

Denier

A play in two acts

by Tom Moran

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Setting

Time: The present or recent past, March through the following September

Place: Various sites around Boston, Mass.:

A science conference

JILLIAN CARTER's home

The roof of JILLIAN CARTER's office building

JILLIAN CARTER's office

JAMES BRADLEY's office

An auditorium

Most sets can coexist on stage throughout the play, and wherever possible, scene changes can be accomplished through lighting cues.

Characters

JILLIAN CARTER, 40's. A Professor of Astronomy at Everett University near Boston.

MARIE CARTER, 18, JILLIAN's daughter. A high school senior, then a freshman at M.I.T.

MARTIN CROSS, 40's. A work colleague of JILLIAN's. British.

JAMES BRADLEY, 60's-70's. A distinguished physicist and former head of the National Academy of Sciences.

LITTLE GIRL, 8-12. A vision of a little girl who appears to JILLIAN. Wears blue dress with yellow flowers.

DEBATE MODERATOR (V.O.)

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(March. A science conference. JILLIAN speaks from behind a podium stage right, holding a remote and gesturing to an unseen powerpoint. MARTIN, BRADLEY and MARIE all sit in the front row of the audience.)

JILLIAN

Now on this final chart, the x-axis is air temperature, and the y-axis is solar variability. Can you see that? Font's a little small, sorry. (Murmurs of assent.) Good. There's a pretty strong correlation there: in our field measurements, sunspots had a major impact on local temperatures, up to two degrees Celsius during extreme events. But that, as noted, did not show up in any of our models.

So the big question is, how much do sunspots really figure into the temperature equation. The answer is, we're working on it. The other Doctor Carter and I have a more extensive follow-up project in the works that should put these issues to rest. (She clicks the remote.) And that's where we are. Questions?

(MARTIN raises his hand. JILLIAN calls on him. He stands.)

JILLIAN

Doctor Cross?

MARTIN

When can we expect to see the results of this follow-up research?

JILLIAN

We're still trying to secure funding for that. (Smiles.) You know anybody?

MARTIN

Right. And has your research partner made any progress?

JILLIAN

(snippy)

Not to my knowledge, but I'm expecting an update from him soon. Anyone else?

(MARTIN sits. BRADLEY raises his hand.)

JILLIAN

Yes. You, sir?

BRADLEY

(stands)

Have you considered the possible influence of solar variability on historic temperature trends? Like the Little Ice Age or the Medieval Warming Period?

JILLIAN

No, we'd need more data to make that kind of extrapolation. It's a fascinating topic, though.

BRADLEY

Thank you, ma'am.

JILLIAN

Anybody else? (looking toward back of room) Okay, looks like they're sending up the clown with the broom. Thanks for coming, and please find me with any further questions.

(JILLIAN packs up her notes and leaves the podium. BRADLEY approaches her.)

BRADLEY

Doctor Carter. My name is James Bradley. Can I please have a moment of your time?

JILLIAN

I don't autograph body parts.

BRADLEY

Pardon me?

JILLIAN

It was a joke. What can I do for you?

BRADLEY

Can you tell me more about the follow-up project you're hoping to undertake?

JILLIAN

Sure. Our conclusions so far are based on limited data.

BRADLEY

How limited?

JILLIAN

There's a single solar monitoring station on the roof of my office. Bolometer, time-lapse heliograph, and a couple of other doodads. It was built fifteen years ago by the lowest bidder, so there's your first drawback.

BRADLEY

I see.

JILLIAN

Second, the other Doctor Carter and I only tracked it for six months. So not even an annual cycle.

BRADLEY

But you came to some very promising conclusions.

JILLIAN

I'm not sure "promising" is the right word. "Unexpected," certainly. We didn't anticipate so much variability in sunspot activity. It might explain a lot of atmospheric phenomena we've been attributing all over the place.

BRADLEY

I got that impression, yes.

JILLIAN

But. To say anything definitive, we would need to undertake a larger and longer study.

BRADLEY

Who is we?

JILLIAN

I hope to involve Doctor Brett Carter as well.

BRADLEY

Forgive me, but I thought that your, um, partnership had dissolved.

JILLIAN

Where did you hear that?

BRADLEY

The research community here is smaller than you might think.

JILLIAN

Ah. That's temporary. He'll be in touch soon.

BRADLEY

How large a project are you hoping to undertake?

JILLIAN

Two years. Four sites at different latitudes across North America. New equipment, a couple of postdocs, a gaggle of grad students, a few dozen sherpas, and maybe a helper monkey. A macaque if possible, gibbons always want co-author credit. (Pause.) Joke. Do you know anybody?

(BRADLEY hands her a business card.)

BRADLEY

I am anybody. Do you think you could generate interim results faster than that?

JILLIAN

I could certainly write updates on my progress.

BRADLEY

And what about examining historic temperature trends?

JILLIAN

For that I'd need another postdoc and at least two more macaques.

BRADLEY

I'm afraid all we have are some lemurs, doctor. And some undergrads. In fact they're all sharing a cage. (Pause.) That was a joke. This isn't: my organization is very interested in your work. If you could put together a proposal and a budget and forward it to this email (points at card), I can pass it along to my superiors.

JILLIAN

May I ask what your scientific interest in historic sunspot activity is?

BRADLEY

We want to shed more light on the drivers behind climate change.

JILLIAN

You're not a political organization, are you?

BRADLEY

We are after the truth. If that rattles the walls, so be it.

JILLIAN

I see. Thank you.

BRADLEY

(smiles warmly)

Keep up the good work, Doctor.

(They shake hands. BRADLEY exits.

JILLIAN looks at the card as MARTIN approaches. She displays it to him.)

JILLIAN

"The Northeast Research Institute." Oh, there's something on the back. "Wisdom will prevail over prevailing wisdom." Huh.

MARTIN

Catchy. Do you think they only study Northeast? What if I want to look into a Southwest? Or an East-Central?

JILLIAN

Pretty sure you're boned.

MARTIN

More's the pity. Nice job out there.

JILLIAN

What'd you bring Brett up for?

MARTIN

It was a fair question. And I thought this way you'd maybe actually answer it.

JILLIAN

I did answer it. If anyone had funded him I would have heard about it.

MARTIN

Probably.

JILLIAN

And he and I would have a better shot at finding some money if we could work together on this.

MARTIN

He's your ex-husband, Jillian. Doesn't that sort of preclude the whole "working together" concept?

JILLIAN

(icy)

No, he's not. And therefore, it doesn't preclude a damn thing. Watch your step, Martin. Or what is it you say? Mind the gap?

MARTIN

('hands off' gesture)

Okay. Okay.

JILLIAN

Are you heading to the poster session?

MARTIN

I was planning on getting pleasantly sidetracked in the hotel pub first. Care to join?

JILLIAN

Marie is with me, I can't leave her here while I go carouse with the likes of you. And I've got to go peddle my wares (holds up card.)

MARTIN

Why is your daughter here?

JILLIAN

She gets extra credit for attending. (sotto voce) She needs it.

MARTIN

Has she heard from anyone yet?

JILLIAN

UMass let her in. She got into Everett, too, which is good, free tuition. She's still waiting on a couple of the biggies, but I'm not holding my breath.

MARTIN

Really? I always remembered her as a model student.

JILLIAN

She's smarter than I was at seventeen. Maybe smarter than I am at forty-four. Somehow it just doesn't show up in the end results. A steady A-minus-slash-B-plus average does not pry open the gates of M.I.T or Harvard.

MARTIN

Could you afford Harvard anyway?

JILLIAN

I could afford a Harvard sweatshirt. And a tote bag.
(Pause.) No, just the sweatshirt. Oh, there she is. (to MARIE) Hey Electron! Over here! (to MARTIN) I call her that because she's always so negative.

MARIE

(sarcastic)

You know I love that name, Mom. (Sees MARTIN) Hi Martin! I didn't know you were in town.

JILLIAN

He just took a job in the department.

MARTIN

Research professor. Non-tenure track.

MARIE

Ouch. How do you live with yourself?

MARTIN

Tai chi, strong whiskey and Patrick O'Brian novels.

JILLIAN

Sounds like a roadmap to success. Marie, the car is parked in, like, New Hampshire. I'll go bring it around.

(JILLIAN exits.)

MARIE

So did you ask her out yet?

MARTIN

Beg pardon?

MARIE

C'mon, Martin. It's pretty obvious there's a thing there.

MARTIN

Wow. You've grown up a lot in two years, haven't you?

MARIE

It's all the HGH. Now back to you hitting on my mother.

MARTIN

This conversation is going strange places.

MARIE

Keep at it! She's totally available!

MARTIN

Not according to her.

MARIE

Oh, right.

MARTIN

How's your dad?

MARIE

Still a dick. How's my mom?

MARTIN

Still hung up on a dick.

MARIE

Sounds painful.

MARTIN

It's painful to watch.

MARIE

I'm sorry, Martin. She's deluded. She still thinks he's going to see the error of his ways and come slithering back.

MARTIN

Is he?

MARIE

Would you?

MARTIN

If I were him? Yes.

MARIE

Really? If you were living in Hilo with the stunningly hot undergrad you ran off with?

MARTIN

Yes.

MARIE

I don't believe you.

MARTIN

I went that route already.

MARIE

Wait, what? For real?

MARTIN

If it please the court, I'd like to enter a plea of 'midlife crisis.' Don't tell your mother.

MARIE

Relax, I don't tell her anything. So that's over?

MARTIN

Long ago. And never again. I've reached the peculiar point where "stimulation" and "intellectual stimulation" are synonyms.

MARIE

Then Mom is right up your alley.

MARTIN

She does have a very sexy brain.

MARIE

Downright voluptuous.

MARTIN

Ahem. And how are you doing these days? I barely recognize you.

MARIE

(shrugs)

Fine, I guess. Mom says I have an acute case of senioritis.

MARTIN

That's a bit early-onset, isn't it?

MARIE

Well, I caught it as a freshman. I think high school just isn't my preferred milieu.

MARTIN

What's so bad about it?

MARIE

You ever feel like everything you do is just a colossal waste of time?

MARTIN

No.

MARIE

That's because you're not in high school. Listen, please come by the house sometime. Mom won't say it, but I'm sure she'd love to see more of you. She really needs a man around.

MARTIN

That's not a very progressive thing to say.

