH It's OK, really.

DANNY Really?

SARAH Look – I'm breathing!

He takes off his visor, a little sheepishly.

DANNY Of course you are! We both are. Silly.
It looks ... ruined. The way it really is.
(Looks around)
I like it.

They stand by a railing and look up at the stars.

DANNY You remember what you said to me when we first came up here? You told me that story about your parents buying you a trip on a liner, and I thought you were gonna say you thought the Earth looked magical or something. But no: you thought, 'Fuck you, Earth!'

SARAH Yeah.

DANNY I always found that quite funny. Just the way you phrased it. 'Fuck you, Earth!'

SARAH laughs, but her sorrow is close to the surface. She puts her arms around DANNY.

DANNY I miss the smell of your neck.

SARAH I miss ... I'm sorry things got twisted around, and I miss – I don't know.
You were s'posed to be the word guy.
That was your job.
Anyway, don't say it all like that ...

DANNY Like what?

SARAH Past tense.

He looks contemplative.

DANNY How did you swing it?

SARAH I didn't. Margaret offered.

DANNY Really?

SARAH Out of the blue.

Pause.

DANNY So you and her are getting on alright?

SARAH Seem to be.

DANNY I mean, I need to know you'll be alright –

SARAH (*sorrowful*) Don't put it like that.
Like it's too late.

DANNY It's always too late.

(Pause)

It wasn't hard for me to convince the doctors. You pay them enough and they'll do anything.

I almost looked forward to it! Looking forward to an operation!

(Pause)

Sarah, I guess I need to say ... I might not survive this –

SARAH hushes him.

SARAH Hey!

She taps her hand for a moment.

DANNY Please, let me just ... I'm the word guy, remember?

(Beat)

Right now, in some place called 'reality', I'm in a hospital, out to it, and they're drilling into my body, trying to cut out death.

Weirdly, it feels relaxing. We spend our whole lives terrified of it, and now (it's coming) –
I feel serene almost, and, and here I am with you, and —

SARAH I don't know what to do! Maybe I can get back to Earth?

DANNY Sarah —

SARAH I want to be there with you! I can leave, come home,
Margaret said –

DANNY Listen to me.

He takes her by the hand and stares into her eyes.

DANNY This is the moment.

It's all we've got.

(Long pause)

I guess ... I guess what I'm trying to say is ... let's get married.

SARAH Yeah. Yeah, I think we should.

She laughs sadly. They look deeply at each other and kiss. Then they turn to look at the stars. The lights dim, so that we can see star patterns all over the stage, or maybe the aurora, and the two of them in the middle, silhouetted.