

## English translation of podcast, *El Quinto Planeta (Fifth Planet)*, by David Auburn

NARRATOR (ERIK ZAVALA). La Troupe Radio Theatre presents two short plays by David Auburn, adapted for radio and directed by Fredric Dannen. *Fifth Planet*, the play you are about to hear in a new Spanish translation, is performed by Marcela Brondo and Sebastian Vallin. The other play, *Two Dads*, in its original English version, is performed by Richard Fink and Paul Voudouris, and can be heard on this podcast channel.

David Auburn is best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Proof*, which ran for two and a half years on Broadway. While studying political science at the University of Chicago, Auburn wrote and acted in comedy sketches for a group called Off-Off Campus. Applying the techniques he had learned composing sketches, Auburn tried his hand at writing plays, submitted two of them to the Juilliard School in New York, and was accepted for a playwriting residency.

Auburn remains a devotee of the short play, which he says equates to a full-length play the way a short story equates to a novel. Regardless of a play's length, Auburn says, it must feel complete. In *Two Dads*, two men in vacation clothes sitting on deck chairs relate their troubled relationships with their son and daughter, respectively, looking for solace where no answers can be found.

*Fifth Planet*, which Auburn wrote during his Juilliard residency, is a one-act play that charts the bumpy friendship of two astronomers, one amateur and one professional, over the course of a year. The play has 37 scenes, some of them very short. Each scene takes place on a different night on the same hilltop.

We present Marcela Brondo and Sebastian Vallin, in *Fifth Planet*, by David Auburn.

*(Musical introduction: "Space Travel," by Bernard Herrmann)*

Scene 1: The sun sets, and the sky above the hill fills with stars. Mike enters. He wears a workman's jumpsuit, keys dangling from his belt. He takes a beer out of his pocket, pops it open, sits, drinks, watches the sky. Scene 2: Another night. Mike now has a telescope on a tripod. He looks through it. Veronica enters, crossing Mike's line of sight.

MIKE. Hello.

VERONICA. Sorry.

Scene 3.

VERONICA (*calling*) I'm on my way to work.

MIKE. Thank you!

Scene 4.

VERONICA (*laughs*).

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. Nothing.

MIKE (*offended*) What?

Scene 5.

MIKE. Hey. Wait.

VERONICA. What?

MIKE. Come on.

VERONICA. What?

MIKE. Before. A week, two weeks ago. You were laughing. You laughed.

VERONICA. What do you do with that?

MIKE. Look at the sky.

VERONICA. At what?

MIKE. Stars.

VERONICA. Which ones?

MIKE. See that big orange star?

VERONICA. Uh huh.

MIKE. That's Jupiter.

VERONICA. Jupiter is a *planet*.

MIKE. I know. It looks like a star from here. I meant—

VERONICA. It looks like a star because you've got a little telescope.

Scene 6.

VERONICA. And that's not Jupiter.

Scene 7.

MIKE. Let's see. Jupiter. Fifth planet from the sun. It is the largest and most massive planet in the solar system.

Okay...where is it...? (*He can't find it. Growls in frustration.*) It's the largest and most massive fucking planet in the solar system.

Scene 8.

VERONICA. May I?

MIKE. Well. All right.

VERONICA. Thanks. Jupiter?

MIKE. Mm-hm.

VERONICA. All right, let me just— That's a little better. Yup. Tighten that. This is a lot like my first telescope, which I bought when I was thirteen. Saturn's rings, mountains on the moon, Jupiter of course, the binary in Orion—I did all the teen faves. There, look.

MIKE. Hey!

VERONICA. Good night.

Scene 9.

VERONICA. Jupiter. Fifth planet from the sun. Both the largest and most massive of the planets. Ancient astronomers had no knowledge of the relative sizes of the planets, of course. But they were lucky and they picked the right name: Jupiter. King of the gods. It is the only planet other than the earth known to have a magnetic field. The violent, surging atmosphere, of which the famous "Red Spot"—big enough to hold a hundred earths—is the most prominent feature, is composed primarily of methane, ammonia, and hydrogen. Galileo was the first to see Jupiter's four largest moons: Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto. He was using one of the very first telescopes, which, however, was slightly more sophisticated than the one you have. Io, Europa, Ganymede, Callisto. Beautiful names! The first objects discovered by a human using a telescope! Oh, this is interesting, and you probably don't know it: Sixty-five years later. A Danish astronomer called Ole Romer noticed a discrepancy between the predicted times of the moons' eclipses and the observed times. And he explained the discrepancy by—guesses? No. Okay, I'll tell you: by positing a

finite velocity for the propagation of light! Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto led us straight to the most fundamental fact in science!

