

FUSION AND FALLOUT OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

by

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April 20, 2020
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FUSION AND FALLOUT OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

a full-length play

by Jean Egdorf

CHARACTERS (4F, 3M)

ADA 30s, she/her, nuclear chemist

MARCEL 90, he/him, Ada's grandfather; WWII veteran and retired chemist who worked on the Manhattan Project

MYRA 60s, she/her, Marcel's daughter, Ada's aunt & older sister of Peter

BRIDGET late-30s/early-40s, she/her, Ada's research colleague & partner

PETER 60s, he/him, Marcel's son, Ada's father & younger brother of Myra

YOUNG MARCEL 20s, he/him, a memory of Marcel when he was a young man

YOUNG IRENE late-teens/20s, she/her, a memory of Marcel's wife Irene when she was a young woman

DOUBLED ROLES:

FATHER 50s, played by the same actor who plays Peter

MOTHER 50s, played by the same actor who plays Myra

DAUGHTER Teen-20s, f, played by the same actor who plays Young Irene

SON Teen, m, played by the same actor who plays Young Marcel

NARRATOR Voice-over narration, in the style of educational films of the late-1940s and 1950s. Pre-recorded or may be performed live.

SETTING

The living room of a low-income apartment rented by Marcel.

A space out of a late-1940s/1950s Coronet Instructional Film.

TIME & PLACE

The present action of the play takes place in 2015 in Los Alamos, New Mexico: a small town in the Southern Rocky Mountains that once was a secret government city during the Manhattan Project.

The scenes in the past take place in the edges of space and time, variably between the 1940s and 1970s.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Marcel's dialog is peppered with noises that appear in the text as variations of "hm" and "hrm" -- these are intended to represent grunts or other interruptions in speech with sound, and are up to the choices of the actor and director. Periods and interruptions of text are thoughts cut-off, not an indication of slowness of speech. Marcel's speech is about maintaining vocalization/language in order to find the right words, rather than a slowness of delivery.

With exception of the intermission, during which the clutter of Marcel's apartment should be cleared, transitions in the play ideally should show the actors in character moving in time: they may sort through things as a means to get to their place in the following scene, but otherwise the apartment can stay the same (crew-driven transitions should not be necessary).

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Music plays in as lights come up on a scene out of a 1950s Coronet Instructional Film.

This is the picture of the traditional, American nuclear family: the MOTHER, a catalog-ready portrait from a Sears Roebuck ad; the young teenage DAUGHTER, a miniature facsimile of her mother in poise and demeanor, if you swapped out the makeup and the high-heeled shoes for mary janes; and the SON, that little rapsallion, who we don't mind hasn't yet washed up for dinner after an afternoon at play.

Finally, in through the door walks the FATHER, home after a hard day's work. Mother, of course, is there to take his briefcase and greet him with a smooch on the cheek.

The scene is mimed by the actors as the voice of the NARRATOR plays over:)

NARRATOR

Ah, here we have the perfect picture of the all-American family. The Father, arrived home after a long day's work, is greeted as always by his dedicated wife and doting, well-behaved, children. Dinner is in the oven, so now is the perfect time for Father to sit, relax, read the paper, smoke his pipe.

Now, now, kids -- this is not the time to bother your Father with questions and demands. There will be plenty of time for him to help you with your homework and read stories to your dollies after dinner is finished.

Your Father works a very important job, for the government, as a scientist. A Nuclear Scientist, to be exact.

I'm sure you're all familiar with the word "nuclear."

NARRATOR (CONT)

We all know about the atomic bomb. In World War II, brilliant scientists, like your Father, made the discovery that won the war against the evil Axis powers and ushered us into a golden future: the nuclear age.

The great power that comes from splitting the atom has now been harnessed to provide affordable, clean, and easily renewable energy to families all across America. Do not be alarmed, children. Unlike the atomic bomb, nuclear energy is completely safe, and a necessary development for modern civilization.

It was not too long ago that only the richest and most powerful members of society could afford electric appliances and the energy it took to power them. Soon, every home in America will have the newest and best electric appliances: like the Frigidaire electric refrigerator with built in freezer. It sure makes preparing dinner each night a breeze, isn't that right, Mom?

All this is thanks to the miraculous power of fission energy.

But Father is keenly aware that the same process that powers our homes, businesses, and classrooms, in the wrong hands, may be used to try to harm us. Which is why he and other scientists concern themselves with not just powering our future, but maintaining our defenses to protect it.

We all know the atomic bomb is very dangerous. Since it could be used against us, we should get ready for it, just as we would for other dangers that are around us all the time.

First you have to know what happens when an atomic bomb explodes. You'll know when it comes, we hope it never comes, but we must be ready. It will look something like this: there will be a bright flash, brighter than the sun, brighter than anything you have ever seen.

If you are not ready, if you do not know what to do, then it could hurt you in different ways.

NARRATOR (CONT)

Always remember, the flash of an atomic bomb can come at any time, no matter where you may be. It may even come in your very, own home.

When you're inside or somewhere safe, be sure you follow the necessary next steps: Duck, and cover.

Duck and cover! Then stay where you are until you know the danger has passed. This family knows what to do just as your own family should.

SON

"But Father!"

NARRATOR

Oh, what a precocious scamp. Okay, Junior. Just one more question.

SON

"If nuclear energy uses the same ingredients as the atomic bomb, how do we know it isn't dangerous, too?"

NARRATOR

Don't you worry, Junior. You trust your Father, don't you?

Good. Then you can trust nuclear energy. It's in the hands of the best and brightest scientists, and every step of the process is overseen by the American government, who always has its citizens' best interests at heart.

Oh, what's that Mother? It's time to wash up for dinner already? Well, Father didn't get much of a break, now did he? I guess it's true what they say, a Father's work is never done -- at the job, or in his home.

(Music plays out on the happy family. The sound of the film running out of an old projector reel, as the lights and scene shift.)

SCENE 2

(Lights rise on the apartment living room of 90-year-old MARCEL. A lazy-boy style recliner, hutch for a small TV, maybe some bookcases, a coffee table, a couch under there somewhere, all of it--except for the seat of the recliner, which, is appropriately used for sitting--covered with the years and decades of clutter that came from each preceding home. A shallow hall leads off to a bathroom and bedroom, the kitchen adjacent to the living room is there, but is implied more than seen.)

(ADA stands in the middle of the mess, looking at papers or photos taken from a stack somewhere. She seems at once a familiar part of this place and very out of place. From off, her aunt MYRA shouts out to her:)

MYRA (OFF)

Honestly I tried to convince him to go through and clear out this mess ten years ago--TEN YEARS AGO--when we moved him out of the old house in the Jemez after the first time his license got taken away.

ADA

Wait, the first time? They gave it back?

MYRA (OFF)

The way he tells it, he sweet-talked the poor gal at the DMV. Can you believe it? I mean, of course you could. It's Marcel Lange, what else would you expect him to do. ... They should really have better standards for employment at those sorts of places, the man was eighty for crissake, what eighty-year-old needs a driver's license?

ADA

I'm going to remind you that you said that in twenty years.

MYRA (OFF)

I'll happily shred mine before then. I loathe driving. And yet, here I am, twice a week, making the four-hour round trip.

ADA

Does he still have his license?

MYRA (OFF)

Christ, no! They finally took it away for good after he hit a deer and totaled his pickup.

ADA

I feel sorry for the deer.

MYRA (OFF)

I was in Milan for a conference, so Peter had to come out to help him take care of the insurance--Peter didn't tell you about it? It was a whole row the two of them had.

ADA

You know me and Dad. ... I'm surprised he came at all.

MYRA (OFF)

Like it or not, he's still our father. ... You'd do the same for Peter, wouldn't you--

ADA

If it even occurred to him to call me, maybe.

MYRA (OFF)

You could be the one to call him, you know--

ADA

Maybe when he has to move into his nursing home.

MYRA

Honestly, Ada! I just don't understand the two of you.

ADA

You're one to talk!

MYRA

My situation is entirely different.

ADA

I'll tell you what: I'll call Dad the day you and Grandpa can be in the same room together and not end up in a screaming match--

MYRA

I do not scream--

ADA

You were saying about grandpa's stuff?

