

"THE OMBUDSMAN'S DAUGHTER"

by David Misch

OPEN ON: Bare stage with two chairs. BOB and ROSEMARY (20's/30's, in jumpsuits) stumble in from Stage Left and, yelling, fall across off Stage Right.

A beat, then they tumble in from Stage Right and fall off Stage Left.

A beat, then Bob falls in from Stage Left as Rosemary falls in from Stage Right. They grab each other, then drop into the chairs, lurch forward, reach up into the air, and pull back sharply. They bounce in their chairs then stop suddenly. They breathe heavily for a few moments, then sigh in relief.

Bob is great at being an astronaut but less-so at understanding people. Especially Rosemary, who's tough, hard-working and driven to be the best at everything she does.

BOB

Phew. All right. We made it. We're fine.

ROSEMARY

I warned you about the transponder.

BOB

I don't think that's it.

ROSEMARY

But it is.

BOB

Anyway. I'll call, then we have an hour off.

ROSEMARY

Okay. I'm gonna do some stuff.

She gets up.

BOB

Rosemary?

ROSEMARY

Yeah?

BOB

I gotta talk to you about something. I was going through your gear this morning --- (OFF HER LOOK) I was looking for a tool. I couldn't find the wrench, I had to make a repair, I thought you had it last...

ROSEMARY

You had it last.

BOB

Oh I know! I mean, I realized that when I didn't find it. But...

Rosemary shakes her head.

BOB (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. But I gotta ask you...

ROSEMARY

Yes, they're mugs. They're travel mugs with my picture on them and I'm gonna sell 'em when we get back.

BOB

What?

ROSEMARY

What what?

BOB

You have travel mugs?

ROSEMARY

Oh Jesus... Look, Bob, this whole program is built on the foundation of free enterprise. It's a great giant entrepreneurial adventure.

BOB

I was just gonna ask about the writing.

ROSEMARY

The writing.

BOB

You know... It looks like... Geez, you have travel mugs? What'll they go for?

ROSEMARY

They tell me a minimum of a thou apiece. Say, you want one? (PULLS MUG FROM SUIT) Half-price. Believe me, these babies are gonna appreciate like wildfire.

BOB

How many do you have?

ROSEMARY

A dozen.

BOB

At a thousand apiece?! (REALIZES SOMETHING) How much do they weigh?

ROSEMARY

Oh c'mon, the weight of a dozen mugs is not... (PUTS HAND TO EAR; SPEAKS TO SOMEONE ELSE) Yes, copy. (BEAT) Yeah, we shifted our goddam position -- we were over a goddam crater! (BEAT) I'm sorry, you'll have to repeat that. (BEAT) Houston, am I to understand that we will be on the air in two repeat tee-double-oh minutes? (BEAT) Houston, next scheduled transmission is --- (BEAT) The President. Isn't that a little premature, Houston? We may go out there and fall through the surface. He doesn't know if we're winners or losers yet. (BEAT) Yeah, well, fuck you too, Houston. (TAKES HAND FROM EAR; TO BOB) Get beautiful, we're on.

BOB

With the President?!

They reach behind their chairs, pull out space helmets, and put them on their laps. Rosemary takes a compact from her suit and touches up. Bob watches her, then reaches behind his chair and takes out a spritzer. He sprays his face to look sweaty, then sets his expression to Serious Intensity.

Rosemary regards him, then unfastens the top button of her uniform. Bob regards her, then opens his top button. Rosemary stares, then unfastens two buttons. Bob looks at her, then grabs the spritzer and sprays. Suddenly, they each put their hands to their ears and stand. Then, remembering, they grab their helmets and put them on. A beat to compose themselves, then Bob leans forward and flips a switch.

BOB (CONT'D)

Yes! Captain Bob 'Bucky' Roberts and Lieutenant Rosemary Denison aboard the USS Commander just landed on Mars.
(BEAT) Thank you very much, sir.

Beat.

ROSEMARY

Thank you very much, sir.

Beat. They laugh. Beat. They laugh again. Beat. They nod seriously. Beat.

BOB

Thank you, sir.

ROSEMARY

Thank you very much, sir.