MIKE. You know a lot about Jupiter.

VERONICA. Mm-hm.

MIKE. You work up at the observatory.

VERONICA. Yes. We have a very big telescope.

Scene 10.

VERONICA. How is it?

MIKE. Fine. I don't need another lecture.

VERONICA. I don't want to have to give you one.

MIKE. I usually come here to be alone for a few hours after work. I don't mean to be—

VERONICA. I used to come here for the same thing before work.

MIKE. Uh huh. Well you've got a whole observatory. This is all I have. (*Beat. Then:*) I can't see a fucking thing through this.

VERONICA. It's cloudy tonight. It's usually fairly difficult to see any stars under those conditions. It's one of those things you pick up in grad school.

Scene 11.

VERONICA. People say, what do you do on rainy nights? When it's overcast, and you can't see anything. (*She laughs.*) But observation's just a small part of what we do. Rainy nights are the best nights, Dr. Ayers says. Rainy nights are when the thinking gets done. Dr. Ayers says that rainy nights are the most fun.

Scene 12.

VERONICA. Hello.

MIKE. Hello.

VERONICA. I haven't seen you for a few nights.

MIKE. It's been raining.

VERONICA. Good. You're doing well.

Scene 13.

VERONICA. Where's your telescope?

MIKE. Home. It's getting dark later now. I can't stay out all night.

VERONICA. Oh yes. That's called the "summer."

Scene 14.

MIKE. I had a good time last night. Kiki—that's my wife—Kiki and I had dinner on the couch and watched her favorite movie. She's probably seen it a hundred times. It's an old movie from the forties called *Trigger Happy*, and it's about these ranchers in Nevada during the Gold Rush who hike up this mountain where they think there's going to be gold that they can mine. That's about the first third of the film right there, getting up the mountain and meeting the characters. There's the head cowboy or rancher, I can't remember who he is. But his wife is Esther Williams, and there's an old prospector character who's Lionel Barrymore and a kid played by Mickey Rooney, and the cook on the wagon is Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. (I wouldn't remember all this except we have seen this movie about a hundred times.) So they get to the top of the mountain and there's a blizzard and everyone freezes their asses off. And, there's no gold. The picture gets

kind of slow there. But then they go over the ridge and they find a natural amphitheater that's been carved into the rock by a glacier. So it's perfect for putting on shows. Everyone has an act. The cowboy—*[remembering]* Joel McCrea! He's Joel McCrea—does rope tricks and Mickey Rooney tells jokes and sings, and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson tap dances, and the climax of the movie is an avalanche and the amphitheater is completely filled with snow. Then the sun comes out and it all melts. So Esther Williams—*pop!* Under her buckskins she's got her swimsuit on, and she and this all-girl rodeo troupe they met going up the hill, they dive in in formation. Kiki loves it.

Scene 15.

MIKE. There's Kiki. She fell asleep in front of the television and now there's no signal. She's going to sleep till morning. It's clear and I can stay out all night.

Scene 16.

VERONICA. How's Jupiter?

MIKE. Fine.

VERONICA. You're finding it okay.

MIKE. Yeah. No problems. Is that what you do? Jupiter? Or—

VERONICA. Oh, yes. But, uh, actually we're very excited: we launched a probe seven years ago. Dr. Ayers and I have been consulting on it. And it will be orbiting Jupiter in a matter of weeks. So it's almost as though, what's the point of looking into a telescope now...

MIKE. Right.

VERONICA. When after seven years we'll actually be in the Jovian system.

MIKE. Seven years. Wow.

VERONICA. It takes time to get there. Even light takes about twenty-eight minutes to get here from Jupiter.

MIKE. Huh.

VERONICA. Dr. Ayers will be in charge of the monitoring team. He's brilliant.