MYRA (OFF)

Right. Of course your grandfather doesn't listen to me--when does he listen to anyone, least of all his own children. And so in move all the boxes and bags from god only knows how long ago. At least since your grandmother passed, I'd have to assume, as she was the only one who deigned to keep anything organized in their marriage--

(Myra finally enters, precariously carrying two boxes. Ada rushes to help her before anything drops.)

MYRA (CONT)

Thank you. There's more in the bedroom closet.

ADA

I'll get them later, this is more than enough to start with.

MYRA

Receipts, notes with no context, junk he printed off the internet you can just trash or recycle. Anything that looks official, financial paperwork, photographs--there are a lot of photographs... Organize those into the empty boxes, and I'll deal with them at some point. ... Or, you'll be doing all this all over again for me in thirty years.

(Myra regards the photo Ada is holding.)

MYRA (CONT)

Find something good?

ADA

Do you recognize anyone in this?

MYRA

Hm. I'm not sure... Are there any others?

ADA

ADA

No, just that one by itself. It must have gotten mixed up with whatever else was in this stack.

MYRA

Well what hasn't. ... Wait... The third man from the left, there, that's your grandfather in his uniform.

ADA

Uniform? He was in the military?

MYRA

All this, whatever good it actually does him, comes from his VA benefits. You only get those if you served.

ADA

When?

MYRA

Before I was born. He doesn't talk about it.

ADA

Grandpa Marcel? Doesn't talk about something in his past?

MYRA

He's full of stories, but if you ever really listen to him, you'll hear that none of them are anything about anything important.

(Beat.)

It's good of you to come out and do this. After his fall, well, the timeline for moving him out of this...

(She gestures vaguely at the disarray around her.)

I only make it down twice a week or so, all just to sneak in during the hour your grandfather is out with the nurse from the physical therapist--

ADA

I'm happy to help, really.

MYRA

Still. Your grandfather is. A lot. He's just a lot. This is just a lot. I'll come down to help when I know he'll be out of the house, and I promise I won't hold it against you if you abandon ship after the first few hours.

ADA

What do you mean? Grandpa and I get along great.

MYRA

Oh? Pardon me. I must have forgotten that old saying: not taking time to see a family member but once a decade makes the heart grow fonder.

ADA

It doesn't work for you?

MYRA

You weren't raised by him!

ADA

And I see him--

MYRA

You've been back here for what--six months now? This is the first I've seen of you. How many times really.

ADA

It's been busy. A lot of travel between labs, California, Chicago--

MYRA

You don't need to make excuses to me, Ada, I understand. ... I am happy you're here. If I haven't made that clear. It was just a bit... When you took my call I obviously expected your work, as always, would take priority--

ADA

You told me it was an emergency.

MYRA

It is an emergency.

ADA

Work right now isn't exactly a priority.

MYRA

(A bit too gleefully:)

Did you lose your job?

ADA

What? No.

MYRA

Oh...

ADA

No, the project is just on hold, temporarily, while the lab figures out funding, or whatever. Bureaucratic red-tape.

MYRA

Oh.

ADA

Bridget has promised me we come out for the better on the other end of this. ... We've been promised a new office and a substantial raise.

MYRA

Oh. Well. How. Great... For you.

ADA

Mmhmm.

MYRA

... I suppose it was a fool's hope you had reconsidered signing your life away to a government agency.

ADA

What is that supposed to mean.

MYRA

Oh, Ada, don't be naive.

ADA

It's just an energy contract, Aunt Myra.

MYRA

I suppose that means they're moving ahead with construction on that... abomination they're building.

ADA

It isn't an abomination--

MYRA

You know I really don't have the means to move house. Again. To a whole new area of the country.

ADA

Jesus Christ not this again.

MYRA

It's unconscionable! This sort of decision should be put up to a vote.

ADA

You don't actually live here--

MYRA

A state vote! I know where my taxes go, and if I help fund this "government research facility" then I should damn well get a say in how they spend my money!

ADA

And what would you do if a vote passed?

MYRA

Take to the streets! When I was your age, I was in New York with one million people protesting against nuclear weapons--the largest political protest in history, Ada--

ADA

I'm not making nuclear weapons! It's nuclear power, they're two completely different things--

MYRA

No one who lived through the 1980s and saw what happened in Chernobyl would ever approve the construction of a nuclear power plant in their own backyard.

ADA

Things have changed Aunt Myra--

MYRA

To say nothing of Three Mile Island, Church Rock-- Fukushima was barely four years ago--!

ADA

And those were all nuclear fission plants, we're moving past nuclear fission--

MYRA

It is 2015, I like to believe we as a society have moved past the need for nuclear anything--

ADA

Did you read the articles I sent you? The ones we published?

MYRA

I skimmed them.

ADA

Skimmed.

MYRA

I remember they were surprisingly well composed. I admit I was impressed by your writing, it was never your strength, exactly--

ADA

I didn't actually write them. My partner, Bridget, she's the one who--

MYRA

Oh, my mistake. Well you'll have to tell her how impressed I was by the writing--

ADA

But it is my research--

MYRA

Unfortunately.

ADA

If you had done more than skimmed them--!

Fusion energy, Aunt Myra. Power that comes from not splitting atoms apart, but by bringing them together. The work I'm doing is revolutionary, and I'm the only one doing it at the scale that can actually prove its potential to save the world. I will change the world.

MYRA

I imagine Oppenheimer said the same about his project--
-

ADA

If we as a species are going to actually free ourselves from fossil fuel dependent energy systems, and produce enough power to meet the rapidly growing world demand, nuclear is the only answer to provide the major source of clean, abundant, renewable--

MYRA

With all your smarts, it simply baffles me that you didn't instead dedicate your life to practical and progressive pursuits like solar energy. Did you forget about the sun, Ada? You want abundance? It's just there! There's no risk of it being depleted in our lifetime, it isn't radioactive--

ADA

The sun, by definition, is radioactive!

MYRA

You know what I mean! You are. So. Stubborn--

ADA

I'm stubborn?!

MYRA

You are just like your grandfather. Good luck to the both of you!

ADA

At least he actually supports the work I'm doing!

(The front door slams. A beat. MARCEL enters. He looks at the two women and grunts, then starts to make his way to the bedroom.)

MYRA

Where is Samantha?

MARCEL

Who?

MYRA

Samantha! Your nurse? You're back early. You were supposed to be out for another hour--

MARCEL

Who? ... Samantha. Huhn. No. ... You mean Debra?

MYRA

What happened to Samantha?

MARCEL

I don't remember any Samantha.

MYRA

Then where is Debra?

MARCEL

I challenged her to a race back here and she couldn't keep up.

(Marcel laughs a bit to himself. The bad joke makes Ada smile. Marcel notices.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Ada Irena! You made it back in safe? You find the place okay? The first. First time you. Hm. It's like a maze. Getting back to this old apartment.

(Myra gives Ada a sharp look: you've seen him?)

ADA

Yeah, I made it just fine.

MARCEL

You fly here?

ADA

No, I drove--

MARCEL

All the way from Chicago? That's. That's a. Some drive. Good. The drive's good. Through the. The mountains. Pretty drive. Winding. Through all the. Irene and I used to. When the aspens. To see the colors. Nice drive. Watch out for the deer, though--

ADA

It was a very nice drive, no deer.

MARCEL

I do miss the aspens. From the. Hm. From the. Don't think I've been on a plane since... Since... Eh. Hrm. ... Did I ever tell you the story about the first time I took your dad out flying, it was in a little two-seater, open cockpit--

MYRA

Dad. I'm sure she's heard that story a dozen times--

ADA

No, I don't mind--

MYRA

What happened to Debra?

MARCEL

She quit. Or I fired her. Eh. Hrm. Does it matter?

MYRA

You can't keep running off these poor girls. Soon there isn't going to be anyone left the clinic can send that will be willing to work with you.

MYRA (CONT)

Your options are already limited by what Medicare and the VA will cover. This isn't just for fun, Dad, it's your health--

MARCEL

Blah blah blah, hrm. Haruph. My health. Hrmph. It's my life, and it's my choice what I want to do with it and who I want to spend time with. ... And it's not some squawking spring chickens who'd rather be socializing, out with their galfriends and chasing boys--

(pointedly, to Ada:)

--or other gals--instead of being stuck taking afternoon walks with grouchy old stuffs like me.