Bob leans forward to switch off.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

And may I add, sir, that our duty to America is eclipsed only by our duty to the stars. (BEAT) Thank you, sir.

Bob flips the switch; they take off their helmets.

BOB

What was that?

ROSEMARY

What?

BOB

That stuff about 'duty to the stars'.

ROSEMARY

A little rhetorical flourish. Should I run a soil analysis?

BOB

Rosemary, really, we have to discuss that thing.

ROSEMARY

No sex. No mutual masturbation. No open-mouth kissing. You wanta celebrate, pop a champagne capsule.

BOB

Geez, please don't talk like that.

ROSEMARY

Dude -- it's seven months back. That's a week of foreplay, a week of hot sex, three weeks of boredom, and six months of whining.

BOB

Rosemary, I'm married. You know I wouldn't... Geez, you're not like any woman I've ever met.

ROSEMARY

I take it you didn't date many jet pilots. Okay, I'm sorry if I jump the gun sometimes but any mix-ups out here could be fatal.

BOB

No, it's good to make things clear. But you gotta admit that I've been more than fair to you. I let you have your... 'space'... I don't bother you with my experiments, I don't ask about yours, I'm not gonna 'hassle' you about the mugs...

ROSEMARY

You coulda brought your own mugs.

BOB

I could've! That's true! It's just those slips of paper in your gear. With the... sentences.

She says nothing.

BOB (CONT'D)

I know what they are. They're... ideas... for sentences to say on Mars. For the first person to step on the planet Mars.

She says nothing.

BOB (CONT'D)

But you know the problem. You know there's a big problem. I'm the one who goes out first. That's been the focus of five years of training for me. You're supposed to stay on board till tomorrow.

ROSEMARY

I know that. I'm very aware of that.
(BEAT) The sentences are for in case.

BOB

In case what?

ROSEMARY

Bob, you wanta name all the women who've been first to step on a planet?

BOB

That's not fair. Neil Armstrong's the only ---

ROSEMARY

At the end of a ball game, one team wins. There's no column where they tote up which side was more fair. I happen to be in a game where the score is one-zip.

BOB

Rosemary, you know if it was up to me...

ROSEMARY

I know. You're okay. Bob ...

BOB

Call me Bucky.

ROSEMARY

Bob, I wish I didn't feel this way. But I've always been first. I was first in my class at the Academy, first in my astronaut group to score heavily in the securities market. I've worked really hard and really well, and I know there isn't a man on Earth better qualified to be the first woman on Mars.

BOB

You're a wonderful astronaut.

ROSEMARY

(UNHAPPY) Thanks.

Beat.

BOB

I feel bad. It doesn't even mean that much to me. It's exciting, of course, but I just want to do my job well. I want to make a scientific contribution.

ROSEMARY

So do I! I want to make a scientific contribution and get rich! Something wrong with that?

BOB

No, there's nothing wrong with that.

ROSEMARY

Well, who are you to judge?!

BOB

I agreed with you.

ROSEMARY

Oh. Thank you.

BOB

What worries me is after. Interviews and speeches and maybe a parade...

ROSEMARY

Yeah, it could get rough.

BOB

You're joking. 'Cause you would look forward to that.

ROSEMARY

Hey, they prepped me to take a hundred-fifty G's in a free-fall with an unconscious co-pilot and the engine on fire, I think I can handle 'Cosmo Girl'.

A beat.

BOB

You come up with any good first words?

ROSEMARY

'Man finds courage in the stars... Woman finds courage in herself.'

Bob plays it over in his head.

BOB

I don't... well, yeah. Sure. I guess. I don't quite understand it.

ROSEMARY

It's rotten. I didn't think of it.

BOB

It's a quote?

ROSEMARY

It's from my PR firm.

BOB

You have --- ?

ROSEMARY

It could be worse. They wanted to plug me as an 'astronette'. (MAKES "GAGGING" GESTURE) That I deep-sixed, so they came up with a few lines -- duty to the stars, courage in the stars... They said if I said 'em... it'd be nice.

BOB

(TENTATIVELY) You'd get paid?

ROSEMARY

Now wait a minute. This is an important event in world history, no one's trying to get paid for it! They're doing it pro bono, I do it pro bono, if someone happens to be impressed and wants to pay them or us or me to do other things, then that's fine!