MIKE. Well you must be brilliant too.

VERONICA. Yes. *(Beat.)* I'm Dr. Babcock.

MIKE. Yes.

VERONICA. We've been working together for years. We have a very close working relationship. It's rare.

MIKE. That sounds good.

VERONICA. He's really very brilliant.

Scene 17.

VERONICA. You can sit on the earth looking at something until the universe implodes but it's not necessarily going to get you anywhere. You've got to get up there. “Up,” well. Out. Unmanned exploration as a practical concept has been around at least since Tombaugh. (He discovered Pluto.) But Doctor Ayers—Hans—really rammed this one through. Championed it. *(Laughs.)* I remember the first night we—well, Dr. Ayers and I were on and we had had a run of nights of the most optimal viewing conditions you can imagine, it must have lasted three weeks, and we were there together every night. And of course we had plenty of time to talk. Dr. Ayers would say, “Get me the Windex, Dr. Babcock, I've fogged up the eyepiece again.” And I'd go get it. Dr. Ayers breathes very hard. He's a very intense person. *(Faster.)* And one night, I remember it was about four A.M. on February 19 eleven years ago, I said, I was just casually talking, you know, I was just rambling and I said something on the order of, “an unmanned Jovian orbital observation device could be in system within the decade.” Or words to that effect. And I didn't really think Dr. Ayers was paying attention but before I knew it, we were in Houston. The next week. And we were off and running.

Scene 18.

MIKE. How do you know if you've seen something new?

VERONICA. Ha. The holy grail.

MIKE. There are thousands of things up there.

VERONICA. Thousands?

MIKE. Millions.

VERONICA. You can't count the number of objects in the universe. Even asking the question is silly.

MIKE. But that you can see.

VERONICA. That I can see or that you can see?

MIKE. Okay, me.

VERONICA. You could sit here for thirty years and perhaps begin to approach counting the number of objects visible to you with this telescope. It would require a degree of dedication.

MIKE. How would you know if you've seen something that no one has ever seen before?

VERONICA. Don't worry.

MIKE. I'm not "worried."

VERONICA. You can't possibly. A serious observation, the kind that produces a new categorizable object, let's say a comet, would take you at least a year. You have to have a pretty good idea what it is to keep track of it. And you have to track it to know what it really is.

MIKE. So it's impossible.

VERONICA. Not impossible. It happens. But you have to have graduate school.

Scene 19.

MIKE. Jupiter. Fifth planet from the sun. Largest and most massive. I am tracking it. I've got a book and I'm testing myself on where it will appear next. Kiki. My wife. She turns out all the lights in the house so she can watch TV sitting in the blue glow. Kiki looks blue from here. Jupiter is orange.

Scene 20.

MIKE. Doctor.

VERONICA. I can't talk.

Scene 21.

MIKE. Haven't seen you for a while.

VERONICA. Don't get me started.

MIKE. Okay.

VERONICA. For one thing I had to go in the last two days, which I hate.

MIKE. Why?

VERONICA. Ha-ha. In this business (it's not a business) in this *profession* we depend on a lot of people—there's a large support staff and they're not always very knowledgeable. They're often very stupid and they have responsibility for some extraordinarily expensive equipment, and if someone lets dust fall on a fifty-thousand-dollar lens because they left a transom open, there is trouble.

MIKE. Your lenses got dirty.

VERONICA. Some stupid nobody, one of the useless goons who shuffle around the grounds all day— I've got to get to work.

Scene 22.

VERONICA. Hello.

MIKE. I clean the lens room.

VERONICA. What?

MIKE. "Useless goons."

VERONICA. What? (*Beat.*) I didn't recognize you.

Scene 23.

MIKE. You know what we call you? We call you the vein heads.

VERONICA. Dr. Ayers said you weren't at work today.

MIKE. I took the day off.

VERONICA. That's grounds for dismissal.

MIKE. I know my job.

VERONICA. We're not vain.

MIKE. What? No, not "vain." Vein! Like you have such gigantic heads you can see the pulsating veins.

VERONICA. Did you think that up?

MIKE. No, of course not.

VERONICA. Do you know what you did?

MIKE. I didn't do a thing. I do my job correctly.