MYRA

If I remember correctly, Samantha wasn't exactly a spring chicken--

MARCEL

Huh. That's right. Samantha. Hrm. I must have gotten her confused because her persistent nagging reminded me of you! Hmph. Hm. I'm going to take a nap.

MYRA

Yes, well. If you're going to act like a child, you might as well.

(Marcel exits toward the bedroom with a grunt. Myra throws her hands up.)

MYRA (CONT)

And this is a good day.

MARCEL

(Entering:)

What have you done with them?

MYRA

With what?

MARCEL

You know what. What. My things. Mine.

MYRA

I haven't done anything--

MARCEL

Boxes! My closet. All open and missing. Moved. Hrmph. I did not give you permission to touch my things, my important things--

MYRA

Do you even have any idea what's in these boxes that's so important--

MARCEL

It doesn't matter what's in them, they're mine, whatever is in them--

MYRA

Oh, forgive me, we moved your precious boxes full of whatever--

ADA

They're here, Grandpa, we just brought them in so I can--

MARCEL

Now you've roped her into your schemes--?!

MYRA

I'm not scheming. We've been through this over and over again--

MARCEL

You move things and move things and leave me to put them back where they belong--

MYRA

They belong in the dump, probably! If I weren't convinced you were hoarding some crucial record or irreplaceable memory, I'd load them all in the back of my car and take them to the landfill--

MARCEL

It is none of your business what I'm... The things I'm. What. Hrmph. Hoarding?!

MYRA

Yes, hoarding, it's what you do, you hoard things--

MARCEL

Let a man live with his possessions in peace, you harpy!

MYRA

Insult me all you want. It doesn't change the fact that you can't stay here--

MARCEL

It does not. I won't. I refuse! I... I. This is my life. Hmph. Mine, not yours. I never asked you for help. Not anything. Not once in my life have I asked--

MYRA

Of course not, why would you ever lower yourself to such a position as having to ask another human being for anything--

MARCEL

Well I am not asking. I am telling. I am. I am telling you that I will not--

MYRA

Enough. Just enough. The decision's already been made. You've got to be out of here by the end of the month whether you like it or not.

MARCEL

Over my dead body! I will sooner drop down dead--

MYRA

Yes. Exactly. That is exactly why you have to move to a care facility--

MARCEL

Over somebody's dead body, anyway!

MYRA

Well it won't be mine! This is ridiculous. Lord help you, Ada.

MARCEL

Ada. Ada Irena. You tell her. You understand me. You have the Lange spirit of... Of independence. We cannot be. Be. Hmph. Be... Tethered. To. To someone else's care.

ADA

I'm just here to help you sort through everything, okay? That's all--

MARCEL

//Ada, be on... Hm. Be on my side!//

MYRA

//Ada, you are not just here to...// He has to go,
Ada. Make him see reason--

MARCEL

She's not here. She's never. Never comes by. Doesn't
spend time. She doesn't-- she doesn't know that I am
perfectly. Hm. Perfectly fine on my own here. But
you'll see--

MYRA

Perfectly fine?! How can you be so... So nearsighted
to your own... I cannot. Will not. The experience I
went through a month ago? Not again. So either you
will move into your new home where there are people
who can help you take care of yourself, or that's it,
I'm done--

ADA

What happened a month ago?

MARCEL

It was. Hrmph. It was nothing. A case of weak knees,
is all--

MYRA

Weak knees. You fell!

ADA

You already told me about the fall--

MARCEL

People fall. I'm doing better. I. I go. I go to the
therapy--

MYRA

Right, with the nurses you keep forcing to quit or
refuse to spend more than a couple sessions with--

MARCEL

I. Am. Improving. I am.

MYRA

That isn't the point. The point is the next time this
happens--

MARCEL

I am improving. There won't be a next time--

MYRA

WHEN it happens next time, you need to be in a facility where someone is there full time, to check in on you, to assist you immediately, not two days--

ADA

Wait, what?

MARCEL

It was not two days!

MYRA

It was practically two days.

ADA

You just told me he fell--

MYRA

I told you it was an emergency.

ADA

Right, because of the deadline to have him move--

MARCEL

Ada! You are supposed to be on my. Hmph. MY. Side.

MYRA

He fell in the hallway outside the bathroom. He didn't have the strength to push himself up, to even turn over, to crawl--and of course he didn't have his cell phone on him--so he simply lay there, completely helpless, for two entire days--

MARCEL

It was not. It was not two days--

ADA

Oh my god...

MYRA

A neighbor thankfully heard him moaning and called the police. He was dangerously dehydrated, delirious-- it's frankly nothing short of miraculous he is healing as well as he is, let alone that he survived--

MARCEL

If you... If you would-- if you had come here--

MYRA

I do not want to think about what I would have done if I had been the one to find you lying there--

MARCEL

Probably. You probably. Probably would have stepped over my body to move my belongings and then left me there to die!

MYRA

Yes. Probably. Probably I would have. And that is why we must all agree that to avoid that inevitable situation you have. To. MOVE.

MARCEL

If you actually visited your father now and again. Spent. Spent time. If you didn't just leave me here to be on my own--

MYRA

Oh, like you ever wanted our company, anyway, you miserable old--

MARCEL

I am your father, you bitter, heartless--

MYRA

I have spent long enough here. Ada, God help you.

(Myra exits. A silence. Marcel grunts.)

MARCEL

It's not all so bad. Hmph. It's not all as bad as what she says.

ADA

Grandpa... She just wants to help you. You know that she just wants to do what's best for you... We both want what's best for you.

(Marcel grunts again. He lifts a finger toward the photo Ada's been holding.)

MARCEL

What'd you find there?

ADA

Aunt Myra said it's a photo of you... In uniform?

(At the edges of space and time, a YOUNG MARCEL, in uniform, steps onstage. He is young, full of hope, his whole life ahead of him. He straightens his collar, his hat... Marcel throws the photo unceremoniously to the ground. The memory of Young Marcel fades.)

MARCEL

Maybe so. Don't really remember. Doesn't look familiar.

ADA

But you did serve, didn't you--

(Marcel exits. The bedroom door closes. Ada stands alone, surrounded by a mess of memories. Lights shift.)

SCENE 3

(Ada may move boxes, sort through papers, clean, organize... enough to uncover the couch. BRIDGET enters, makes herself somewhat comfortable, considering the setting, and lights rise mid-scene.)

BRIDGET

And the greatest part honestly is that it isn't in a basement. Natural light, Ada. It's magnificent. It's glorious. It's goddamn regal. I cannot wait for you to see it. Something about stepping foot into your own office... not just an office, an entire floor... If that's not a sign you've made it, I don't know what is.

ADA

Maybe we can stop by on the way home and you can show me--

BRIDGET

What? Tonight? A big, empty room under rows of florescent lights--which I'm having replaced--No. You need to see it in its full glory once I've gotten all the furniture in.

ADA

I'm not sure we have that much control over the furniture we get, Bridg.

BRIDGET

Let a woman dream. I am entering my 40s with aplomb. I am finally--finally--getting some recognition in my field. I think I have earned the privilege of selecting my own office furniture.

ADA

You're absolutely right. ... Have you heard anything else about when I can get back to work?

BRIDGET

You're going stir crazy.

ADA

I'm not, I'm just curious--

BRIDGET

I know you, Ada. You can't sit still. It's a miracle I managed to get you to settle down this far.

ADA

Then let me settle. I want to go back to work.

BRIDGET

The D.O.E. is taking over the contract. We'll have an answer soon.

ADA

Don't we already work for the D.O.E.?

BRIDGET

Yes, technically we are already under the umbrella of the D.O.E. But they weren't funding the project. ... A lot of department heads are flying in, we'll be in meetings all week.

ADA

Meetings... I need to be at?

BRIDGET

... Not specifically. But you should at least plan to make an appearance--

ADA

It's hard enough going through all this stuff without needing to run out to sit in conference rooms watching power point presentations--

BRIDGET

I'll sit in the meetings if you agree to put on a good show and let me parade you around at any outside functions.