MARIE

Let me rephrase that. She needs a warm body around. Right now her best friends are me and a solar monitor. And she gets along better with the monitor.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(A few days later. The roof of JILLIAN's building. She is dressed for winter. JILLIAN tinkers with a large monitoring station, talking to it.)

JILLIAN

Now what the hell is wrong with your calibration? I swear I just adjusted that last week. (Shakes head.) I could have given up on you years ago. I should have. You know how much work it takes to keep you operating? All for that mystical utopian time when I have the money to actually track data again.

You keep pulling this crap and I'll turn you over to a student. And not a grad student either. An undergrad. Maybe a freshman. A philo major. That's right. That ought to teach you a lesson. She can recite to you from Kierkegaard while I'm on sabbatical sipping from a mangosteen or something-

(During this speech, the LITTLE GIRL enters from the audience. JILLIAN spots her and studies her for a few moments.)

JILLIAN(cont.)

Hello? (No response.) Little girl? (No response.)

(LITTLE GIRL walks to the edge of the stage. She looks at JILLIAN, then turns her gaze upwards, over the heads of the audience, and looks thoughtful.

JILLIAN(cont.)

What are you doing up here? Where are your parents?

(JILLIAN slowly approaches the LITTLE GIRL. As she nears her, the girl notices her and runs offstage.)

JILLIAN(cont.)

Hey! Wait!

(She looks in the direction the girl was looking and sees nothing.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

What are you looking for?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(A few days later. JILLIAN's office.
JILLIAN sits behind her computer.
MARTIN sits on the corner of her desk.)

MARTIN

He offered you how much?!

JILLIAN

Half a million. Over two years. Part of which is some kind
of personal stipend.

MARTIN

Can they do that?

JILLIAN

I think so. And I'm sure as hell gonna let 'em.

MARTIN

That's fantastic. So who is this guy?

JILLIAN

Bradley? Check it out, I found his C.V.

(She gestures to the computer. Martin
grabs the mouse and pages around.)

MARTIN

He plays tenor sax?

JILLIAN

Page one, jackass.

(MARTIN scrolls up.)

MARTIN

Yale, M.I.T. Good, good.

JILLIAN

Now scroll down.

MARTIN

Head of the National Academy of Sciences?

JILLIAN

Exactly.

MARTIN

It was rather a long time ago.

JILLIAN

Nevertheless. Seems like a good sign.

MARTIN

Except he's a physicist. So what qualifies him to hand out grants in astronomy?

JILLIAN

Everyone can't major in everything, Martin. Marie Curie won Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry.

MARTIN

And died of radiation poisoning.

JILLIAN

Watch it bud, this is our daughter's namesake we're talking about.

MARTIN

I'm just saying, mind the gap. It's a lot of money from an organization you've never heard of.

JILLIAN

And I'm saying, don't look a gift grant in the mouth.

MARTIN

Did you find out anything else?

JILLIAN

Nothing much on Google, and their website is just a construction sign. I got the impression they're just getting off the ground.

MARTIN

This all sounds sketchy. Is the money that important? Don't sell your soul for a tuppence.

JILLIAN

What are you so worried about?

MARTIN

We're scientists, Jillian. Blind faith shouldn't be in our vocabulary.

JILLIAN

The money's not important. What's important is the opportunity, Martin. Two years is a long time to wait for the funding stork to drop a mewling baby grant on my doorstep.

MARTIN

I hope you're at least going to sleep on it.

JILLIAN

I'm meeting with Bradley tomorrow. If anything sets off my bullshit detector, I'll hit the eject button. I can get by without the cash. I'm not backed into a corner here.

MARTIN

Okay. Then how about we-

(Sound of a shriek offstage. MARIE runs on stage out of breath. She clutches an envelope and a sheet of paper.)

MARIE

Omigod omigod omigod omigod omigod omigod omigod-

JILLIAN

Marie! What is it? What are you doing at my office?

MARIE

(Pause, points at paper)

M.I.T!

(JILLIAN grabs the paper and scans it.)

JILLIAN

M.I.T! Omigod Omigod Omigod! (Looks at MARTIN) Omigod!

MARTIN

Congratulations!

JILLIAN

Wow. I'm just - stunned.

MARIE

I know!

MARTIN

(to JILLIAN)

Well. It's a good thing you're not backed into a corner.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(The next day. JILLIAN's office. She is doing paperwork when a knock comes from offstage right.)

JILLIAN

Come in!

(The knocking stops, then continues.)

JILLIAN

It's open!

(Knocking continues, JILLIAN walks to edge of stage right and opens door.)

JILLIAN

Come on in.

(BRADLEY enters. He doffs his jacket and hat.)

JILLIAN

Was the latch stuck or something?

BRADLEY

Er-yes. It was the latch, I think. You should take a look at that. Did you receive the contract?

JILLIAN

Yes, thank you. There's quite a bit of fine print.

BRADLEY

Yes well. Fortunately, as researchers we all have easy access to microscopes.

JILLIAN

(smiles)

Good point. Can I get you a coffee? How do you take it?

BRADLEY

Yes please. And black as pitch.

(JILLIAN fetches the coffee.)

BRADLEY

I trust the wording was to your liking?

JILLIAN

To be honest, my eyes glazed over after a couple of pages.

BRADLEY

It's nothing you haven't seen before.

JILLIAN

Yes, yes. But frankly it's been a while.

BRADLEY

You know you're on the cusp of something big here. Your best years are ahead of you, doctor.

JILLIAN

Do you believe that?

BRADLEY

We're putting our money where our mouth is, aren't we?

JILLIAN

It's just that, I had kind of given up hope on getting money for any follow-up work. You can only give the same powerpoint and write the same proposal so many times.

BRADLEY

I understand.

JILLIAN

Do you? But you were in charge of the National Academy. Couldn't you pretty much just print money?

BRADLEY

That was a long time ago. And every challenging career is a long sordid history of rejections, isn't it? Even the best hitters only reach base thirty percent of the time. A science career isn't a sprint, Doctor Carter-

JILLIAN

Jillian, please.

BRADLEY

Jillian. It's a marathon. You may blast from the start or saunter out with the people pushing strollers, but what matters is when you cross the finish line.

JILLIAN

It's about average velocity, not instant velocity.

BRADLEY

To be a bit more eggheaded about it, yes.

JILLIAN

(smiles)

That's how I roll.

BRADLEY

And consider this as well: We're not circling a track. Nothing is static in our line of work. Public mores change. We get new Congressmen, new administrations. Things happen in the world, and people want to inject their own ideas into research. They want to jump to conclusions based on whatever's in the headlines or what the stock market is doing and they expect us to back them up.

JILLIAN

Sure.

BRADLEY

But we can't base our findings on what happened last week. Or on one study out of hundreds. We fund in-depth work like yours, Jillian, so that science is not beholden to sentiment.

JILLIAN

So that wisdom prevails over prevailing wisdom?

BRADLEY

That's exactly it.

JILLIAN

So why my study, then? What are you hoping to prove?

BRADLEY

Your question is important and we want to know the answer. Is it so hard for you to believe that we want you because you're the best person for the job?

JILLIAN

It's just been a while since anyone told me that.

BRADLEY

I'm telling you that now.

JILLIAN

Okay. So where do I sign?

(BRADLEY produced the contract and slides it towards JILLIAN. She grabs it and suddenly clutches her hand.)

JILLIAN

Ow! Paper cut. I'm afraid I just bled all over your nice clean contract, Doctor Bradley.

(JILLIAN stands up and wraps her finger in a towel.)

BRADLEY

That's quite all right. Why don't you just print out another one?

JILLIAN

Oh, sure.

(JILLIAN goes to the computer and prints out the contract, but manages to bleed on the keyboard in the process.)

JILLIAN

Sonofabitch, we got a gusher. Excuse my French.

(JILLIAN throws out the first contract, grabs a paper towel and cleans off the keyboard, mashing a bunch of keys in the process. She retrieves the newly printed contract.)

JILLIAN

And now I just typed a bunch of gibberish into this email to Marie. Great. Sorry, I'm a mess.

BRADLEY

I understand your daughter is off to one of my alma maters.

JILLIAN

Oh, Doctor Bradley, she's so excited. I haven't seen her this energized in a long time. She wishes the semester started tomorrow.

BRADLEY

She'll love it. M.I.T. was a very happy time for me. I was quite the prankster.

JILLIAN

You mean you pulled some of those elaborate nerd stunts?

BRADLEY

I helped to measure the Smoot Bridge.

JILLIAN

Really? That's great! You helped to lay that guy down on the bridge? And take the measurements?

BRADLEY

Over and over and over again. The Harvard Bridge is three hundred sixty-four point four Smoots long-

JILLIAN

-plus or minus one ear.

BRADLEY

I hope Marie gets as much from her time there as I did.

JILLIAN

Thank you for helping make that happen.

BRADLEY

(beat)

What do you mean?

JILLIAN

With this grant. It's going to really help with tuition.

BRADLEY

Yes, of course. If she's anything like her mom, she has big things ahead of her.

JILLIAN

I hope you're right.

(JILLIAN signs the contract and hands it to BRADLEY. BRADLEY takes it, stands and shakes her hand.)

BRADLEY

(smiles)

Welcome aboard, Doctor Carter.

(BRADLEY dons jacket and hat and exits. JILLIAN sits down in front of the computer.)

JILLIAN

(reads screen)

Homo - fuge. Huh. Wonder what that means.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(August. JILLIAN's home. She and MARIE are packing boxes for college. There is a vase of flowers on the coffee table. JILLIAN holds up a framed photograph.)

JILLIAN

You're not taking this?

MARIE

Mom, I'm only moving across town. I don't need to drag a hope chest full of precious mementoes.

JILLIAN

But it's your grandmother.

MARIE

Yes, but I'm moving into a shoebox. And not a hockey skates shoebox. Like, en pointe slippers.

JILLIAN

She would be so proud of you right now. Do you remember visiting her and grandpa out in Hudson when you were a kid?

MARIE

Of course I do.

JILLIAN

She would walk you through the backyard and answer all of your questions. You had so many of them. About the ants, and the leaves, and the clouds. Why is some bark rough and other bark smooth.

MARIE

How come snow gets so small when you put it in your mouth?

JILLIAN

Do ladybugs have sex. I remember that threw her for a loop.

MARIE

And she would answer all of them.