VERONICA. We have to have the lens reground.

MIKE. Look, I have to sign in and out of there just like anybody else.

VERONICA. You have ways. Sneak in and out, special keys. All your keys. You know how to get into places:  
that's your job.

MIKE. My job? What are you talking about? Look, I understand lenses.

VERONICA. No you don't.

MIKE. I understand how to—

VERONICA. *You?*

MIKE. I know their value just as well as you or Dr. Ayers.

VERONICA. It's amusing, because the whole point is that you don't stand a chance of ever understanding what happens when you damage precision equipment! Look at your own telescope!

MIKE. Look at you! Look at what's right in front of you! I walk around that place all day and you see me at night and you don't even know me.

VERONICA. You're usually not wearing your suit. Well how else am I supposed to know you? Up here on a hill.

In the dark. Dr. Ayers—we all rely on people like you to maintain—

MIKE (*Scornful*) Dr. Ayers.

VERONICA. You don't know Dr. Ayers.

MIKE. You're never there in the daytime. I am. He never leaves. He's got a sleeping bag up there.

VERONICA. He's very dedicated.

MIKE. He's very fat.

VERONICA. Brilliance and dedication. He's running simulations all day long.

MIKE. Believe me, he's not working.

VERONICA. Believe *me*—

MIKE. He's *eating*. Taking naps. He's got video games on the mainframe.

VERONICA. Listen to me. You don't get the kind of results he gets without work.

MIKE. He's a joke. They call him—

VERONICA. I don't care what "they" call him. You janitor. You amateur.

MIKE. Go to work.

VERONICA. Someone else will be assigned to the lens room.

Scene 24. *Veronica and Mike speak directly to the audience, not to one another.*

VERONICA. This life does not appeal to many people.

MIKE. A lot of the best astronomy is done by people with backyard telescopes like mine.

VERONICA. In school my friends would tell me they could not understand who would want to stay up all night and sleep all day. They said, how can you live your whole life alone, in the dark?

MIKE. The comets that hit Jupiter—they were discovered by a guy like me who just worked on the sky. I mean, he worked every night. I can't get out every night.

VERONICA. But of course you're not living your whole life in the dark at all. Every night I see more light out there than you see in a lifetime of early mornings and lazy afternoons. It's just farther away.

MIKE. This guy's famous: him and his wife. They were a team and they were very serious. They put in a lot of time together, and that shows you what's possible with a certain amount of dedication. They're famous and they named the comet after them.

VERONICA. And you're not "alone." The myth of solitary scientific achievement is one of the most pernicious misapprehensions laymen have. I mean, Einstein at a desk in the patent office—that's their whole image. Even on the level of archetypes there's the Curies. Why doesn't anyone ever talk about them? They worked side by side for years and won Nobels and were married and in love although he was trampled by a horse and she died of radium poisoning.

MIKE. I think about spending more time out here. "More time." Kiki would... I mean, she gets impatient as it is. It's great for her to have her interest in film, because everybody needs to have something else to think about. For example, I come up here. I've been thinking more and more about the kind of time you need to really see anything. It's serious. You need a year just to look at the whole sky.

VERONICA. I meet all kinds of people! We all work together and there's a lot of joking and a lot of fun. There are the analysis guys, the optics guys, the guys who write the grants. I meet journalists and administrators... custodial, uh, technicians...

MIKE. A year. Light travels five trillion miles in a year. I'm going nowhere.

VERONICA. We all work together. I'm pleased to be able to tell you now officially that the probe has entered the Jupiter system proper. It has traveled four hundred million miles.

*(Beat.)*

MIKE. I lost my job.

Scene 25.

VERONICA. Hello.

MIKE. Hello.

VERONICA. I haven't seen you for a while.

MIKE. No.

VERONICA. How are you doing?

MIKE. I was fired.

VERONICA. Yes, I know. I wanted to talk to you about it.

MIKE. Dr. Ayers gave me the slip. He said that you both knew I was responsible for the lenses—

VERONICA. No!

MIKE. Even though I told you that I was not.

VERONICA. He flew into a rage. There was nothing I could do. He's very sensitive about his equipment and it's difficult for him to—

MIKE. Even though we were friends.