ADA

That is not a better deal.

BRIDGET

Tough luck. Some big-wigs from the NNSA will be here Friday, they want to take us to dinner.

ADA

... The NNSA? You said the D.O.E.

BRIDGET

It's the same thing.

ADA

The Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration are not the same thing.

BRIDGET

The NNSA is a branch of the D.O.E.

ADA

What the hell does the NNSA want with a fusion generator?

BRIDGET

Does it matter if they're paying for it?

ADA

Yes! What does my research have to do with making bombs?

BRIDGET

Our research. ... I don't think they use the term "bomb" anymore.

ADA

But that's what they are. The NNSA makes bombs. Nuclear bombs--

BRIDGET

Weapons, yes--

ADA

Bridget!

BRIDGET

What?

ADA

It doesn't sound just a little preposterous to you?

BRIDGET

No! The NNSA is interested in our work. It means their priorities are expanding. We're working toward a common goal. ... Besides, there's far more money going into national defense than quelling the impending environmental and energy crisis, so the way I see it, let's not split hairs over where the money is coming from as long as we get it.

ADA

But the NNSA--?

BRIDGET

Don't worry, mein Ida, you're wound so tight.

ADA

I am not.

BRIDGET

Constantly fretting over your theories of the world changing properties of a nucleus. Always so focused on the conceptual and not what's in front of you.

ADA

I am not--

BRIDGET

A genius ahead of your time!

ADA

(Oh, but she knows she is.)

... I am not.

BRIDGET

You are. It what makes you so frustratingly endearing.

(Beat.)

ADA

... None of that really answers my question. When do we go back to work?

BRIDGET

The best estimate I was given is early next month.

ADA

Oh. Okay. That's perfect.

BRIDGET

You'd know that if you read any of the e-mails I forward you--

ADA

You know I'm horrible with e-mail.

BRIDGET

Or the briefs we were given. Every bid, from every university, private investor, and government entity, all laid out in black and white--

ADA

I haven't had time.

BRIDGET

Have you even opened them?

ADA

...

BRIDGET

I put the folder in the front pocket of your bag before you drove back from Chicago.

ADA

Oh... Is that what that was.

BRIDGET

Ada...

ADA

It's in my car somewhere, I think.

BRIDGET

Oh, wonderful, it's as good as gone forever then.

ADA

I'm sure I'll find it--

BRIDGET

No point now that things are settled.

(Beat.)

You know... With the extra money we'll have coming in, there's a lot of other furniture we could start to consider...

ADA

Filing cabinets? Oh! White boards?

BRIDGET

No... More like... California Kings... matching sofa-love-seat sets... stainless-steel or black kitchen appliances?

ADA

Not for the apartment?

BRIDGET

Don't be dense. ... What about Friday? Before dinner and drinks with the bigwigs?

ADA

There are drinks now, too?

BRIDGET

There are always drinks when someone else is picking up the bill. ... What do you think?

ADA

What about it?

BRIDGET

For an appointment with a realtor?

ADA

Oh. Sure.

BRIDGET

"Oh. Sure," she says.

ADA

What?

BRIDGET

I guess I expected a little more enthusiasm about finding our dream home--

(Ada snorts.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

What?

ADA

... Are you sure you even need me there?

BRIDGET

Ada!

ADA

Well? You're the one who will really be making the decision, you know I'm not good with all of that stuff--

BRIDGET

Trust me, I know. But this is our future, Ada--

ADA

And I don't know how I feel about looking for my "dream home" when this is the last place I imagined my "dream home" would end up being--

BRIDGET

Why not? To say nothing about stable employment... The landscape is gorgeous, it's a safe community, the school system is the best in the State--

ADA

I know. I went through it.

BRIDGET

I can't imagine a better place to find a little four or five bedroom, pop out two and a half kids, adopt a dog.

ADA

I have not agreed to a dog--

BRIDGET

Oh, you'll come around to Lise Bite-ner.

ADA

Bite-ner? Cute.

BRIDGET

Of course you'll be reluctant at first, and I'll bear the brunt of the daily care. The walking, feeding, bathing, training... But you'll naturally be the one who lets her sit on the couch, and sleep in our bed, and sneak her table scraps...

ADA

Not a dachshund, is she--?

BRIDGET

Please, a Weimaraner.

ADA

Okay. I'll consider the dog--

BRIDGET

Seriously, Ada. I can handle choosing our office furniture on my own, but I am not looking at houses without you.

ADA

I'm sorry. You're right. ... Friday is great.

BRIDGET

And?

ADA

I promise I will ooo and awe over every marble countertop, vaulted ceiling, Hers and Hers sinks in the master bathroom.

BRIDGET

Your feigned investment is all I ask. ... I've pulled some listings in the area that we should go over before we meet with the realtor just so we're on the same page about absolute must-haves and deal breakers. What about tonight? You are coming back tonight, aren't you?

ADA

I mean...

BRIDGET

You've been here until god knows what hour every night for the last week. Passing out on... What? This couch? You need to get out of this cave eventually--

ADA

It is not a cave--

BRIDGET

Oh, come on.

(There's a bit of thumping from the bedroom. Marcel enters, but exits immediately to the kitchen.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

(Sotto:)

You didn't tell me he was home!

ADA

He's 90, Bridg. Where else would he be?

(Marcel re-enters with a mug of coffee and makes his way to his arm chair, which Bridget is sitting in. Ada makes a motion to her and Bridget springs up.)

MARCEL

No, no, don't get up on account of me--

(He says that... but doesn't change his even, slow trajectory to begin the routine of sinking into his chair.)

ADA

Grandpa, this is Bridget. My partner.

MARCEL

Beauty and brains is a... A... An. Exceedingly. Not a combo you see enough. But if you're with my Ada Irena, I wouldn't accept anything less. Hm. Hm. Marcel Lange.

BRIDGET

I've heard all about you from Ada, sir, it's a pleasure to finally--

MARCEL

Hrmph! Hm. Don't "Sir" me young lady, it makes me feel old--

BRIDGET

Oh, young lady? I like your grandfather, Ada.

(Marcel takes a sip of his coffee. He grunts. He gets up out of his chair.)

MARCEL

Darn coffee. Won't stay. ... Cold already. You see that new fangled... New. Monstrosity? In the little kitchen there? Peter thought he was giving me. Giving me an. Upgrade! What's wrong with the old... Your old, reliable eight cup coffee brewer. Just pour the ground up coffee in, and your water, and, and. And push a button. It's all you need. Not all this. This new. Timers. And. Brew settings. What's that all worth when it won't just keep. Keep it from getting cold.

ADA

Do you want me to make a new pot? I think that one's been sitting there since you got up this morning.

MARCEL

No, no, don't trouble yourself. I can just zap it in the microwave. I'm not picky.

(Marcel exits back to the kitchen.)

BRIDGET

Oh, he is just delightful. ... Did he say, "With?"

ADA

When?

BRIDGET

I'm pretty sure he said something about me being smart and beautiful and "with" his Ada.

ADA

Oh, maybe.

BRIDGET

Oh, come on!

ADA

What? He knows we're engaged.

BRIDGET

All my grandparents died before I could rub any of my non-biblical relationships in their faces.

ADA

My grandpa isn't like that.

BRIDGET

Exactly. This is an exciting new world of possibility for me, marrying into a family that actually supports you? I want him to adopt me.

ADA

You barely know him.

BRIDGET

But you love him, and he clearly adores his only grandchild. It's very sweet. Ada Irena. I'm stealing that. What's that from?

ADA

Please don't. It's my middle name--

BRIDGET

Excuse me. Why don't I know your middle name?

ADA

Because the only person who ever uses it is my grandpa--

BRIDGET

It suits you. Ada Irena--

ADA

He gets a pass, you don't. ... Irene was my grandmother's name.

BRIDGET

Oh. Oh, that's just so wholesome, is your whole family this wholesome--

ADA

They are absolutely not--

(Marcel re-enters with his warmed up coffee.)

MARCEL

Much better.

ADA

It would be better if you let me make it fresh.