JILLIAN

Every one. And none of your evasive parent answers either. "Ask your father." "Because I said so."

MARIE

I remember once I pointed at a cumulus cloud and got a 10-minute explanation of convection currents. I was always amazed she could produce all of that from the top of her head.

JILLIAN

That's because she had gotten all of the same questions from me. But half the time the response that I got was "Good question. Let me check on that."

MARIE

And I bet she always did.

JILLIAN

It was just as important to her to find out the answer herself as it was to tell me. Do you remember what she used to say?

MARIE

"Nothing is as important as the truth, because everything else rests upon it."

JILLIAN

You do remember.

MARIE

I wish more of my teachers had been like that in high school. I got a few too many "Because I said so's." (Pause.) I got a lot from dad too.

JILLIAN

He meant well. He was just always so busy.

MARIE

Yeah well, I guess maybe his mind was elsewhere.

JILLIAN

Have you heard from him?

MARIE

Not since the Christmas card.

JILLIAN

Not even on your birthday?

MARIE

Mom, he forgot my birthday like four times when we all lived together.

JILLIAN

No he didn't.

MARIE

(nodding)

Yes! He did! Geez, were we all really living in the same house?

JILLIAN

That's just not how I remember it.

(MARIE retrieves a notebook off the discard pile.)

MARIE

Would you like me to consult my diary? It's not peer-reviewed, but I'll vouch for its accuracy.

JILLIAN

All right, enough.

MARIE

No, no word from him. You know I would have told you if he'd contacted me.

JILLIAN

And have you contacted him.

MARIE

Nope.

JILLIAN

Are you ever going to reply to his emails?

MARIE

I have them all saved in a folder labeled "Douchebag," if that answers your question.

JILLIAN

You do not talk about your father like that! He helped raise you for fifteen years.

MARIE

Mom-

JILLIAN

Change the name of that folder.

MARIE

Fine. How about "Missing in Action?"

JILLIAN

(disgusted)

Do whatever you want.

(Pause.)

MARIE

Does Dad know about your new research project?

JILLIAN

I invited him to run a field site. We could use one in Hawaii. (Pause.) And also to co-lead the grant.

MARIE

Mom!

JILLIAN

He's the right man for the job.

MARIE

Has he at least had the courtesy to respond.

JILLIAN

Not yet.

MARIE

Mom-

JILLIAN

Don't.

MARIE

Mom!

JILLIAN

Don't!

MARIE

Okay, fine. (Long pause, they continue to sort and pack.)
Where'd the flowers come from? Secret admirer?

JILLIAN

I couldn't have just bought flowers for myself?

MARIE

No.

JILLIAN

They're from the Institute.

MARIE

You mean your new sponsors?

JILLIAN

They keep sending gifts. Checking up on me. Nice to finally see someone showing an appreciation for my work.

MARIE

I appreciate your work.

JILLIAN

You should. What do you think is paying for the next four years?

MARIE

You know Dad would have to pay for half of it. If not more. That's how it works.

JILLIAN

Again. How it works, Marie, is I will not sign those papers. What I had with your father is not over. And maybe if you hadn't maintained radio silence for two years he'd be more inclined to want to pitch in.

MARIE

That is my choice, mom.

JILLIAN

And this is mine. And we're not talking about this anymore.

MARIE

Why not?

JILLIAN

Because I said so!

MARIE

You know what? I'll take the photo of grandma after all.

(MARIE grabs the photo and walks out of the room. JILLIAN looks over the half-empty boxes. Blackout.)

SCENE 6

(A few days later. JILLIAN is back on the roof tinkering with the monitoring station. She wears a welding helmet, apron and gloves and holds a welding torch.)

JILLIAN

I tried Brett again. Certified mail, return receipt requested. Nada. I hope there's nothing wrong with him. I know when he left he wasn't right in the head. But I would think he'd be better by now. I hope he realizes what he's missing out on.

(She fiddles with something.)

Man, you are one ungrateful little whelp, you know that? I mean, you're supposed to monitor the sun and your solar panels don't work. How's that for irony? I think.

Well. Your days are numbered unless you shape up. I've got three brand-new stations working for me now. Lucky for you they're all far away. But I may have some extra cash in the equipment fund, so one more peep out of you and it's straight to (ominous voice) university surplus. Scared? You should be. And-

(Meanwhile, the LITTLE GIRL walks through the audience and gets on stage. JILLIAN sees her.)

JILLIAN

You're - you're back. Who are you?

(JILLIAN stands and approaches warily, holding the welding torch.)

JILLIAN

Please don't run away. I'm not going to hurt you.

(LITTLE GIRL looks at the torch with alarm. JILLIAN realizes and puts it down, takes off helmet and gloves. The LITTLE GIRL catches JILLIAN's gaze and looks back over the audience. JILLIAN stands next to her and looks as well.)

JILLIAN

I don't see it. Help me to see it.

(The girl points.)

JILLIAN

No, I don't...Do you speak? What are you doing up here? Do I know you? Come on, let's go find your parents.

(She tries to grab the girl's hand. The girl wriggles out of her grip and takes off.)

JILLIAN

Wait! Please! Who are you?

(The girl exits. JILLIAN gives brief chase and stops.)

JILLIAN

What are you?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 7

(December. JAMES BRADLEY's office.
There is a Christmas decoration or two
up. He paces back and forth and draws
on a whiteboard. A knock on the door.)

BRADLEY

Come in.

(JILLIAN enters, shivering. She starts
to take off her jacket, gloves and hat.
BRADLEY assists.)

JILLIAN

Wow, it's hot in here.

BRADLEY

I keep the heat at seventy. What can I say, I'm old.

JILLIAN

Better than outside.

BRADLEY

Snowiest winter in Boston history. Where's all that global
warming they warned us about?

JILLIAN

Doctor Bradley, I hardly have to tell you that weather does
not equal climate.

BRADLEY

No, of course not. It's much more complex than that. Which
is where research like yours comes in.

JILLIAN

Did you receive my first progress report?

BRADLEY

Yes. Excellent work. Solid progress. It sounds as though
you're waiting on one site?

JILLIAN

I'm still in negotiations with the University of Hawaii.
With the other Doctor Carter.

BRADLEY

Jillian, I understand your interest in involving him in this project. But there are plenty of other sites at that latitude.

JILLIAN

True, but this is optimal for several reasons. It was all laid out in my proposal.

BRADLEY

What if he declines to participate?

JILLIAN

Why would he want to do that?

BRADLEY

Very well. I will let you handle the research and we'll take care of the rest.

JILLIAN

What is the rest?

BRADLEY

Getting the word out, of course. We want to make sure your results reach the public.

JILLIAN

Of course, but I'm not sure what there is to write at this point. My plan is to submit the final results to the *Climate Research* journal. And maybe to *Science*, if what I find is promising enough.

BRADLEY

And I look forward to being able to say we supported groundbreaking research that passes the rigors of peer review, as of course it will. But in the meantime it's important people know your work is happening. I know of several publications that would love to get their hands on your findings.

JILLIAN

Like who? *People Magazine*? My new results are no more conclusive than the previous ones.

BRADLEY

Doctor. Can't you see the urgency in your work?

JILLIAN

I'm as excited to see my final numbers as anyone. But it's a long-term project.

BRADLEY

Yes, but. We have a new Congress. These are not people who are going to change their minds about science in the middle of their terms. We need to make sure that are fully informed from day one.

JILLIAN

I don't understand. You're advising Congress?

BRADLEY

(laughs)

No, of course not. Look around. We're just a walkup down a side alley off the Green Line. Who we are advising, is the people. And they are Congress' bosses. That's how it works. Right?

JILLIAN

(unconvinced)

Sure.

BRADLEY

Jillian. I'm telling you we're going to draw attention to your results, and you seem disappointed! Sharing your findings is important to our partners and it's important to me.

JILLIAN

Who are your partners?

BRADLEY

Our partners. Take a look. (He gestures at the whiteboard.) I was just diagramming our strategic linkages.

(JILLIAN looks at the board.)

JILLIAN

The Lancaster Institute. Coalition for the Study of Global Change. The National Center for Policy Analysis. I'm sorry, Doctor Bradley, I've never heard of any of these.

BRADLEY

We are a broad network of grass-roots groups, Jillian. Small organizations across the country like this one, who want to see sound science make the front pages.

JILLIAN

What exactly is sound science?

BRADLEY

The kind you're doing, Jillian. Science that doesn't start with the answer in mind. That dares to ask the big questions. And that's skeptical of the easy way out.

JILLIAN

You're talking about all science, Doctor. That's the basic definition.

BRADLEY

(smiles)

Then we're in agreement. To further your cause, we'd like you to - hold on -

(BRADLEY looks at the whiteboard and circles four of the organizations.)

BRADLEY (cont.)

-we'd like you to serve on the board of the Ecoliteracy Council, here. We'll make you a special advisor to the Independent Forum and to the Committee for Tomorrow. And contributing scientist for Research Monitor.

JILLIAN

That sounds like a lot of work. What do I have to do?

BRADLEY

Just keep doing what you're doing and we'll take care of the rest.

JILLIAN

That's what I'm afraid of.

BRADLEY

Jillian. Why are you so skeptical? You're doing good research, correct? There's nothing questionable about your methods?

JILLIAN

No, of course not.

BRADLEY

Then what can we report except your solid science and sound results? And also, we can help improve your monitoring. I know a man in Hilo.

JILLIAN

Pardon me?

BRADLEY

If you'd like, I can try to get in touch with the other Doctor Carter directly. I can be very persuasive.

JILLIAN

You would do that for me?

BRADLEY

He's the best man for the job, right?

JILLIAN

Yes he is.

BRADLEY

Then let me do something for you, and you do something for me. Make sure your next report has some results we can work with.

JILLIAN

Preliminary results.

BRADLEY

Of course. I'm glad we're in agreement.

JILLIAN

Thank you.

(JILLIAN stands up to leave and starts to get dressed.)

BRADLEY

Oh, and one more thing. We noticed your equipment budget was drawing down more quickly than you had estimated.

JILLIAN

Oh yes, I'm sorry. The maintenance on the monitoring stations-

BRADLEY

-Which is why I took the liberty of adding another fifty thousand dollars to your budget. Will that be enough?

JILLIAN

Oh. Yes, more than enough. Thank you.