BOB

Okay, yeah, I see. I understand.

ROSEMARY

People don't do everything for money.

BOB

No, they don't. Definitely.

ROSEMARY

Sometimes you do things so you can make money later. (THEN) You think I'm cynical.

BOB

You? No! I don't think you're cynical. You're not really cynical. I wouldn't say you're cynical. (THEN) You're a bit cynical.

ROSEMARY

Well, you're naive.

BOB

Oh, I wouldn't be surprised. I mean, I don't know a lot about these things but I'm probably quite naive.

ROSEMARY

We're different, that's all. Let's face it, if they hadn't put us together, we probably wouldn't be friends, and I'm almost certain we wouldn't be lovers. Although, y'see, I'm an idealist too, only a capitalist idealist.

BOB

I don't think I'm an idealist.

ROSEMARY

That proves you are. (SIGHS) You better get going.

A beat.

BOB

Aren't you going to say 'Break a leg'?

ROSEMARY

C'mon, lay off. I said I'm sorry.

BOB

I was just trying to cheer you up.

ROSEMARY

You know the problem? I'm a driven woman. During the psychological tests, it all came out, like shit from a duck. I have strongly ambivalent feelings towards my father. On the one hand, I love him. On the other hand, I hate him.

BOB

That's pretty ambivalent.

ROSEMARY

I mean, how would you feel about a father who spent his life as an ombudsman?

BOB

A what?

ROSEMARY

Y'see? How many professions are there people haven't even heard of? An ombudsman was a sort of... representative of the people. Someone who was in the government but not of it. Someone to cut through the red tape and make things happen, really help people -- 'the lance of Quixote tilting at the windmills of Big Brother'. It was invented in the Sixties but took forever to die. Pop worked for a Congressman in upstate New York. So you know what he did? He corrected address errors on Medicare checks. After eight years, he got defunded, so he went to work on a newspaper where he corrected address errors on cat rescue stories.

BOB

I always wondered what happened to people with jobs that only existed in the Sixties.

ROSEMARY

Well, Pop's one and I don't know what happened to him.

BOB

Maybe they all went somewhere. Maybe there's an island someplace where the ombudsmen rule wisely over a kingdom of protest singers and Peace Corps workers and underground cartoonists and Women's Herstory majors and students who chase corporate recruiters off campus.

ROSEMARY

So when I'm growing up, you know what everyone asks me? 'Are you going to be an ombudsman? Maybe you could be the first...

(MORE)

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

(SARCASTIC PAUSE FOR 'EFFECT')
ombudswoman...' And gentle laughter
would echo through the Catskills.

BOB

(NOTICES SOMETHING) Are the foot-pads
stable?

ROSEMARY

Yes. So I became a jet pilot. And the
first woman in history not to be the
first woman on Mars.

Bob looks awkward.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

Oh hell, it was a crazy idea. I guess
I'm a dreamer like Pop after all, huh?
It's tough right now, that's all, sitting
here inches away and not being able to do
it. Anyway, it wouldn't have meant much
with that sentence. I thought of some
back-ups... (FISHES IN POCKET, PULLS OUT
PAPER) ... 'A planet not just for me,
but for all women.'

Bob smiles politely.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

It's pompous as hell. Y'see, I don't
mean it that way, that's why I need a PR
firm. (PULLS OUT ANOTHER) 'From here, I
see the women of Earth.' It's not
enough. It's a first sentence, I'm sure
there's a killer pay-off, but who's gonna
remember two sentences? (PULLS OUT
ANOTHER) 'What a dump.' That's a movie
reference. It's a gag, I wasn't serious.
Although you never know. (SIGH) Go on,
do it.

BOB

I hate to leave with you feeling so
crummy.

ROSEMARY

It's no big deal. I mean, obviously, it is a big deal but... You're a good man, Roberts. You handle your job well, you treat me fine... you deserve this. Really, I mean it. I was nuts even thinking about it. You'll do great. Now get out before I throw you out, ya big lug.

BOB

Okay...

He starts to leave.

ROSEMARY

Bob...

He turns as she pulls something out of her pocket.