MARCEL

Whatever... This. This blend of. This blend. What'd Peter call it. Hm. Whatever it's called. He. He mailed it from. Wherever he is. They make coffee better than they used to. I'm not one of those. Old. Old stuffs. Who can't admit when things have improved. Hm. I lived during the great depression you know.

BRIDGET

Oh, really! What was that like?

MARCEL

I don't like to talk about it--

BRIDGET

I'm sorry--

MARCEL

--It was too depressing!

(Everyone thinks this is funnier than they probably should.)

MARCEL (CONT)

What was I. I was saying. What I was saying was. Even zapped in the microwave. This coffee's better. Better than coffee used to be. ... Oh. Do you? Do you drink coffee, Bridget? I should get you a cup. You will actually want it fresh, so let me put a new pot on--

(Marcel starts up again.)

ADA

Grandpa, really, you can let me, she's my guest--

MARCEL

I am old, not infirm, Ada, I am perfectly capable! You are both my guests, so. Hah! It's double my. You're both my. Manners. And I am. More than capable. In fact. In fact. I have been more active in the last few days of you being here since... Since... Some time. My physical therapist should be thrilled!

ADA

Maybe if you put up a little less resistance about seeing them--

MARCEL

I'm going to the appointments! I am. Careful. You. You don't start sounding like Myra.

(Marcel exits to the kitchen.)

BRIDGET

(With a gasp:)

We could buy a house with a ground-level ensuite and let your grandpa live with us!

ADA

Are you sure that's a good idea?

BRIDGET

You're probably right. I could never tolerate all this clutter. ... Do you need help? ... Did your aunt know you were probably the worst person to ask to complete this task?

(Bridget springs to action to help Ada with whatever sorting task she has set herself upon.)

ADA

What is that supposed to mean?

BRIDGET

You unquestionably inherited the Lange clutter gene.

ADA

I did not--

BRIDGET

I have seen you move the same stack of papers back and forth between two boxes five times now.

ADA

I am just trying to determine the best system of organization. I am very organized--

BRIDGET

You're funny. You make me laugh. I love how easily you make me laugh.

ADA

I am--!

BRIDGET

Your brain is occupied with far more important things. It's why we work so well together. You... Chemist... And I... Manage. ... I'm just saying... I don't know how you fooled your aunt into leaving you to sort through all this by yourself.

ADA

I'm starting to think she's the one who fooled me.

BRIDGET

Can I help you? Let me help you.

ADA

Sure, just... Photos in that box. Documents in that one... Trash--

BRIDGET

In the trash can, got it. ...

(Bridget picks up a stack and is immediately distracted by the photo on the top of the pile.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

Oh, wow, is this your grandfather? So handsome. He can't be more than, what... 20 in this?

(At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel appears, in his uniform.)

ADA

I honestly have no idea. I didn't know until this week that he was even in the military.

BRIDGET

World War II?

ADA

What?

BRIDGET

Your grandpa. When he served.

ADA

I mean... You think so?

BRIDGET

Do the math. You may be a genius, Ida Noddak, but sometimes you sure can be dumb.

ADA

It's a pretty big deal, though, isn't it? Why wouldn't my aunt have said so?

BRIDGET

Who's the girl with him?

(Bridget studies the photo next to Ada.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

It couldn't be your grandmother, could it?

(YOUNG IRENE enters beside Young Marcel.)

ADA

No, it couldn't be. They got married in their mid-twenties. That I know for sure. This girl is a teenager.

(Marcel enters with a fresh cup of coffee.)

MARCEL

Here you go. Fresh. Hot. Fresh and hot.

BRIDGET

Answer a pressing quandary for us. Who is the handsome young couple in this photograph?

(Marcel takes the photo. He squints at it. He studies it for a long moment.)

(A tinny recording of a slow dance echoes faintly from the edges of space and time where Young Marcel and Young Irene stand.)

ADA

Grandpa?

MARCEL

I remember... I remember that dress. Hm. It was the color of honeysuckle. And she smelled... She smelled just as sweet. I never... Never got to see her hair that way often. Down. Mostly down. Around her shoulders. Had to keep it up when she was working. All the girls. Had to keep their hair up.

I had seen her before. With her hair up. Glances here and there, in passing. It was a busy place, but you take notice of a pretty girl like her... This was the first time I saw her... Saw her with her hair down.

Oh, I liked it down... The way it moved across the back of her neck, the way it felt against my cheek when we danced... That was the... The first night. I remember. The first night we danced together. It was... Hm. I remember it was a. A. One of those. At the USO. Didn't wear the uniform much. After. But for those sorts of occasions. ... She asked me. Can you believe it?

YOUNG IRENE

Hey there soldier, care to give a girl a dance?

MARCEL

I don't think I'd ever been so embarrassed. Embarrassed. Of embarrassing myself. Such a proper, pretty girl asking a lanky kid from Illinois to dance.

YOUNG MARCEL

I'm not... I'm not actually a soldier.

YOUNG IRENE

You're wearing the uniform, ain't you?

YOUNG MARCEL

I was. I mean. I didn't steal it or nothing, but it's just, I was discharged. Honorably. It was honorable. And then they sent me to do my part here--

YOUNG IRENE

(With a laugh:)

I know who you are. I'm just teasing.

MARCEL

She knew who I was. Can you believe it?

YOUNG MARCEL

You know who I am?

YOUNG IRENE

Every girl here knows about the youngest chemist in the history of the Project. You're practically a local celebrity. Our own Clark Gable.

MARCEL & YOUNG MARCEL

Mickey Rooney, maybe.

YOUNG IRENE

He's a soldier now, too, ain't he? Heard it on the radio.

YOUNG MARCEL

I'm no entertainer.

YOUNG IRENE

I bet you have a story or two in you. And you haven't proven yet you can't dance.

MARCEL

I wasn't much a dancer. But she made up for the both of us. I'll never... Never forget that smell of honeysuckle in her hair, like the color of her dress... Her arms wrapped around my neck, those too-nice, mud-caked shoes dangling from the tip of her fingers... The mud was so bad, most the girls had learned already to leave those nice shoes they came in with shut up in their closets, but not Irene, she loved those shoes--

YOUNG IRENE

I spent good money on them, didn't I? I should enjoy wearing them, mud or no.

ADA

This was in Chicago?

MARCEL

No, no, this was back in Tennessee. She didn't care about the shoes, but being a gentleman, I carried her back to her boarding house on my shoulders that night. Either between the dancing or the carrying, got mud on my jacket, found it that night when I took off my uniform. Wouldn't've minded much if that stain never came off...

(Young Marcel carries Young Irene offstage, mud-caked heels dangling from her fingers.)

ADA

When were you in Tennessee?

MARCEL

Huh?

ADA

You and Grandma met in Chicago.

MARCEL

I never said that. Who told you that?

ADA

Aunt Myra, she always told me you and Grandma Irene were married in Chicago.

MARCEL

Right, we were married in Chicago. Nineteen... Nineteen forty-nine.

ADA

So when were you in Tennessee?

MARCEL

Huh. Hrm. I don't... I wasn't.

ADA

Grandpa--

MARCEL

You. You're. Hrm. You're confusing. Confusing things. I was telling a story, and-- It's none of your... It's not.

ADA

Sorry, I didn't mean--

MARCEL

I'm. I think I. Hrm. I need to. I'm going to go lie down.

(Marcel get up out of his chair and exits to his room. A beat.)

ADA

What did I say...

BRIDGET

What did your grandfather do for a living?

ADA

He was a chemist.

BRIDGET

He couldn't have been at Oak Ridge, could he?

ADA

What?

BRIDGET

He was a chemist... during World War II in Tennessee? Your grandfather was probably at Oak Ridge.

ADA

No. My dad and my aunt always told me he and my grandma met in Chicago--

BRIDGET

Maybe, maybe not. Why would he lie about being in Tennessee?

ADA

I don't know, maybe he misremembered, he said he was confused--

BRIDGET

Do you think your grandfather worked on the Manhattan Project?

(Lights shift.)

SCENE 4

(Ada has distracted herself from sorting by working on her own project. Marcel is in his chair, flipping through channels on an unseen TV. He grunts as he goes one to the next, not finding anything worth watching.)

MARCEL

Do you. Hrm. Do you have a. A. A channel. I can put it on. Background noise.