BRADLEY

Keep up the good work, doctor. And happy holidays!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 8

(The next day. JILLIAN and MARTIN are in JILLIAN's office. Also a couple of Christmas decorations. MARTIN sits at JILLIAN's computer while JILLIAN stands.)

JILLIAN

Five-hundred-and fifty-grand, Martin.

MARTIN

I feel like we've had this conversation before.

JILLIAN

Yeah, but this time I'm looking at it from the inside.

MARTIN

Is the view different in there?

JILLIAN

It's definitely a bit cloudier. I don't understand what they're trying to get out of me.

MARTIN

It's information-laundering.

JILLIAN

Well, good. Nothing worse than filthy data.

MARTIN

They form a bunch of groups with professional-sounding names and staff them with a few handpicked (air quotes) "experts." How many people work at NRI?

JILLIAN

I've only ever seen Doctor Bradley and his secretary.

MARTIN

Exactly. They spread out personnel so they can puff up this tiny contrarian climate sect and make it sound like some sort of consensus.

JILLIAN

Yeah, but look. (Moves mouse.) The Ecoliteracy Council gave three million to Stanford last year. Stanford took their cash! Why shouldn't I?

MARTIN

And what else is on their websites?

JILLIAN

It's a mixed bag.

MARTIN

Jillian.

JILLIAN

A mixed bag of junk science, ill-informed commentary and links that lead me round and round in a big circle.

MARTIN

It's an echo chamber. You know what these guys are up to.

JILLIAN

They're up to giving me money!

MARTIN

And who's they? ExxonMobil? BP? ConocoPhillips?

JILLIAN

I have no idea. None of their websites link up to a parent organization.

MARTIN

But it seems like a pretty good bet. You think they're bankrolled by the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Fund?

JILLIAN

I don't understand. Why do they want me?

MARTIN

Look in a mirror! You're telegenic. Well-spoken. Attractive.

JILLIAN

Damn right.

MARTIN

And your research has the potential to throw a spanner into generally accepted theories of climate change. Right?

JILLIAN

Yes. But that's the thing. I'm not falsifying data. I'm not cherry-picking my results. I am answering a legitimate research question through legitimate research. So if my findings throw a monkey wrench into climate change, it's because there is a monkey wrench to be thrown into climate change.

MARTIN

What the devil is a monkey wrench?

JILLIAN

What the hell is a spanner?

MARTIN

You're assuming they don't step in and alter your results for you.

JILLIAN

If they wanted to do that, then why recruit me? Just eliminate the middleman and make some shit up.

MARTIN

Because this way they can attach the name of an actual scientist who didn't get her degree in Grenada.

JILLIAN

Fine. But they haven't done any of these things yet, so I'm not jumping to conclusions. Maybe 'blind faith' shouldn't be in our vocabulary, but neither should 'unfounded assumption.'

MARTIN

Methinks the lady doth protest too little.

JILLIAN

Martin. Without this money, my career is right back in the gutter. This is my chance to finally - finally! - get somewhere. To get back in the game! To get noticed again!

MARTIN

By Brett, you mean?

JILLIAN

By Brett, for sure. Once he gets on this grant, it'll really-

MARTIN

Brett is joining you on the grant?

JILLIAN

Yeah. Bradley is going to cajole him into it. I'm sure he can pull it off. The guy's very persuasive.

MARTIN

Huh.

JILLIAN

What?

MARTIN

No, nothing.

JILLIAN

I was on the way up, Martin. A chapter from my dissertation got published in *Science*! Do you know how hard that is? It's like your letter actually getting to Santa! And then him dropping by the house to deliver your spectroscope!

MARTIN

Did you really ask Santa for a spectroscope?

JILLIAN

No, I asked him for five hundred fifty grand to get my career out of the toilet. And I got it. The research is mine. They're not going to put any constraints on how I conduct the study, and I will be free to publish my results.

MARTIN

You'll pardon me if I remain skeptical. The consensus has been in on climate change for years now, Jillian. Did you read the last Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report?

JILLIAN

Oh yeah. It was quite the page-turner. I thought the love scene in section two was a bit unnecessary, don't you?

MARTIN

Jillian.

JILLIAN

Yes, of course I read it. Two thousand pages of in-depth, solid scientific analysis by pretty much everyone worth their salt that conclusively demonstrates that climate change is real, worsening and our own damn fault.

MARTIN

It's the single biggest crisis facing humanity ever and these guys are trying to kick the can down the road until it's too late for us to do anything about it. No good can come of what you're doing.

JILLIAN

Do you know who Stanley Prusiner was?

MARTIN

Didn't he discover the Mad Cow things?

JILLIAN

Prions. It was a completely new class of pathogens. Revolutionary research. It won him a Nobel Prize.

MARTIN

Okay. So?

JILLIAN

He was funded by R. J. Reynolds.

MARTIN

Really?

JILLIAN

It was part of the tobacco industry's strategy for aiming the spotlight away from cigarettes. Fund research that might turn up alternative causes for emphysema, lung disease.

MARTIN

A smokescreen.

JILLIAN

Right. But no one remembers that. And the fact that big tobacco is full of shit did not invalidate his work.

MARTIN

In the long term, no.

JILLIAN

Ultimately, who cares where the money came from? Does anyone remember the name of Michelangelo's patron? Or the guy who paid the rent on Edison's laboratory? Of course not. So when my research shows up in *Science* or *Nature* or wherever, it will be *my* research. And the Committee for Tomorrow can go to hell. And when my 24 months are up, I get my soul back.

MARTIN

I'm not sure that's how it works.

JILLIAN

That's the way it's going to work for me.

MARTIN

And what if they ask for more out of you than they already have?

JILLIAN

Then I will jump off that bridge when I come to it.

MARTIN

I see.

JILLIAN

And I won't tell you about it.

MARTIN

Good. I don't think I'll want to know.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 9

(A few days later. BRADLEY's office.
Christmas decorations still there. He's
wrapping a present. A knock.)

BRADLEY

Yes, who is it?

(MARTIN enters. He wears coat and hat
and doesn't take them off.)

MARTIN

Doctor Bradley? My name is Martin Cross.

(They shake hands.)

BRADLEY

I'm aware of your work. What can I do for you?

MARTIN

I'm here to inquire about your grant funding of Doctor Jillian Carter.

BRADLEY

Okay, inquire.

MARTIN

What's the purpose of the funding?

BRADLEY

We're supporting her data-gathering and analysis, with the goal of her publishing it in reputable scientific journals.

MARTIN

That's it?

BRADLEY

Yes. It's a standard contract.

MARTIN

And what about Research Monitor? The Committee for Tomorrow?

BRADLEY

I suggested she should get involved with some of our partner organizations to publicize her research. She said

it was a good idea. Please, would you like to take off your coat and have a seat?

MARTIN

No. I'm just- frankly, I'm concerned about the legitimacy of your organization. I'm not sure her involvement is the best thing for Jillian.

BRADLEY

How so?

MARTIN

I think you're taking advantage of her mental state to bend her to your whims.

(BRADLEY laughs.)

BRADLEY

"Bend her to our whims?" What is this, a dime novel?

MARTIN

Are you really attempting to get her ex-husband involved in the project?

BRADLEY

We approached him, yes. But he declined. He's already found funding elsewhere.

MARTIN

But you didn't tell Jillian that.

BRADLEY

I wasn't sure how to break it to her gently. But if you'd like, I can call her right now and let her know?

(BRADLEY picks up the phone. MARTIN waves him off.)

MARTIN

No, I'd rather not be around for that, frankly. But you do need to tell her. Her entire career is hanging on this award. I don't want her working under false pretenses.

BRADLEY

Of course. Will that be all? I am a man with precious little time to spare, Dr. Cross.

(MARTIN looks at the half-wrapped present on his desk. BRADLEY follows his gaze.)

BRADLEY (cont.)

I'm a scientist. Dr. Cross, but I'm also a grandfather. Oh, and -(He opens a drawer, pulls out another gift.)-actually, there's another gift here. It's for Jillian. We like to remind our grantees that we're thinking of them. Would you like to deliver it to her?

MARTIN

No, that wouldn't be appropriate.

BRADLEY

Does she know you're here?

MARTIN

No.

BRADLEY

I see.

MARTIN

Doctor, what will you do if her research doesn't further your particular aims?

BRADLEY

What aims are you referring to?

MARTIN

Disputing the scientific consensus on climate change.

BRADLEY

Where did you get that idea?

MARTIN

From your website. And the websites of your partners, and their newsletters, and their magazines. It's quite a common theme.

BRADLEY

We're presenting dissenting opinions by reputable scientists, doctor. And anyway, what consensus are you referring to?

MARTIN

Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists. And you can get that number from NASA, not Greenpeace.

BRADLEY

Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of people used to believe the sun revolved around the earth. And who was correct about that?

MARTIN

Copernicus. Galileo. And they proved it by using the most up-to-date equipment and applying the scientific method. Just like legitimate climate scientists are doing.

BRADLEY

But they weren't the final arbiters of truth, were they? Five hundred years later, we're still making discoveries that test their conclusions. It's the same with climate change.

MARTIN

Of course it is, that's how science works. Answers always lead to new questions. That doesn't mean "the science is not in."

BRADLEY

I think that comes down to a simple difference of opinion, doesn't it?

MARTIN

Science isn't about what we believe. It's about what we know.

BRADLEY

And Jillian is adding to that knowledge. It was very thoughtful of you to come here on behalf of your friend. You can be assured she is in good hands, regardless of her findings. Good day.

MARTIN

(drily)

I sincerely hope so. Merry Christmas, Doctor Bradley.

(MARTIN exits. BRADLEY moves the present aside, turns to his computer and types.)

BRADLEY
Martin Cross Everett University.

(BRADLEY looks at the screen and picks up the phone. Blackout.)

SCENE 10

(February. BRADLEY's office. Christmas decorations are gone. He looks at a few sheets of paper, marked in red. JILLIAN enters in coat and hat, which she doffs.)

BRADLEY

Good morning, Jillian. I was just looking over your progress report.

JILLIAN

Of course.

BRADLEY

I think I understand it. But can you please explain to me in your own words the significance of these results?

JILLIAN

Short answer? They don't confirm the earlier study.

BRADLEY

I see.