VERONICA. You and Dr. Ayers were friends?

MIKE. You and me.

VERONICA. Oh. Yes.

Scene 26.

VERONICA. Hello. I've been travelling.

MIKE. Huh.

VERONICA. Houston. And then Washington. The probe is now officially orbiting Jupiter.

MIKE. I know.

VERONICA. You do? Where did you get that journal?

MIKE. I *am* allowed to purchase them.

VERONICA. No, I mean. I'm just surprised.

MIKE. Surprised that I would read this.

VERONICA. Yes.

MIKE. Because you didn't think I could understand it.

VERONICA. Yes.

MIKE. Well I don't... Not much of it. I don't have the math.

VERONICA. I wouldn't think so.

MIKE. But I'm working on it. I've had a lot of time.

VERONICA. Good. (*Beat.*) If you ever want to...*discuss*...anything you've read, or are wondering about...

MIKE. Thanks.

VERONICA. Just...

MIKE. Thanks.

VERONICA. I didn't realize we were friends.

MIKE. Yes.

VERONICA (*Awkward*) I have some friends. And they're not very much like you.

MIKE. Do go on.

VERONICA (*Quickly*) I see them at conferences, you know. Or in Houston this week. I always have some interesting discussions when I get back to school for a seminar...

MIKE. Or Dr. Ayers.

VERONICA. Yes we are friends.

MIKE. Then get me my job back.

VERONICA. We are hardly that close. I'm sorry.

Scene 27.

MIKE. Around the middle of *Trigger Happy*, there's a scene where Esther Williams and Joel McCrea first find the natural rock amphitheater and it's at night and a big moon comes up. So their heads are silhouetted against the moon. And Esther Williams says, "Look at that moon, Shep." And Joel McCrea says, "Great big beautiful moon." And Esther Williams says, "Do you think we could ever get there, Shep?" Joel McCrea: "I just don't know, honey. I reckon the moon is mighty far away." "How far away do you suppose?" "I really couldn't say, sugar." Right. Then Esther Williams says, "Farther than San Francisky?" It is the stupidest fucking line. Joel McCrea kind of chuckles huh huh huh. "I don't know." You don't know?! Yes the moon is farther away than fucking San Francisky! Jesus Christ, man, I mean I know you were born on the back of a horse but come on! Stupid stupid stupid.

Scene 28.

VERONICA. I brought you something. Here.

MIKE. Doctor.

VERONICA. Call me Veronica.

MIKE. Veronica.



VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. I'm surprised.

VERONICA. Well. Don't be.

MIKE. A Bible.

VERONICA. Do you like it?

MIKE. Do I like the Bible?

VERONICA. It's all they had.

MIKE. Where did you go?

VERONICA. They uh. I got it when we went to the White House.

MIKE. The White House.

VERONICA. There was a reception for us when the probe got to Jupiter. They've got roomfuls of them. People give them to the President, foreign leaders...they're just lying around. I wanted to get you something nicer but I didn't have time. I feel bad.

MIKE. You stole a Bible from the White House, why should you feel bad?

VERONICA. I don't know much about gifts. I don't know what people like.

MIKE. It's okay.

VERONICA. I didn't know what you would want.

MIKE. I want my job back.

VERONICA. I have to respect Dr. Ayers' judgment. He knows what he is doing. He knows what's best for the program. He's brilliant...

MIKE. He's an idiot.

VERONICA. You don't know, Mike. You just don't know. You're not there.

MIKE. I was there during the days, when you weren't there. He was in your files. In your notes.

VERONICA. My notes?

MIKE. The notebooks with your name on them. Dr. Babcock. I put them on the shelves every morning.

VERONICA. My notes. They're not *my* notes. I'm taking notes for the team. They represent common conclusions, data we've all gathered.

MIKE. Okay.

VERONICA. They're as much Dr. Ayers' as they are mine.

MIKE. *Okay.*

VERONICA. If anything, I'm just the medium. I track our observations. We're both in the room. I'm just writing.

MIKE. Yes.

VERONICA. Sometimes I make a few extremely tentative hypotheses. Tentative. Tentative.

MIKE. I understand.