(Ada is actually pretty focused, she barely glances up.)

ADA

No, I'm good.

(Marcel grunts. Turns the TV off.)

MARCEL

So many. Hm. With so many channels. You. You'd think it'd be easier to find something worth watching! But it's all just. Just commercials. And. And Hm. Drivel.

(Ada gives him a consoling smile, then turns back to her work. Silence. Marcel sighs, bored.)

ADA

Is there anything you--

MARCEL

No. No. Don't mind me. I don't want to distract your. Your. Espionage.

(Ada doesn't take the bait. Marcel shifts in his seat to see what Ada is working on.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Hrm. I thought. Thought you were supposed to be. Sorting. What are you--? That's not. What is that?

ADA

Don't tell Aunt Myra. It's for work.

MARCEL

Your secret's. Hm. Secret's safe with me.

(Marcel reaches out for the notebook
Ada is working in, Lange curiosity
getting the better of him. She
obliges.)

MARCEL (CONT)

This is. Hm. Not really. Not your standard chemistry.

ADA

Well, I'm not really your standard chemist...

MARCEL

This. I recognize some of. Hrm.

(Marcel studies the notes carefully.
His face brightens.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Fusion.

ADA

Yes! ... Wait. What do you know about fusion?

MARCEL

Know about--! Do I know. Hrm. I know about fusion,
Ada. I. I. Worked. Here. In Los Alamos. Half a century
ago--! Fusion isn't a new idea--

ADA

You really worked with fusion energy? Grandpa, this
is... I mean, I always knew I was following in your
footsteps to an extent, but this--! ... So was that
after you served in the war?

MARCEL

Yes. After the-- wait. What? I didn't. We don't--

ADA

Come on, Grandpa. You served in World War II. I have
the pictures--

(At the edges of space and time, a
Young Marcel in his uniform.)

MARCEL

It was. Hrm. A lifetime ago.

ADA

... I always thought you were just a chemist.

MARCEL

I am a chemist!

ADA

No, what I mean is--

MARCEL

Hm. Chemistry. Chemistry was always. I. I was. Chemistry was my first. Hm. First love. Before Irene.

(Beat.)

I. I grew up in. Hm. Grew up in Illinois. Family didn't have. Never had much. Never... Never had much thought to go to college. In those days. In those days it didn't matter. Like it does. Now a days. But. But I was clever. Always clever. You inherit your cleverness from the Langes! We're a clever. Clever bunch.

ADA

How did you get into chemistry, then, if it wasn't college?

MARCEL

The science teacher. At the. The little city primary school. He had... Had this big. Big poster. Of the periodic table. And I'd spend hours. Hours. Just marveling at that table. The way some folks look at.. At.. At Picassos or Da Vincis... I looked at the periodic table.

And. I stopped. Stopped school at 15 to work. I was bright. Bright enough. And clever. Didn't need more school. So instead, this science teacher. He set me up with a buddy of his, worked doing chemical testing for this... This perfume business, I think it was. I remember. The smell. The smell of this one perfume they made. Like honeysuckle...

*(Marcel gets a bit lost for a moment.
At the edges of space and time, Young
Irene comes up behind Young Marcel.)*

ADA

You were saying about the perfume company...

MARCEL

Hrm. Right. I. I apprenticed there. For a couple years. And that buddy of my science teacher's, he got me to take a couple classes at a local college, nights. This was before the war. Well. What's before. War was war. Going on. Going on, you'd read it in the newspaper, about Europe and their troubles, and back then most of us just thought we'd keep out of it this time around.

I had enough training at this point, I could've kept going with the. The chemistry. When the draft came around. Probably. Probably could have avoided conscription entirely had I had a mind to. But. But I was 17. Dumb kid. I was clever, but even clever kids can be dumb kids. So when we joined the war. I signed up to fight.

ADA

At 17?

MARCEL

Hrm? Huhn. Close enough to 18. They don't look too close. My father. My father was. World War I. He. It wasn't hard. Just sign some papers. Just. Just sign.

I had always... I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago near this... This air field. I would. Some of the other boys and I would. Ride our bikes... Our bikes... With the... The fringe...

(At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel wheels out a pink, child's bicycle with fringe on the handlebars: his daughter's. The memory fades as:)

ADA

Fringe? What are you talking about--?

MARCEL

No. No, we. We rode. Rode out to this air field after school and just watched the planes come in. First time I was in a plane myself I must have been... Fourteen. ... Did I ever tell you the story about the first time I took your dad out flying, it was in a little two-seater, open cockpit--

ADA

Grandpa... What happened after you enlisted?

MARCEL

Hm. Right. I. I had the experience. With the airplanes. So I joined the Air Force. New. New exciting. After World War I, this branch. Just really getting its feet in the. The. Looking for eager, young cadets like me. It was a perfect match. And I... I took to boot camp like a. A. Like a fish to. No. Like a bird! A bird to. To. To air.

ADA

Were you deployed to Europe? Did you fly planes against the... The Red Barron?

MARCEL

Huh. What? What history do they teach you in school? Red Barron. Never. That. That's not even the right. The right war, Ada--

ADA

Sorry--

MARCEL

No. No. I never even left the U.S. I was. I was good. I had experience. Remember. But no. Some. Some malfunction in a plane. During training. Eh. Hrm. Not important. What happened was I spent two months in the hospital then was declared unfit to serve and given an honorable discharge for my trouble.

ADA

You're serious. So you never actually served in the war.

MARCEL

I served. I served my country!

(Myra enters.)

ADA

What happened after you were discharged? Is that when you went to Tennessee? Did you work as a chemist for the war?

MARCEL

I. I. I don't-- that isn't what you were. Hm. Were asking.

MYRA

(Dryly:)

Oh, wonderful, you haven't left yet.

(Ada and Marcel stare blankly at Myra.)

MYRA (CONT)

You cannot afford to miss another physical therapy appointment, not in your condition--

ADA

(Glancing at her phone:)

Oh, shoot. We must have lost track of time--

MARCEL

My condition?! My condition. Is. Is. Hrm. I do not need you telling me what my condition--

MYRA

Someone obviously needs to tell you and apparently I can't trust your granddaughter to do it, so I guess it has to fall on me, as usual--

ADA

Grandpa. You should go get ready. I'll take you.

(Marcel gets out of his chair, grunting.)

MARCEL

I'm. I'm going.

(Marcel exits. A beat.)

MYRA

Look at this place.

(Regarding her work:)

Have you made more mess since I was here last--?

ADA

I'm doing this as a favor to you--!

MYRA

I know. I'm sorry. I shouldn't take out my frustrations with him on you. ... But honestly, Ada, I need to know I can rely on you--

ADA

I've been here. I'm making progress. I take him to his appointments. He's been going to his appointments--

MYRA

Rely on you to back me up when he gets an attitude about moving to the assisted care facility--

ADA

I'm doing my best, Aunt Myra, but honestly maybe he has a point--

MYRA

A point?!

ADA

He's been doing really well since I've been here. I met his physical therapist, and he promises Grandpa's been on his best behavior.

MYRA

His progress at therapy doesn't change the reality of the situation--

ADA

But maybe we could look into another arrangement. One that would make you both happy. Let him stay here, and, and--

MYRA

And what?

ADA

Maybe we hire a long-term care nurse to come here, to him.

MYRA

That is not an option.

ADA

I think what he needs most is someone to keep him social, active. The longer I've been here, the more I get him to talk... His whole attitude changes. His energy, his mental clarity--

MYRA

And he can get that at the assisted living facility, where they are trained to deal with crotchety old men--
-!

ADA

At-home nurses are trained to do the same thing, probably better--

MYRA

This is not a conversation, Ada.

ADA

You won't even think about it?

MYRA

I have thought about it. Even if I thought it were practical, it isn't remotely possible. To even just get Medicare to cover most the expense of the assisted living facility, we have practically had to bankrupt the man, and a private nurse would be twice the cost at least. I can only afford to help so much without ending up the same myself in thirty years.

ADA

Then let me pay for it.

(A beat.)

MYRA

Right. With your blood money.

ADA

Aunt Myra.

MYRA

So that's it. You're offering to take over his care, then. You're sure about that.