JILLIAN

We're just not seeing solar variation having a major effect on air temperature. On a daily basis, yes, but over the longer term everything averages out. That's true across seasons and across most of the field sites.

BRADLEY

What about historic temperatures?

JILLIAN

So far there's nothing to suggest that the Medieval Warm Period or the Little Ice Age were caused by changes to sunspot activity. It also doesn't appear to be impacting the current warming trend.

BRADLEY

That's unfortunate.

JILLIAN

It's not fortunate or unfortunate, Doctor. It's the data.

BRADLEY

How do you account for the different results from the earlier study?

JILLIAN

Any number of things. The rooftop monitor might have been impacted by the urban setting. The effect might be more pronounced in the spring and summer, when we conducted the first study. Or there might have been some unusually strong sunspots the first time around.

BRADLEY

I see. Can you correct for these?

JILLIAN

I don't understand. Correcting for those was the entire point of the follow-up study. And anyway, this may change. That's why I needed two years, so I could compare two annual cycles.

BRADLEY

But for the time being, you're telling me you have no significant results.

JILLIAN

I have results that contradict the previous research. That doesn't make them insignificant.

BRADLEY

It makes them less exciting.

JILLIAN

They're not high on the wow-o-meter, no. But that happens sometimes. In fact, as you know, it happens most of the time.

BRADLEY

Yes, of course. I see you've written the report up in publishable format, as I requested.

JILLIAN

Yes. Not for scientific publication, of course, it's more of an update on methodology and some rough findings.

BRADLEY

It's good. Very easy to understand. And you have a gift for graphics.

JILLIAN

Thanks. You have to tweak the same damn powerpoint enough times, it tends to spur your creativity.

BRADLEY (cont.)

As for the text, I've made a few revisions I'd like you to consider.

(He hands her the paper. She reads. He paces back and forth.)

JILLIAN

This doesn't make sense.

BRADLEY

What's that?

JILLIAN

You're saying I should omit the readings from one of the monitors altogether. And two of the other ones, only use the data for the summer months?

BRADLEY

I believe the report will be more accurate if you acknowledge that some of the readings are anomalies.

JILLIAN

And this statistical analysis you're using - this changes the entire meaning of the project. It'll make the sunspot activity seem to have much more of an impact on climate than the data suggests. And no one uses this method anymore. Doctor Bradley, surely you realize this won't stand up to any level of scrutiny.

BRADLEY

Like you said, this won't be for scientific publication.

JILLIAN

Yes, but it still has my name on it! No. No. I can't agree to this.

BRADLEY

Are you certain?

JILLIAN

Yes. This is no longer science. It's propaganda.

BRADLEY

You're suggesting we have an agenda.

JILLIAN

Yes.

BRADLEY

Has it occurred to you that everyone else might have an agenda as well?

JILLIAN

What do you mean?

BRADLEY

How many agencies and organizations did you apply to for funding for this project?

JILLIAN

About twenty, I think.

BRADLEY

And they all turned you down.

JILLIAN

Yes.

BRADLEY

So who's to say they didn't have a vested interest in suppressing your research?

JILLIAN

Why would they do that?

BRADLEY

Because they were afraid of your conclusions. That you would poke a hole in climate change so big that all the money would drain out.

JILLIAN

That's a pretty big leap, Doctor Bradley.

BRADLEY

Nonetheless. You're not questioning their, so maybe it's not in your best interests to question ours either.

JILLIAN

I'm not sure I buy that argument.

BRADLEY

There's something else, as well. We had a visit from a friend of yours. Doctor Cross, I believe his name is?

JILLIAN

Martin? What was he doing here?

BRADLEY

He was here to request that we take you off the grant.

JILLIAN

He did what?

BRADLEY

He said he felt your continuing on this award was unwise given your fragile mental state. That we were exploiting your financial and emotional desperation.

JILLIAN

"Emotional desperation?"

BRADLEY

Those were his words, not mine. For your own protection, he suggested we transfer the project over to him.

JILLIAN

What?

BRADLEY

I refused, of course.

JILLIAN

I don't believe it. He knows how important this grant is to me.

BRADLEY

You can ask him yourself. He visited yesterday at about 10 A.M. Check the register at the front desk. I'm not sure Doctor Cross is worthy of your trust, Jillian.

JILLIAN

Why?

BRADLEY

I hesitate to show you this, but ... I found his staunch opposition to your research troubling, so I ran a background check. We found these.

(He hands her an envelope. She opens it and pulls out printouts of several photographs. She is stunned.)

JILLIAN

Where did these come from?

BRADLEY

I believe that's Cape Cod. Barnstable, maybe? They're about three years old.

JILLIAN

No, I mean where did you get them?

BRADLEY

The internet has plenty of back alleys.

JILLIAN

I see.

BRADLEY

I apologize for showing you these. But we thought it was important.

JILLIAN

God. (Pause.) You think you know someone.

BRADLEY

Yes.

(Pause.)

JILLIAN

Have you heard back from the other Doctor Carter?

BRADLEY

I'm afraid we have. He declined our offer.

JILLIAN

Oh. Did he say why.

BRADLEY

He's already been funded to conduct a similar study.

JILLIAN

I see.

BRADLEY

I'm sorry, Jillian. I know how important it was to you to have him on this grant.

JILLIAN

Yeah.

BRADLEY

You're doing tremendous work without him, doctor. We're not at all concerned by his absence.

(JILLIAN is near tears.)

BRADLEY (cont.)

Jillian? Are you all right? Is there anything I can do?

JILLIAN

Your statistical analysis.

BRADLEY

Yes?

JILLIAN

Nobody will buy that. I can clean it up for you.

BRADLEY

You would be able to do that?

JILLIAN

Piece of cake.

BRADLEY

That would be a great help. Thank you.

JILLIAN

No problem. It's what you're paying me for.

(Blackout.)

Act II

SCENE 1

(May. JILLIAN's house. JILLIAN sits making notes in red pen. MARIE enters carrying a laundry basket, on top of which are several pieces of mail.)

MARIE

Hey Mom.

JILLIAN

Marie! What are you doing here? Don't you have class today?

MARIE

Class got cancelled. There was a measles outbreak on campus.

JILLIAN

Measles? Are you serious?

MARIE

Yeah, I know. Apparently some people in the anti-vaxxer crowd produce kids smart enough to go to M.I.T. Go figure.

JILLIAN

Great.

MARIE

So I thought I should probably get off campus, and anyway (holds up laundry) I'm clearly overdue for a visit.

JILLIAN

Wouldn't it be easier to just do that in Cambridge somewhere?

MARIE

Good to see you too, Mom.

JILLIAN

Sorry, you're right. Welcome home.

MARIE

I grabbed your mail on the way in. (She holds up a magazine.) You can probably tell Aunt Laura to cancel the

gift subscription to *Seventeen*. (Leafs through mail.) Wow, you're popular. The Northeast Research Institute. The Reason Center? The Foundation for Law and Government? Mom, who are these people?

JILLIAN

You know, you fill out one online survey and suddenly the floodgates open.

MARIE

Fake address, Ma. Cinch.

JILLIAN

So how is spring semester going?

MARIE

Hard. High school really doesn't prepare you for this.

JILLIAN

Don't go blaming high school.

MARIE

Thanks. That's very supportive.

JILLIAN

You just need to put everything you have into it.

MARIE

The engines are already at warp 10, Mom. Maybe I just wasn't cut out for M.I.T. I mean, my best subject right now is psychology, and they barely have a department.

JILLIAN

Really? I always thought you'd want to go into biology. Ever since your father got you those turtles, you've always been interested in animals.

MARIE

To say nothing of the ladybug sex. But maybe I'm just interested in the most baffling animal of them all. Us. In why we make such strange choices. Why we don't always act in our own best interests.

JILLIAN

Are you driving at something?

(MARIE holds up another envelope.)

MARIE

The Heritage Foundation, Mom? The Heritage Foundation?

JILLIAN

I got on their mailing list, I don't know how.

(MARIE pulls out smartphone.)

MARIE

Martin Cross and I have been texting.

JILLIAN

You stay away from him!

MARIE

What? Why?

JILLIAN

I don't want to get into it.

MARIE

He only contacted me to get through to you. He said you haven't been returning his calls and have been avoiding him at the office.

JILLIAN

That's a personal matter.

MARIE

And he also sent me a link. (Reads.) "Impacts of solar variation on Northern Hemisphere climate volatility." Jillian Carter, lead author. In something called the *Science and Reason Journal*.

JILLIAN

What? Let me see that.

(She grabs the phone and scans it.)

MARIE

Mom, I'm getting a B-minus in media literacy right now and even I can see that magazine is bullshit. What are you doing to yourself?

JILLIAN

Language!

MARIE

Sorry.

JILLIAN

I'm funding your education, for one thing.

MARIE

Don't change the subject. If this is what's footing the bill for M.I.T., I will happily transfer to Everett.

JILLIAN

This is a means to an end, Marie.

MARIE

What end would that be?

JILLIAN

Next year I complete the work and publish the full results. I can dismiss these, report them as preliminary.

MARIE

Can you can get away with that? Don't you think this will wreck your reputation?

JILLIAN

Without the grant I don't have a reputation to wreck. Besides, who reads these?

MARIE

Someone apparently does. Because it got quoted in the Wall Street Journal.

JILLIAN

It what?

(MARIE grabs phone.)

MARIE

Martin sent me that too. Here's the article. "On Eve of Summit, New Claims Dispute Climate Change." Here.

(MARIE hands JILLIAN the phone. JILLIAN reads.)

JILLIAN

Hamburg.

MARIE

The climate summit is in six months, Mom. And the U.S. is doing its usual hemming and hawing about agreeing to anything. And this isn't helping!

JILLIAN

There's nothing wrong with healthy skepticism.

MARIE

This is not skepticism, Mom. It's denial.

JILLIAN

Oh, it doesn't matter. This study is a drop in the bucket.

MARIE

And what obscure magazine are you going to publish your final results in? You realize a hundred times more people will read this than *Climate Change Journal*, or whatever. Maybe a thousand. And by that time we'll already have blown another chance to do anything meaningful about a world that is going to shit-

JILLIAN

Language!

MARIE

-that is going to shit and that I am going to have to live in for the next seventy years or so.

JILLIAN

You think I made a deal with the devil. A Faustian bargain.

MARIE

Oh no, Mom. You don't get to compare yourself to Faust. Faust made his deal for knowledge. You did it in the name of ignorance.