VERONICA. No you don't. What do you know about methodology? You're an amateur. You don't get anything. There's nothing for you but the looking. You don't know anything, you just look.

MIKE. I look at you.

VERONICA. What do you mean?

MIKE. This isn't very powerful, this telescope. Jupiter. Mountains on the moon. And you and Dr. Ayres in the lens room on the fourth floor on cloudy nights. They don't even let dust in there.

VERONICA. You son of a bitch.

MIKE. I need my job back.

VERONICA. No.

MIKE. You know how the lenses got damaged.

VERONICA. How dare you watch me?

MIKE. You have to track something to know what it is.

VERONICA. How dare you?

MIKE. Get me my job back.

VERONICA. I thought we were friends.

MIKE. Ha! Friends! I have *friends*. Friends are people. You know people? They have lives. They tell jokes.

VERONICA. You can't—

MIKE. You have no friends. You have colleagues and you have Dr. Ayers. Friends help each other.

VERONICA. I helped you! You never would have found Jupiter if I hadn't helped you. Not finding Jupiter is like not being able to tie your shoes.

MIKE. I know it's dark and lonely up there.

VERONICA. It is not lonely. It is not dark!

MIKE. But Dr. Ayers!

VERONICA. Dr. Ayers is the finest person I know in my field.

MIKE. I knew if I looked long enough I'd see something new.

VERONICA. You'll never see anything! You don't know me! You have no job and you don't know anything! I've explored the solar system. I've traveled farther than you ever will. I—

MIKE. Get off my hill.

VERONICA. This is not your hill!

MIKE. Get off my hill!

Scene 29.

VERONICA. Dr. Ayers told me he loved me on June 11th of this year. That day the probe that we built together photographed Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto and the pictures were full color and gorgeous. We were in Houston and we saw them develop, line by line, on the giant screens and he held my hand. The observatory was far away, his wife was far away. It was three in the afternoon and the sun was hot and shining bright. The sun is a star that is 93 million miles away, so close it can burn you. Of course my notebooks are my own. My conclusions are tentative and occasionally speculative and they're sometimes daring and they're private. And of course I do most of the work. The President shook both our hands but only Dr. Ayers got photographed. When I can't stand it, I think about the pictures made by my machine floating half a billion miles away. My pictures appearing on the screen, and me standing watching in that room in Texas at three in the afternoon.

Scene 30.

MIKE. I got a new telescope. It's better. It cost a lot of money but... The nights are good and long again. Of course it's cold.

Scene 31.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. It's me. Why are you sleeping out here?

MIKE. What do you want? What's wrong?

VERONICA. We lost the probe.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. We lost the Jupiter probe! Did you hear me? We lost the probe!

MIKE. How?

VERONICA. It's a piece of shit.

MIKE. Come on.

VERONICA. It's a piece of shit! That's how! Did you hear me! It was a piece of shit! Dr. Ayers had been signing off on the design review checks for six years when he hadn't even been looking at them so consequently he failed to notice that the probe was a piece of shit!

MIKE. Jesus. I'm sorry. Do you know what happened?

VERONICA. It got to the Jovian system and it—. Oh God.

MIKE. Veronica. What happened? What happened?

VERONICA. It bumped into it.

MIKE. Bumped into Jupiter?

VERONICA. Yes.

MIKE. How can it “bump into” Jupiter?

VERONICA. What do you mean how can it bump into Jupiter! Jupiter is not only the largest but also the most massive fucking planet in the solar system!

MIKE. Okay! Okay!

VERONICA. I thought you knew that!

MIKE. I did, you’re right. You’re right.

VERONICA. It was supposed to be a close approach, but Dr. Ayers—oh God. (*Beat.*) It’s cold up here. I’m sorry to wake you.

MIKE. It’s okay. I’m sorry.

VERONICA. Yes. I just thought you’d like to know.

## Scene 32.

VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. You look frozen. I have coffee.

MIKE. I’m okay.

VERONICA. I’ve got a thermos. Here. Take this. Drink it.

MIKE. All right.

VERONICA. It’s very clear tonight.

MIKE. Why do you think I’m up here?

VERONICA. I know.

MIKE. This is hot.

VERONICA. Sip it. Do you want some vodka?

MIKE. Yeah?