ROSEMARY (CONT'D)

Could you take this serving tray with you?

BOB

Rosemary...

ROSEMARY

It's really light. Space-age plastic -- that's the hook.

BOB

No, I can't. It's... it's scary going out there. I don't want to be weighed down with serving trays.

ROSEMARY

You mean weighed down psychologically. Because you see it's incredibly light.

BOB

It is! No, like you say, weighed down psychologically.

ROSEMARY

I'd split fifty-fifty. The main payment, not the ancillary rights 'cause, you know, I set up the deal.

BOB

No, I'd really rather not.

ROSEMARY

Okay. No problem. Have a nice walk.

BOB

Are you angry?

ROSEMARY

Do I look angry?

She looks sad.

BOB

You know -- a woman isn't important because of what she does. A woman is important because of who she is.

A beat, then Rosemary lifts her head, amazed.

ROSEMARY

That's it. That is absolutely it. What was it again?

BOB

Um... a woman isn't important because she does things...

ROSEMARY

No! Because of what she does!

BOB

Because of what she does. She's important because she is.

ROSEMARY

What? No, no. A woman is important... did it actually make sense?

BOB

Um...

ROSEMARY

No, it was great, it was. (REMEMBERS) A woman is important because of who she is! Yeah! All right! That is great! Why did you say that?

BOB

I was thinking of my wife. She's not important or anything, but she's so... beautiful. So calm and confident and good at what she does -- she teaches high school. Maybe 'cause of how she acts, everyone thinks she's more beautiful than she is.

ROSEMARY

That's really sweet. I'd like to meet her. Maybe after the book tour. (SIGHS) Oh God, this really makes it tough.

BOB

What?

ROSEMARY

It's just... now there's a sentence. The perfect sentence.

She sighs. Bob thinks for a moment.

BOB

Rosemary, you're as good as I am. I mean, scientifically. And you want this so much. And I really don't want it at all. Go ahead.

ROSEMARY

What -- really?! You mean it?!

BOB

It would make me happy. And I'd be the first man on Earth to be with the first woman on Mars.

ROSEMARY

Oh shit, this is fantastic! Bob -- thank you! This is incredible! You're great! You're... you're a Bucky!

BOB

Thank you.

She kisses him, then pulls back.

ROSEMARY

(KIDDING) No tongues. Oh man, this is unbelievable. And... I can use the sentence?

BOB

Huh? Oh, sure.

ROSEMARY

You watch, I'm gonna do great. Now I almost wish you didn't love your wife, we could have sex on the way back. Did you bring condoms? Shit, I have condoms! Five hundred with my picture on 'em. Anyway, not important -- I'm off. And Bob... Bucky... thanks a million, really.

She runs out. Bob leans forward and flips a switch.

BOB

This is Captain Bob 'Bucky' Roberts aboard the USS Commander. Due to a minor injury, I will not be able to participate in the scheduled EVA. Lieutenant Denison will take my place -- I believe you can see her now on the exterior monitor as she walks down the steps to the Martian surface.

ROSEMARY (O.S.)

(FILTERED) I am now descending the eight steps... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. A woman is not ---

We hear a PLOP, a SQUISH, and a CRASH.

ROSEMARY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Shi-i-i-i-i-t!!!!

BOB
(JIGGLES SWITCH) Rosemary? (JIGGLES SWITCH) Rosemary! (GETS UP; PUTS ON HELMET) People of Earth -- Lieutenant Denison has sunk into the Martian surface! I will attempt an immediate rescue...

ROSEMARY (O.S.)
(FILTERED) No, it's okay, I'm all right, it's just gunk. It's really gunky, though. I bet it stinks too. It's like a gooey smelly... like tapioca your cat went in. Bob -- don't worry, I can get out. Oh! Shit! A woman isn't beautiful... women aren't... women are... fuck...

BOB
I'm coming, Rosemary! Hang on!

He rushes out.

ROSEMARY (O.S.)
(FILTERED) Hey, I don't need rescuing! I could use a couple Handi-Wipes. And bring the sentences. Ouch!!! Oh shit, I sat on a travel mug...

BOB (O.S.)
(FILTERED) I'm coming, Rosemary!

BLACK-OUT.

THE END