(Marie stands up and grabs the laundry.)

MARIE (cont.)

All your life you've said how you hoped I'd follow in your footsteps.

JILLIAN

Yes.

MARIE

Do you really want that now?

(MARIE starts to walk off.)

JILLIAN

Marie.

MARIE

Yeah?

JILLIAN

Did you ever own a blue dress as a kid? With yellow flowers on it?

MARIE

I don't remember. Maybe. What kind of question is that?

JILLIAN

It's happened a few times now. I'm up on the roof fixing our solar monitor and my mind starts to wander. And a little girl appears.

MARIE

On the roof? How'd she get there?

JILLIAN

I don't know! One minute she's just there, and then she's gone.

MARIE

What does she do? Does she say anything?

JILLIAN

She just draws my attention her way. Then she points up into the sky.

MARIE

At what?

JILLIAN

There's nothing there. She just points, and when I try to question her, she runs away. And poof.

MARIE

You know she's not real, Mom.

JILLIAN

I figure she must be, I don't know, some kind of vision. A waking dream. I thought maybe she was you, at first. Like a flashback.

MARIE

Okay.

JILLIAN

But I don't think it's you. And then I thought, maybe it's something more abstract. Like, this is your future child. Or great-grandchild. This is the world we're creating.

MARIE

A portent.

JILLIAN

The Ghost of Climate Yet-To-Come.

MARIE

Have you seen anyone? Have you told anyone about this?

JILLIAN

No. They'll think I'm crazy.

MARIE

I don't think you're crazy, Mom. I think you're trying to remember, or to decide something, and it's manifesting itself in a weird way. We all have vivid dreams sometimes. Maybe this one just leached a little bit into reality.

JILLIAN

That completely and utterly makes me sound crazy.

MARIE

Well, hold on until I get my Master's in psych, and I'll be able to give you a more informed diagnosis.

JILLIAN

You'd be a fantastic psychologist, Marie. But I still think you should reconsider the turtles.

MARIE

The turtles were dad's idea, Mom. I never liked them, they just crawled around their cage looking bored. I wanted a dog.

JILLIAN

A dog?

MARIE

Yeah. A sheltie or a border collie. A girl. I wanted to name her Helen, because she would be the most beautiful dog in the world. The dog that launched a thousand ships.

JILLIAN

Now you tell me this.

MARIE

I told you then, too. But Dad said no. He said a dog would make too much of a mess.

JILLIAN

He did?

MARIE

Mom. I think there are maybe some things you're deliberately not remembering about Dad.

JILLIAN

Talk to me when you get that master's.

MARIE

Mom. Please, just try to find someone you can talk to now. Okay?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(May. JILLIAN on the roof in summer clothes, tinkering with the weather station.)

JILLIAN

I can trace it all back to Germany. I mean, your husband gets a postdoc at Max Planck, you go along, right? Even if there's nothing there for you. But it was so hard. Yeah, everyone speaks perfect English, but you still feel like an outsider. It's so difficult to make friends, plus you've got a toddler keeping you in the house, and suddenly you're a dependent. I hate that word, dependent. But Brett was all I had. Moneywise, socially, emotionally. And he didn't like it. When we got back to the States, something had just changed.

(She pulls out a battery and examines it.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

And now you're leaking acid. Great. You know, you're the most dependable thing in my life, and even you're not that dependable. Still, at least you're real. (Pats station.) And you're not going to tell me I'm crazy. Although, I guess if you did, that would probably prove I'm crazy, right?

(MARTIN enters. JILLIAN senses a presence but doesn't look.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

Oh god, you're there again, aren't you? I don't want to see you anymore. You're just in my head. You're just in my head.

(She turns and looks at MARTIN.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

Yaah!

MARTIN

Are you all right?

JILLIAN

Sorry. I was expecting someone else.

MARTIN

On the roof?

JILLIAN

It's a long story.

MARTIN

I heard you were up here and you've been keeping your office locked.

JILLIAN

Yeah.

MARTIN

And I wanted to talk to you.

JILLIAN

You're talking to me.

MARTIN

I see you've been getting published.

JILLIAN

My words are getting read by people, yes.

MARTIN

The whole department's talking about it. They're wondering if you'll get fired.

JILLIAN

The department signed off on the contract, and anyway I'm tenured. They could catch me ripping off methadone from the med school and selling it to preteens and I wouldn't get fired.

MARTIN

But will you ever research in this town again?

JILLIAN

I can barely research in this town now. As you should know.

MARTIN

What's that mean?

JILLIAN

You tried to have me removed from the grant.

MARTIN

I did?

JILLIAN

Yes, you did. Don't play dumb. Why would you do that?

MARTIN

I wouldn't, as a matter of fact. Where are you getting this from?

JILLIAN

Bradley told me.

MARTIN

And he's the arbiter of truth now?

JILLIAN

Did you go to see him or not?

MARTIN

No.

JILLIAN

Except you signed in at his front desk.

MARTIN

Oh yeah. Due diligence. Good work. Okay, yes. I saw him.

JILLIAN

Why?

MARTIN

I was worried about you. And frankly, about the good name of the department. I didn't tell you because I know you want to fight your own battles.

JILLIAN

That's right, I do. And I have things under control.

MARTIN

Says the woman who's BFF with a heliograph.

JILLIAN

Hey, we all talk to ourselves, Martin. Some of us just do it out loud.

MARTIN

I never told him to take you off the grant. I just wanted to find out his motives.

JILLIAN

And did you figure it out?

MARTIN

The what, yeah. Not so much the why.

JILLIAN

That's about where I am. I know what he's trying to do. I wish I understood where he's coming from.

MARTIN

If you know he's such a weasel, then why won't you talk to me? You must know he's been lying to you.

JILLIAN

Not about everything.

MARTIN

What do you mean?

JILLIAN

He showed me some photos. Of Ashley.

MARTIN

Okay.

JILLIAN

With you.

MARTIN

What? Really?

JILLIAN

Don't try to deny it.

MARTIN

I'm not. I'm just surprised. How did he find those? Who is this guy?

JILLIAN

Don't change the subject. You owe me an explanation.

MARTIN

I don't see that I do. It wasn't your affair then or now.

JILLIAN

Martin. I'm feeling like there is precious little truth in my life right now. You want to make amends, please do something about that.

MARTIN

I don't see how this helps-

JILLIAN

Please.

MARTIN

Okay. She was my student her junior year at Everett. Climatology four-oh-one.

JILLIAN

And you had a thing with her.

MARTIN

Yes, I did. I was just coming off my divorce, and-

JILLIAN

That's not an excuse.

MARTIN

No, it's not. We did hold off until the semester ended.

JILLIAN

Still highly unethical.

MARTIN

I know. Report me if you want.

JILLIAN

So what happened?

MARTIN

It was a fling. We flung. We had some laughs. Lay on some beaches, went to concerts, drank cheap beer.

JILLIAN

Had sex.

MARTIN

That does happen in flings, yes.

JILLIAN

Why would you do a thing like that?

MARTIN

She was fun. It made me feel young and alive and like I still had things to look forward to, which is what I needed at the time. After a couple of months she got bored with me and moved on to somebody else.

JILLIAN

You mean Brett?

MARTIN

Actually there were a couple of other guys before Brett. So I heard. She bounced around the department so much we used to call her Plasma Girl.

JILLIAN

That's it?

MARTIN

I haven't spoken to her since they ran off. To be honest I haven't thought of her in a while, except when I see you. Because I see how devastated you still are.

JILLIAN

I'm not devastated.

MARTIN

Again: Confessional. (Points to monitor.) Heliograph.

JILLIAN

Brett is working on the same project I am. But for someone else.

MARTIN

The National Science Foundation.

JILLIAN

Where'd you hear that?

MARTIN

He approached me about participating in the study.

JILLIAN

Oh. But not me.

MARTIN

No.

JILLIAN

Martin.

MARTIN

Yes?

JILLIAN

Did he tell you anything else?

MARTIN

(hiding something)

Brett? No. It was all professional.

JILLIAN

Is he happy?

MARTIN

It was a work email, Jillian. It's not like he dotted his I's with happy faces and drew flowers in the margins.

JILLIAN

You're not telling me something.

MARTIN

What makes you say that?

JILLIAN

The timbre of your voice. The twitch in your eyelid. The bead of sweat on your brow.

MARTIN

You're good.

JILLIAN

I've been through a lot of lies now. I'm getting better at spotting them.

MARTIN

Okay. He and Ashley are engaged.

JILLIAN

Oh.

MARTIN

And she's pregnant.

JILLIAN

Oh.

MARTIN

I'm sorry, Jillian. (Silence.) Okay, I've said my piece. Would you like me to leave you to discuss it with the HAL 9000?

JILLIAN

Dammit, Martin. Why does reality has such a high entrance fee?

MARTIN

You can talk to me, Jillian.

JILLIAN

Brett and I started out as equals. I was a wunderkind, he was on the brink of a great career. We were going to conquer the world together. And then we had to keep choosing: his postdoc offer or mine. His job offer or mine. His career or mine. And I was trying to raise Marie, and it always just seemed the most logical course to defer to him for the moment. I figured things would even out in the end.

MARTIN

But that didn't happen.

JILLIAN

People don't realize what a handicap a few blank years in your resume can be. Even if it's for a pretty damn good reason, like raising a kid, or bouncing around so much that you can't land a job in your field. And he resented me for it. For falling behind a few steps.

MARTIN

That wasn't your fault. Plus he left you for an undergrad! That was hardly a partnership of equals.

JILLIAN

When he ran off with Ashley, I figured he would eventually realize he'd made a mistake. All I had to do was get back to being the scientist he fell in love with. Catch back up.

MARTIN

You are still the scientist he fell in love with.

JILLIAN

I'm the frog in the frying pan, Martin. He just turned up the heat little by little, grew incrementally more aloof and disappointed and checked out, and I never picked up on it.

MARTIN

You're awfully hard on yourself.

JILLIAN

Am I? Because I'm letting it happen again.

MARTIN

You mean Bradley.

JILLIAN

Yeah.

MARTIN

How's the project going?

JILLIAN

From a scientific standpoint, great. Lots of solid data. It'll be an important contribution to climate models.

MARTIN

But?