VERONICA. Yes. Do you want some in your coffee?

MIKE. Sure.

(*Beat.*)

VERONICA. They fired me too.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. Dr. Ayers.

MIKE. Veronica.

VERONICA. They needed somebody to blame, you know, for the probe. And my name was all over the project.

MIKE. But it wasn’t your fault.

VERONICA. No.

MIKE. You can prove it.

VERONICA. No. They took everything. All my work, sealed off. I can’t even get my notebooks back.

MIKE. I can’t believe it.

VERONICA. I know. Neither can I. (*Beat.*) Orion, winter constellation, you know it?

MIKE. “The hunter.”

VERONICA. Right. The brightest star is Betelgeuse, the red giant. It was my favorite star when I was a kid. See the stars in the belt? One of them, look to the left, can you see it?

MIKE. I think so.

VERONICA. It’s a binary. A binary system. Two stars—

MIKE. Two stars in orbit around each other.

VERONICA. Good. Most people can’t see both. They’re too close together and one is very faint. American Indians had a test for vision. If you could pick out the binary in Orion, if you could see both stars then your

vision was perfect and you could be a hunter. It's just a coincidence, hunter, hunter. Two completely different cultures and everything. Can you see both?

MIKE. Yes.

VERONICA. Me too.

Scene 33.

VERONICA (*Softly.*) Mike. Mike.

MIKE (*Wakes up.*)

VERONICA. What are you doing up here?

MIKE. Observing. I'm waiting for the planets.

VERONICA. Mike, it's cold. It's supposed to get down to freezing tonight.

MIKE. I know. That's called "winter."

(*Beat.*)

VERONICA. Your coat doesn't look very warm.

MIKE. I'm okay.

VERONICA. Maybe you should go home.

MIKE. I'm okay.

VERONICA. Go home, Mike. I'll help you. Come on.

MIKE. No. It's okay.

VERONICA. Come on. I want to help.

MIKE. I don't need help.

Scene 34.

VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. Uh?

VERONICA. Wake up.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. I know about Kiki.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. She's gone, right? You haven't been together in a while. Months, I think.

MIKE. She's away on a trip.

VERONICA. I'm very sorry.

MIKE. A little vacation. She likes to watch movies at night. I come up here.

VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. Good night.

VERONICA. She packed everything. She wasn't going on a trip.

MIKE. How do you know?

VERONICA. Oh for God's sake, Mike. We had a forty-seven-inch mirror on the hill. I can count eyelashes.

MIKE. You were spying?

VERONICA. Did you think we watched Jupiter all night long? No. I'm not proud of it. It was something Dr. Ayers enjoyed.

MIKE. How can you do that?

VERONICA. Is that a technical question or ethical?

MIKE. Technical.

VERONICA. Please, Mike. I thought you understood the kind of power we have. That mirror was polished in a cave in Kentucky for nine years. Has someone in town been drinking? We knew because we can see swollen capillaries in an eyeball five miles away.

MIKE. She packed everything. She had ten boxes.

VERONICA. Sixteen. She shipped six UPS a few nights before she left.

MIKE. How many nights were you watching me?

VERONICA. A few. I was worried.

MIKE. There's the room. There's the depression she made in the couch. She said I was never home and that she didn't love me. And that I was an unemployed janitor and that I didn't love her either. She said that I hadn't even thought about her, she was pretty sure, for about a year. Yep. It'll be a year in a month.

### Scene 35.

VERONICA. Mike? Are you up here? Hello.

MIKE. Hey! Sorry, I scare you?

VERONICA. I saw all your stuff here but I couldn't find you. I was—.

MIKE. I've got something for you.

VERONICA. Package. Thanks. *(Beat.)* My notebooks!

MIKE. I didn't know what you would like.

VERONICA. How did you—?

MIKE. I know how to get into places. You were right. My keys. In this case, duplicates of my keys that I made right after Dr. Ayers canned me.

VERONICA. Mike. Do you know what's in these? Do you?

MIKE. Yes.

### Scene 36.

MIKE. Well hello.

VERONICA. Hello.

MIKE. How's work?

VERONICA. I want to thank you.

MIKE. Don't.

VERONICA. I thought I wouldn't be working for a long time. You were the only one who could have helped.