ADA

Of course I am.

MYRA

And to be the one to come here? To check on him regularly? To make sure that he hasn't run off just one more in a series of harangued nurses?

ADA

Yes, I--

MYRA

Even when your... Your bureaucratic red tape is pulled up, and you go back to your 60-hour work weeks? When work, suddenly, is your priority once more.

ADA

He can move in with me and Bridget!

(Myra lets out a loud laugh.)

ADA (CONT)

We're planning to buy a house. He can be part of that plan. And I'm sure he'd prefer it to--

MYRA

You have absolutely no idea what it is like to live with someone who needs full-time care. Neither of you.

ADA

He's old, not ill.

MYRA

Yes, and knowing him he'll probably live past a hundred just to spite me!

ADA

I want to do this. I can take over his power of attorney. Work with him to make decisions about his own life, not selfishly make them for him--

MYRA

You think I'm being selfish?

ADA

Aren't you?

MYRA

You and he are cut from identical cloth. You get caught up. Caught up in your work and what you think is best for your family when the reality? The reality is you don't even know what's best for yourself.

(Marcel enters.)

MARCEL

I haven't. Hm. Haven't got all day, Ada. I don't. Don't want to be late.

ADA

I'm coming.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE 5

(Ada is sorting through papers. Marcel is helping... or, rather, going through things Ada has already sorted, throwing random stacks of paper into random boxes, the trash... really not helping at all...)

ADA

Grandpa...

MARCEL

Junk, junk, junk...

ADA

Grandpa--

MARCEL

What's the. Hrm. What's the point of. Any of this. Just. Throw it all away.

ADA

I'm not going to just throw it all away. You-- stop. Stop, you just threw away like, ten photographs.

MARCEL

Photographs are. A facade. A. A. Waste of. Hrm. Just live. In. The. Hrm. Live in the present!

ADA

Aunt Myra wants them, so we're going to keep them.

MARCEL

They aren't hers. They're mine. And if I want to put them in the trash. I will. Hrm. Into the trash.

ADA

Grandpa! Stop!

(Marcel throws his hands up, lets the papers and photos he was holding fly across the room. Ada collects them so she can get back to work.)

MARCEL

Too. Too many. Hrmph. Photos of myself. I hate photos of myself.

ADA

They're nice memories.

MARCEL

Who wants to. To. To. Look at photos of. This. Hm.
This mug.

ADA

I like them.

MARCEL

Hrmph.

ADA

... Look! Look, this one. This is Grandma Irene, isn't
it?

(Ada shows Marcel the photograph she's
found. At the edges of space and time,
Young Irene enters, a 1950s-era camera
on a strap around her neck. Marcel
softens when he sees the photograph.)

MARCEL

She loved. Loved that... That stupid. Thing. Took it
everywhere. Wanted to capture. All. All of our
adventures together.

(Young Irene snaps a photograph. Young
Marcel enters, holding up his arms to
block her shot of his face.)

YOUNG MARCEL

Enough with that thing! Stop!

YOUNG IRENE

We missed five whole years together after Oak Ridge, I
don't want to miss anything ever again.

ADA

Was this in Chicago?

MARCEL

Shortly after we were married... I had been. Working
there for. For a couple years. In the. The. Metallurgy
lab. It had been. After Oak Ridge, it had been... It
was like fate. Brought us back together. Never reckon
I believed in soul mates until the day I ran into
Irene again in Chicago after all those years.

ADA

So you were in Tennessee!

MARCEL

I was. What? When did I say anything about Tennessee--

ADA

Grandpa. I know what Oak Ridge is.

MARCEL

This was not. This was in Chicago. Nineteen...
Nineteen forty-nine. Just after we were married...

ADA

I want to know about Oak Ridge. Did you work on the
Manhattan Project?

MARCEL

I did-- I did a lot of things. When I was. Hm.
Younger. I didn't go to college, but I was. I was-- in
the service for--

ADA

You already told me this story. I want to know about
what happened after--

MARCEL

I don't. We agreed. It wasn't... Time and place. I
don't care to talk. To talk about.

ADA

Fine. ... Then, what if we talk about moving...

MARCEL

It's. Hm. Bad enough Myra has. Has. Solicited you to
do her dirty work, Ada, I don't--

ADA

I'm not talking about the nursing home, Grandpa. What
if you came to live with me?

MARCEL

... Ada Irena. You don't.

ADA

When we find a house. It could be your own space, your
own home, still, but somewhere you're close to your
family.

MARCEL

We are. We are Langes. We don't. I don't want. I will not be a burden. To. To you. You and your--

ADA

You aren't a burden. I want you there.

MARCEL

Hrm. Hm. I-- Myra would. Would be. Hrm. She will never--

ADA

What even happened between you two to make you hate each other so much?

MARCEL

I. I don't. Hrmph. What is. That has nothing. It's ancient. Ancient history. We don't talk. Talk about.

ADA

Dad always told me it's because you insulted her for wanting to study art instead of math in college.

MARCEL

He said. What?

ADA

That's what he said. I remember in my second year of undergrad, I had made up my mind already, and told Dad after I graduated I was planning to get my doctorate to research nuclear energy... And he was just. So... disappointed? Most parents are thrilled when their kids choose STEM, and not like, English Lit or something-- but not Dad.

And then he told Aunt Myra, and I remember for like, two months, she would spam my Hotmail account nonstop with all these scaremongering articles and news reports, and when I blocked her eventually she stopped talking to me for a year. So. If it's about her choice in major, just saying, it's not like she's been any better--

MARCEL

Nonsense! I would. Irene was. Irene was very supportive. Of her. Of her choices. I wouldn't. Irene would have. She would have told me what's what if I had.

ADA

Then what happened?

(A beat. Marcel pushes around some papers and photos on the table. He stops on one:)

MARCEL

Did Peter ever tell you about the. The house. The town-house on the cul de sac.

(At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel wheels on the child's bicycle with fringe on the handlebars.)

ADA

Is this you and Aunt Myra? You looks so happy. I'm holding onto this to prove to her you actually loved each other once. ... Was this while you were in Chicago?

MARCEL

No. No we had left. Left Chicago. A few years after. Maybe. I don't know if Peter was old enough to remember that house. But Myra... Hrm. Myra would.

I bought her this bicycle. Her very first. She saw it in the. In the window of the department store. In town. I'll never. Never forget. The way her. The way. The way her face lit up when she saw it. I was making good money then and we could afford this new. Brand new model. Pink. And with. With the fringe. She specifically wanted the fringe on the handlebars.

ADA

The bike with the fringe... Huh. ... It's hard to imagine Aunt Myra riding around on a pink bicycle.

MARCEL

Little girls. Hrm. They grow up. They go through. Phases. One minute it's pink and frills and fancy things and the next it's. It's. The music's too loud. And the. Hairstyles. And. And makeup. And whatnot. And the doors slamming and the shouting and the opinions and. A dad. A dad tries. But it's never right. It's never. Good enough. When you have a. A. Hrm. When you have a daughter.

(Beat.)

MARCEL (CONT)

But you don't. You won't have to. Hm. Probably. If you and your gal. If you have a daughter. It's different with mothers, I think. You wouldn't need to know about. About being a father. To a. To a daughter.

ADA

As a daughter with a father I barely ever talk to, I think I get it...

MARCEL

I don't mean anything about you. You and your. About Peter. You just. With daughters. They. They grow up.

But. Myra. She was always just. Just as strong-willed as she is. Still is. Even when she was little. With the. With the pink bicycle. With the fringe.

(Young Marcel brings on a pair of training wheels and a wrench. He starts to put the training wheels onto the bike. Young Irene enters and watches him.)

YOUNG IRENE

What on earth are you doing? You just took those off.

MARCEL

She had. She had insisted. She was too old. Too old for training wheels.

ADA

How old was she?

MARCEL

Eh? Hrm. Six. Or. Or. Seven? It's hard to. To remember all those. Those early years. But six or seven was too. Too. She was old enough. To. To. To learn to ride without them. So she put her foot down. Said she. She wouldn't be seen riding a bike with. With training wheels. In public.

ADA

That sounds like Aunt Myra.