JILLIAN

It's also contradicting the last report. Those articles in my name cherry-picked and mischaracterized the data. Bradley's not getting what he wants.

MARTIN

I'd say so far he's gotten exactly what he wants. A big new name in climate change denial.

JILLIAN

I'm a big name?

MARTIN

To be fair, it's not a crowded field.

JILLIAN

Great.

MARTIN

You can always just cancel the contract. Refuse the rest of the money.

JILLIAN

You mean repent?

MARTIN

It's not midnight yet. Your soul is still yours.

JILLIAN

No. I can't do that.

MARTIN

Why not?

JILLIAN

Because that's not enough. I don't want to hop out of the frying pan. I want to turn off the stove.

MARTIN

How do you propose to do that?

JILLIAN

When I figure it out, I'll let you know.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(August. JILLIAN's office. A knock.)

JILLIAN

Come in!

(More knocking.)

JILLIAN

Come in come in!

(BRADLEY enters.)

BRADLEY

Sorry. You know, I'm a little hard of hearing.

JILLIAN

Sure. You wanted to speak with me?

BRADLEY

Yes. You've seen that we've published more of your results?

JILLIAN

Yes.

BRADLEY

They're making waves. The Wall Street Journal, CNN, Der Spiegel - you're getting cited all over the place.

JILLIAN

Der Spiegel?

BRADLEY

Oh yes. And now, we'd like to put a face to the name.

JILLIAN

What do you mean?

BRADLEY

We want you to promote the work to the public. In person.

JILLIAN

Oh no. I'm a scientist, not a spokesperson.

BRADLEY

Jillian, you present results at conferences all the time.
And we did our homework. You were an actress.

JILLIAN

In high school!

BRADLEY

It doesn't matter. Once you get comfortable on stage, you never forget it.

JILLIAN

So what is it you want me to do? Conferences? TV interviews?

BRADLEY

Yes and yes. We want you to be a new star in the firmament.

JILLIAN

So to speak.

BRADLEY

Yes, of course. Sometimes you make me forget I'm talking to an astronomer. You have the common touch. Which is precisely why you'll be so good at this.

JILLIAN

I appreciate your faith in me. But we're still in the process of-

BRADLEY

Yes yes, gathering data. Now Jillian, you need to stand by what you've written. Don't call your results "interim," "transitional," or "preliminary." Those are all pejoratives as far as I'm concerned. Do you understand?

JILLIAN

Yes, sir.

BRADLEY

And you also need to place your work within the broader context of climate change research.

JILLIAN

Meaning what?

BRADLEY

Meaning, the extent and causes of climate change are not settled. Your research reflects that, and you should make it clear this study is part of a much larger lack of scientific certainty.

(He hands her a sheaf of paper.)

BRADLEY (cont.)

This is a set of talking points. Please have these memorized and ready to go for when we ship you to the front lines.

JILLIAN

That's a bit melodramatic, don't you think?

BRADLEY

You'll forgive my terminology. Keep in mind I ran the National Academy during the thick of the Cold War.

JILLIAN

I see.

BRADLEY

But it still applies. Make no mistake, we are sending you into battle. Don't underestimate the importance of what you're doing.

JILLIAN

How so?

BRADLEY

Science used to hold this country together. How do you think we won the arms race? The space race? Everyone was behind us in those days. We put our best men on it, all the money we had, and it worked. The proudest day of my life was when the Berlin Wall fell, because I knew how large a role I'd played in it.

JILLIAN

I can imagine.

BRADLEY

But that's when I fell too. Out of the heavens and straight to earth. We forgot the lessons of the Cold War. We forgot the value of unity. And we lost our way. Now everything we try to do, there's a roadblock. Protests. Lawsuits.

Regulations. It took us seven years to get to the moon, now it takes three to get permission to run an experiment. Or dig a tunnel. Or build a road! Does that seem right to you?

JILLIAN

I guess not, sir.

BRADLEY

We are strangling the life out of this country. Environmentalism, doctor, is a green tree with red roots. But our work is clearing the way for growth and prosperity. We can get back to what made America great. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?

JILLIAN

(lying)

I guess I never thought of it that way before.

BRADLEY

That's because we're being told a different story by the liberal media. But you can help with that, Jillian. That's why we need you.

JILLIAN

And what's my first assignment?

BRADLEY

We'd like you to speak at the Science and Policy Conference in Nashua next week. We're putting that one on, so it'll be a friendly environment for you.

JILLIAN

Friendly. Okay.

BRADLEY

Then an interview with the local Fox News affiliate.

JILLIAN

Also friendly, no doubt.

BRADLEY

Of course. If those go well, we've been asked to supply an individual to take part in a debate on climate change. It'll be for a college audience, and it will be televised locally. And probably on C-Span as well.

JILLIAN

Really? National TV?

BRADLEY

Well, it's just C-Span, but yes.

JILLIAN

Who will I be debating?

BRADLEY

Are you acquainted with Rohit Gupta? At Harvard?

JILLIAN

Oh yes, he's a heavy hitter.

BRADLEY

But you'll be ready for him.

(BRADLEY stands to leave.)

JILLIAN

Of course. Doctor Bradley?

BRADLEY

Yes.

JILLIAN

I want you to know I deeply appreciate the opportunity you've given me. Without your help my proposal would still be sitting in a desk drawer. Now I'm being read and discussed across the country. Across the world. And I'm getting an opportunity to do what's right. To stand up for what I believe in. Not many of us get than chance.

BRADLEY

I'm glad to hear you feel that way. Keep up the good work, Jillian.

(BRADLEY exits. JILLIAN listens at the door for his footsteps to recede then pulls out her phone and dials.)

JILLIAN

(into phone)

Hello. Could I speak to Doctor Gupta, please?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(September. An auditorium. Two podiums face the audience. JILLIAN and MARTIN enter. MARIE is in the audience.)

JILLIAN

Did I ever tell you I was an actress in high school?

MARTIN

Really.

JILLIAN

I was the lead in Man of La Mancha. (Pause.) It was an all-girls school.

MARTIN

Was it recorded? I'd like to see it sometime.

JILLIAN

(laughs)

No you wouldn't.

MARTIN

I'm sure you'll do great up there. Once you get comfortable on stage, you never forget it.

JILLIAN

Yeah, people keep telling me that.

(BRADLEY approaches.)

MARTIN

Excuse me, I'd better go prep.

(MARTIN slips away.)

BRADLEY

I understand there's been a last-minute change in the lineup?

JILLIAN

Yes. Doctor Gupta has a family emergency. He asked Doctor Cross to take his place.

BRADLEY

He did?

JILLIAN

Yes. It's okay, Martin's perfectly qualified for this.
(Sotto voce) You should be happy, he's only had two hours
to prepare.

BRADLEY

I find this arrangement curious and unsettling.

JILLIAN

What a coincidence, huh? It certainly surprised the hell
out of me.

(MARIE enters.)

MARIE

Break a leg, Mom.

(MARIE gives JILLIAN a hug. MARIE
notices BRADLEY.)

JILLIAN

Marie, this is Doctor Bradley. From the Institute.

(MARIE shakes his hand. She can barely
conceal her distaste.)

MARIE

The pleasure's all mine, I'm sure.

(JILLIAN surreptitiously steps on
MARIE's foot. MARIE gets the message.)

MARIE (cont.)

I'm going to go grab a seat. I love you, Mom.

JILLIAN

Love you too.

(MARIE exits and sits in the audience.)

BRADLEY

May I ask, how is she doing at M.I.T.?

JILLIAN

She's had a rough time of it, but I think she's getting her
feet under her.

BRADLEY

That's good. You know, I still have a number of good friends there. They've done favors for me in the past.

JILLIAN

Okay.

BRADLEY

In the quite recent past, in fact. Around about March 14. You'll recall that date?

JILLIAN

Vividly.

BRADLEY

I also have friends who work in other departments. The ones that handle academic sanctions and continuing enrollment. You know, probation, expulsion, that sort of thing.

JILLIAN

I see.

BRADLEY

It's good to have friends you can count on. Don't you agree?

JILLIAN

Yes it is.

BRADLEY

Good luck in the debate.

(BRADLEY sits in the front of the audience.)

JILLIAN

Fuckity fuck.

(JILLIAN crosses to her podium. MARTIN is at his already.)

JILLIAN

Martin. I don't know if I can go through with this. Bradley just told me that-

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Welcome to the first in a series of debates, entitled "Future on the line: The Road to Hamburg." With us today are Everett University Professor of Astronomy Jillian Carter, and Everett University Research Professor of Climatology Martin Cross. We'll begin with opening statements. Thirty seconds. Doctor Carter?

(JILLIAN has crossed back to her podium and composed herself.)

JILLIAN

Thank you. The earth's climate is not a straight line through time. It has waves and curves and eddies, just like a river. What you'll hear tonight from my opponent is that there is evidence of a steady upward trend in temperatures on this planet in the last few decades. Al Gore's favorite image, the so-called "hockey stick." But the evidence for that trend is often conflicting and inconclusive. If you take into account temperature changes over millennia, the hockey stick looks more like a loose piece of string that veers slightly upward at the end. You will hear claims that this alleged rise is the result of human activity. But there is simply insufficient science to make this claim. Many studies, including my own groundbreaking work on solar variation, have undercut the simplistic claim that—"

(LITTLE GIRL appears on stage. JILLIAN notices her and is unnerved, but maintains her composure. LITTLE GIRL approaches JILLIAN.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

—the simplistic claim that climate variability can be chalked up to the single factor of human emissions. The only real hot air we have to worry about is that generated by alarmist researchers. Thank you.

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Thank you. Doctor Cross?

MARTIN

Thank you. My colleague mentioned the hockey stick, and that is key to the overwhelming evidence that humans are the principal, if not the sole, cause of climate change. Vague claims that "the jury's still out" fail to acknowledge the overwhelming scientific consensus on human-

caused climate change. Over and over again, the predictions we make of a temperature rise based on human emissions of greenhouse gases are borne out by real numbers-

(Meanwhile, the LITTLE GIRL has neared JILLIAN, who is freaked out. LITTLE GIRL reaches out her hand and tries to touch JILLIAN. JILLIAN withdraws. Unsure what to do, she fakes a coughing fit.)

MARTIN

Doctor Carter? Are you all right?

JILLIAN

(through coughs)

I'm sorry, I need a minute.