MIKE. You did the work. I remembered what you had been working on. I've done enough on my own to know how much you did, and what was in your books. And I knew something about Dr. Ayers' work habits.

VERONICA. You impressed the investigating commission.

MIKE. Well...that wasn't what it was about.

VERONICA. No.

MIKE. How is Dr. Ayers?

VERONICA. I guess he's pretty comfortable. It's a minimum security prison, so he can play tennis, you know, get outside.

MIKE. Oh, good.

VERONICA. We really don't communicate any more.

MIKE. Good. Hey, listen. I owe you too. A few months ago, you know, when it was cold. The vodka, the coffee and everything. It was nice of you.

VERONICA. It was nothing. Are you working?

MIKE. Yeah. Different cleaning gig, you know, but it's good.

VERONICA. Good.

MIKE. So?

VERONICA. So.

MIKE. So this research that you're doing. I'm wondering...

VERONICA. Yes?

MIKE. I'd like to ask you about it because I've been working on something. From some things you said and some things I've been working on on my own. Here. I want to show you something. This happened months ago. Almost a year ago. I noticed an object. And I've been tracking it.

VERONICA. You have?

MIKE. Yes! And here, see I took observations every night, after I got serious, you know, and I kept notes, here they are...

VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. I know. I plotted the motion. I tracked it. Charts... And I think I'm working toward something new, you know. Something original. Remember I asked you about how—

VERONICA. Yes, yes!

MIKE. So I've been meaning to ask you about it. Consult. I was going to look you up but now here you are.

VERONICA. Yes.

MIKE. Veronica, take a look at this. I don't know what to make of it. I'm pretty excited, I admit.

VERONICA. Well, let me take a look at it. Mike, you did a beautiful job with these observations. This looks professional.

MIKE. Thanks. There were some nights when I couldn't get an accurate reading, you know, for whatever reason. But that's par for the course, like you said, there are cloudy nights, you learn that.

VERONICA. Uh huh. Now you've got...

MIKE. It's continued here.

VERONICA. Right. (*Beat*)

MIKE. So?

VERONICA. Oh.

MIKE. Uh huh?

VERONICA. Oh God.

MIKE. So? What have I got?

VERONICA. Mike.

MIKE. What? Tell me.

VERONICA. Mike, this is comet L-11-46-B.

MIKE. What?

VERONICA. L-11-46-B. Visible from earth every seventeen years. Discovered in 1911.

MIKE. L-11-46-B. Are you sure?

VERONICA. Yes. It's an old favorite. I'm sorry.

MIKE. Shit.

VERONICA. These are beautiful observations.

MIKE. I'm an idiot. I'm an idiot!

VERONICA. Mike, you're not. These observations are textbook. They're graduate level and you did it by yourself. With your telescope. They're just not new. And that's fine. Something new only happens once in a great while. This is important work. You have to track something to know what it is. Now you really know what it is.

MIKE. I worked on that for a year.

VERONICA. It's okay. You'll work on something new this year. It's a whole new year. I'll help you. We'll do something together.

MIKE. No. That's all right. Thanks.

VERONICA. I want to.

Scene 37.

VERONICA. Giovanni Schiaparelli. I like that name. He was an Italian astronomer. He was the first to notice the valleys and canyons carved into the surface of Mars. In 1877 he sent the news of his discovery all around the world: "*Canali*": Channels. But when the news got to America someone forgot to translate from the

Italian and everyone thought that *canals* had been discovered on the surface of the red planet. Canals? Water; irrigation; farming: Civilization. Cities made of glass. You can see how the argument went. People got excited. And my predecessors in this profession spent years beating their heads against the wall trying to correct the impression. There are no canals on Mars. And no Martians. There's not even any water, for God's sake. Well. Now. In my lifetime we have sent spacecraft to Mars. And there is beginning to be some good evidence to suggest that many millions of years ago there was water there. But there is no life on Mars and there probably never was. But there were oceans and ice and rivers. So who knows? You'll have to forgive me for going on in a speculative vein. But it is important to maintain enough flexibility to revise an opinion, and then to revise the revision. We are learning all the time. And it takes a while to figure some things out.

END OF PLAY