(JILLIAN runs offstage.)

MARTIN

(to audience)

She needs a minute.

(MARTIN follows JILLIAN offstage, as does MARIE. Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(A couple of minutes later. The auditorium, across stage from the podiums. JILLIAN sits with a cup of water. MARTIN and MARIE hover over her.)

MARIE

Are you okay, mom?

JILLIAN

I'm fine. I just needed to get off stage and talk to you.

MARTIN

I'll let folks know you're okay.

(JILLIAN pats MARTIN on the arm.)

JILLIAN

Thanks. Tell them five minutes.

(MARTIN exits offstage.)

JILLIAN

Marie. You know if I go through with this today you might have to leave M.I.T.

MARIE

We talked about this. We can find the money somewhere else.

JILLIAN

No, I mean they might kick you out.

MARIE

For what? I'm getting straight A's this semester.

JILLIAN

Really?

MARIE

Yeah.

JILLIAN

I'm not sure that matters.

MARIE

Bradley can do that?

JILLIAN

I don't know. Doesn't seem out of the realm of possibility.

MARIE

Nothing is with that guy, is it?

JILLIAN

So this needs to be up to you.

MARIE

Mom, you know my answer.

JILLIAN

I want to hear it from you.

MARIE

"Nothing is as important as the truth, because everything else rests upon it." Okay?

JILLIAN

You make me so proud.

MARIE

Not as proud as you're about to make me.

(MARTIN re-enters. JILLIAN stands up.)

MARTIN

You good to go?

JILLIAN

Let's blow this thing and go home.

(They walk over to the podiums. From here on out, JILLIAN acts out a pretend catharsis on stage. Her lines should seem just a little off, but believably sincere.)

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Welcome back. We apologize for the brief delay. Our first question: Recent studies, including one by Doctor Carter, have suggested that solar variability may play a large role

in explaining recent changes in global temperatures. What evidence can you present to prove or disprove this claim?

(MARTIN shuffles papers on his podium.)

MARTIN

The studies you're citing are based on incomplete or inconclusive data. A number of other investigations have come up with markedly different results. A study out of the University of Arizona showed no measurable effect of variation on air or water temperatures. Recent research just out from the University of Chicago has in fact shown a negative correlation - that solar variability has overall tended to reduce temperatures.

JILLIAN

Really? A negative correlation?

MARTIN

Yes.

JILLIAN

Do you have that? Can I see it?

MARTIN

Of course.

(He hands her the paper. She scans.)

MARTIN (cont.)

These are only part of a mounting body of evidence disproving these claims. Using data from the Hubble Space Telescope, NASA was able to determine that-

JILLIAN

This is incredible.

MARTIN

Pardon me?

JILLIAN

This study. The research questions are spot-on. Their methodology is flawless.

MARTIN

And the conclusions?

JILLIAN

I don't know how I overlooked this.

(BRADLEY has entered the stage and stands stage left, furious.)

MARTIN

Well then. I guess that concludes my statement.

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Thank you. Doctor Carter, rebuttal?

JILLIAN

None. Doctor Cross has proven his point. (to MARTIN) Can I keep this?

MARTIN

By all means.

MODERATOR (V.O.)

Thank you. Next question: Some estimates show that rising temperatures, steady throughout the past several decades, have recently appeared to plateau. How does this bolster or detract from the theory of anthropogenic climate change? Dr. Carter.

JILLIAN

Thank you. This plateau has been demonstrated in a number of studies, and as human emissions have risen steadily over this time frame, it certainly throws a monkey wrench into theories that anticipate steady warming. Or maybe a spanner, eh, Doctor Cross?

MARTIN

Quite.

JILLIAN

Some of the most important research demonstrating this came from a study by Brockner et al, in which this plateau was conclusively demonstrated to be-

MARTIN

Wait. Sorry to interrupt. You're citing Brockner?

JILLIAN

Of course, he's an authority in the field.

MARTIN

You know that study has been discredited. He falsified half his data. He was just dismissed from the National Academy.

JILLIAN

Really?

MARTIN

I have the investigator's report right here. Oh, I'm sorry, I should wait for my rebuttal.

JILLIAN

No, please, give it here.

(MARTIN hands the report over. JILLIAN scans. BRADLEY is pacing now.)

JILLIAN

Wow. They come down hard on the guy. Who'd he work for?

MARTIN

The Northeast Research Institute.

JILLIAN

Shut up.

MARTIN

Which is part of a highly organized front for a consortium of oil companies.

JILLIAN

You're kidding. Do you have paperwork for that too?

MARTIN

Sure, let me just dig that out for you. There's this great article by InsideClimate where they break it all down-

(BRADLEY rushes over, takes the sheaf of papers from MARTIN's desk, and throws it on the floor. He stands in front of the podiums and faces the crowd.)

BRADLEY

Ladies and gentlemen, this event is over!

MARTIN

Hey! What the hell are you doing!

(BRADLEY tries to grab the papers off JILLIAN's podium as well. MARTIN intervenes. A brief and awkward scuffle ensues, then BRADLEY gives up and retreats.)

JILLIAN

When you said this was a battle, you weren't kidding.

BRADLEY

Doctor Carter, your career is finished.

JILLIAN

I expected as much. I assume I'll be hearing from your lawyer?

BRADLEY

You have turned this debate into a farce.

JILLIAN

(smiling)

I kind of think we've turned this farce into a debate.

BRADLEY

You won't get away with this.

MARTIN

I think we just did.

(BRADLEY glares, then goes over to the wall and pulls out a plug. Lights out on stage.)

JILLIAN

Did someone get all of that on tape?

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(A few days later. JILLIAN, MARIE and MARTIN in JILLIAN's OFFICE, huddled around a computer.)

MARTIN

Look at him go after me there! Sure wish I could have gotten a good punch in.

JILLIAN

The fight over climate change has never been so visceral. How many views has it gotten?

MARIE

Two-point-six million. And you're at number three on Reddit.

JILLIAN

Is that good?

MARIE

Oh yes. You're definitely viral.

MARTIN

And you're a hell of an actress.

JILLIAN

I had pretty strong motivation. (Taps MARTIN on arm affectionately.) And a talented co-star.

MARTIN

It's too bad Doctor Gupta declined the opportunity to do it himself.

JILLIAN

Just be glad he went along with it. His heart's in the right place.

MARTIN

I think a lot of people's hearts are in the right place. The problem is their brains.

JILLIAN

Do you think this will make a difference? At Hamburg?

MARTIN

We just gave a very public peek into the bollocks behind climate change denial. In highly entertaining fashion. Every little bit helps, right?

JILLIAN

Marie, what you did at that debate was incredibly selfless.

MARIE

(shrugs)

It's fine. I mean, I'm not supposed to be at M.I.T. anyway.

JILLIAN

What do you mean?

MARIE

I mean, Bradley got me in, right?

JILLIAN

How could you think that?

MARIE

Come on, Mom. I was like twentieth in my class. M.I.T. is for kids who get a 1600 on their SATs and send a note to the College Board letting them know they misphrased something on one of the questions.

JILLIAN

Have a little faith in yourself, honey.

MARIE

I do. That's why I went anyway. I figured it would be pretty clear if I deserved to be there or not.

JILLIAN

And?

MARIE

I told you, straight A's this semester. I'm already thinking about my senior thesis. I was to do it on the psychology of denial. That is, if they don't kick me out.

JILLIAN

If they try, we'll fight it. And incidentally, we should have some help in paying for it.

MARIE

What do you mean?

JILLIAN

I called your father's lawyer today and asked him to mail me the papers.

(MARIE puts her arms up in triumph and does a little dance.)

MARIE

Yes!

JILLIAN

Try not to be so broken-up about it, now.

MARIE

Long time comin,' mom, and you know it. Yeah!

MARTIN

Give your mom a break, Marie. Ask her someday about the frying pan. (to JILLIAN) Jillian?

JILLIAN

Yes?

MARTIN

Can I interest you in that drink now?

JILLIAN

I'm not quite ready for that yet, Martin.

MARTIN

Oh.

JILLIAN

How about in an hour?

MARTIN

Oh. Okay! I'll see you then. See you later, Marie.

MARIE

Peace out, Martin.

(MARTIN heads for the exit, then turns.)

MARTIN

She is saved!

(MARTIN exits.)

MARIE

Mom, are you going to be all right?

JILLIAN

If you mean careerwise, no idea.

MARIE

I meant in everything.

JILLIAN

Yeah. I think so.

MARIE

Based on not quite half a semester as a Brain and Cognitive Science major - I think so too. But what about the Ghost of Climate Yet-to-Come?

JILLIAN

I think I have that figured out.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Immediately afterward. JILLIAN on the roof, next to station.)

JILLIAN

So guess what? It's just you and me again. Yeah, your compadres in Edmonton and Atlanta and Puerto Rico have run off and left us all alone. I know. I'm sorry. Friends can be so fickle. But we've still got each other, right? You'll still be up here watching the skies for me?

(THE LITTLE GIRL enters from the audience and approaches. JILLIAN senses her presence and turns. She continues to address the monitoring station even as she watches the girl.)

JILLIAN

I remember a time when I would watch the skies, too. I would watch everything. I wanted to know about everything. Mountains. Rainbows. Leaves. Beetles.

(The LITTLE GIRL has walked to the edge of the stage. She points.)

JILLIAN (cont.)

And then, when I got a little older, molecules and atoms and electrons and galaxies and dimensions. Nothing on earth was as important to me as knowing. And I would ask about things, and I would always get an answer. I'd always get the truth.

(LITTLE GIRL turns to JILLIAN)

LITTLE GIRL

What is it?

JILLIAN

That? It's a lenticular cloud. It looks a little like a flying saucer, doesn't it? Sometimes people see them and report them as U.F.O.'s.

LITTLE GIRL

Why would they do that?

JILLIAN

Sometimes it's hard for people to understand what's really there. It's how our brains work.

LITTLE GIRL

Does that cloud mean it's going to rain?

JILLIAN

Probably not. Usually those kinds of clouds dissolve quickly. But it might be part of a front, which could mean rain.

LITTLE GIRL

What's a front?

JILLIAN

Why don't you come sit by me, Jillian, and I'll tell you all about it.

(LITTLE GIRL comes and sits by JILLIAN. JILLIAN and LITTLE GIRL look at each other and smile. Blackout. End of Play.)