MARCEL

And we were living in the town house on the cul de sac. Safe. Quiet. Little neighborhood. Away from traffic. And. And so I took them off. And I. We.

MARCEL (CONT)

We pushed the bike out to the street. And let her. Let her try it. Without the training wheels.

YOUNG MARCEL

She couldn't do it.

YOUNG IRENE

It was only her first try, Marcel.

MARCEL

I. I. I took her out to the cul de sac. And she got on the bicycle. I held onto the seat to keep her up straight. Give her. Give her a push.

YOUNG MARCEL

Well, what do you want me to do, Irene? She can't ride the bike yet without the training wheels, so I'm putting them back on.

MARCEL

We'd get going and she'd have her feet on the pedals. In her. Her little black mary janes. With the white socks. And she'd pedal and pedal and I would run there behind her, holding the seat.

And when it looked like she was. Was. Picking up speed. And maybe. Maybe like she'd have the bike going. Going on her own. I'd let go. Let go of the seat and let her do it herself.

YOUNG MARCEL

I want her to have the bike if she needs it. To go. Out. Play with friends. She's a Lange. We're independent. She'll want the bike eventually.

MARCEL

But as soon as I'd let go, the bike would start to wobble and her legs would lock up, and she fell.

YOUNG IRENE

I just think you're making more work for yourself. You know she'll insist on trying again without them tomorrow.

MARCEL

And the first time it wasn't so bad. We brushed the gravel off her knees, and she got back on the bike and we tried again.

YOUNG MARCEL

She told me she was going to quit.

YOUNG IRENE

She did what now? Our daughter?

MARCEL

But after the third or fourth try, she got more. More. Worked up. Unsure of herself. Until even with me holding the seat she. She couldn't keep the pedals going.

YOUNG MARCEL

After we came inside. While I was cleaning up the scrape on her knee.

MARCEL

And that last time she fell she hit a rock or. Or. Or something sharp on the road. I remember those little. Little white socks. All messed up with dirt and blood.

YOUNG MARCEL

I was putting the bandaid on after cleaning it off with the peroxide, and she had stopped crying... And she looked at me with those big, serious eyes she gets. And she said. "You know Dad..."

MARCEL & YOUNG MARCEL

"It's okay."

MARCEL

"Not everyone can be good at everything."

YOUNG MARCEL

"And I'm just not going to be good at riding a bike."

MARCEL

"And it's okay..."

ADA

I didn't learn how to ride a bike until I was like, eleven.

MARCEL

But you learned eventually, didn't you.

YOUNG IRENE

Leave the training wheels off, Marcel. She'll try again.

MARCEL

I'll never. Never forget. The day. The day I let go of the back of the bicycle seat... And watched her. Take off. Down the street. The smile on her face. And how. How she laughed. And just kept pedaling. Faster and faster. I had to. Had to run after her. So proud. But. But screaming at the top of my lungs if she didn't hit the breaks that instant she was going to ride herself straight into oncoming traffic...

(Marcel chuckles to himself at the memory of it. The memory of Young Marcel and Young Irene fades.)

MARCEL (CONT)

She was. She was always my girl. When she was little. We were. We were too much alike. And that. That. Hm. That works fine when she's just a kid. But. But daughters. Daughters grow up.

I wish I. I wish I would have remembered more the times I made her laugh. Instead. Instead of made her. Slam her door. And. And shout. And the music's too loud.

But. Daughters grow up. And she. She barely had her mother. And instead of being there. Instead it's like she. She barely had her father. Either.

(At the edges of space and time, maybe, the echoes of something that sounds like cheery 1950s music out of a Coronet Instructional film.)

MARCEL (CONT)

I tried not to. To not cause fights. While. While she was going through the treatments. Irene. The cancer. She was too tired. To. To put up with me. And Myra. Always fighting. I tried. I wasn't very good. At. At any of it. Hm. We were too. Too much alike. So we drove each other. Drove each other to say things. To say things we'd regret then be too bull-headed to apologize for. We still. Still can't. If she'd. If she'd just apologize.

ADA

But after forty years...

MARCEL

Exactly! It's ancient. Ancient history! It's. The. The past. Too. Too caught up in the past. Should be. Looking to the future! Like you. Your work. You understand. And your. Your work is going. Hm. How's it going?

(Marcel rifles around on the table for Ada's papers.)

ADA

Don't change the subject.

MARCEL

I. I. Had a. A question! About one of the. The formulas. Un-something... Hm. Something. Something not quite. Unbalanced. I could. Could take a look! You know. Help. Help you out. Hm.

(Marcel finds Ada's work and starts flipping through the notebooks. Ada honestly can't help herself. She finds the page she was working on the last time she showed Marcel the work.)

ADA

There's this equation I'm stuck on, here. I'm close to unlocking something, but... It'd be easier if I could run some simulations at the Lab, test some things out... But right now I'm stuck with calculations and theory.

MARCEL

Ah. Aha! Hm. Huh. What if. What if you... Hm. What. I. I'm having trouble with the. The. Words. Hand me a pencil, would you?

(Ada finds him a pencil. Marcel sets to work. Bridget enters.)

BRIDGET

Am I interrupting something?

MARCEL

Come in! Come in. We're. We're just. We're doing. Science! My dear. Come in.

(Neither Ada or Marcel really acknowledge her past that, so focused on the work in front of them.)

BRIDGET

Now I see where you get it.

ADA

Hm?

BRIDGET

Is your phone off? I've been texting.

ADA

What? Oh. Maybe. I can't remember. I think it's here somewhere--

BRIDGET

Forget it. We've got to get going if we don't want to be late.

(Ada looks up at Bridget blankly.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

It's Friday?

ADA

Shit. You're absolutely right. I'm sorry.

MARCEL

What? Ada. Where. Where are you--

ADA

We're meeting with our realtor.

MARCEL

But. But, the science! Ada. We're. We're on the verge of. Of. Of a. Breakthrough! Brilliant. Best. Best and brilliant scientists. The two of us.

ADA

Sorry, Bridg. I promise I had a reminder set. What time is it?

BRIDGET

Almost 3:30.

ADA

The appointment was supposed to start half an hour ago, why didn't you come get me sooner?

BRIDGET

I told you it started at 3:00 because I knew you'd be running late.

ADA

Bridget!

BRIDGET

Was I wrong? We cannot run late if you're going to have time to change before dinner tonight--and you are going to change--and if we're late we'll have to skip at least one of the listings.

ADA

Just let me just find my phone.

BRIDGET

That could take hours.

ADA

Hah hah.

BRIDGET

I'm serious. Just come back and grab it after.

MARCEL

But. But the work, Ada.

(Marcel brandishes the pages.)

ADA

We've got to go find our dream home so you can move in with us.

BRIDGET

... So he can move in with us?

ADA

Yeah, the ensuite, like you said.

BRIDGET

(As politely as possible with Marcel in the room:)

You cannot just make decisions like this without talking to me first--

ADA

We can talk about it on the way.

BRIDGET

Ada...

MARCEL

Ada--!

ADA

We'll get back to our calculations tomorrow, okay, Grandpa?

MARCEL

Right. Right! Tomorrow. You're right. You go. Go out with your. With your gal. Find your. Your houses. On your own. Your own. Cul de sac. And I'll. I'll stay here. And. And. Continue with the work!

(Bridget glances over the work they've been doing, picks it up.)

BRIDGET

Careful, Ada, don't let the new bosses see this. The NNSA may have half a mind to bring Marcel out of retirement to continue with the project instead of you.

(At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel and Young Irene appear.)

YOUNG IRENE

The work is killing you, Marcel--

YOUNG MARCEL

The work is not the problem, Irene!

ADA

That sounds like a perfect idea, Grandpa. I'll be back tonight, if you're still up, okay?

MARCEL

Go! Go. Ada Irena. It's. It's fine. It's. The past is. Don't let my past hold you back from. From your future.

(Ada kisses him on the forehead. She and Bridget exit. At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel walks away from Young Irene. The memory fades. Marcel sits alone with only the theory of fusion. Lights shift.)

SCENE 6

(Nighttime. Ada comes into the apartment, a little dressed up, a little drunk. She throws her keys across the apartment. Struggles with her jacket and too-nice shoes. She falls face-first onto the couch and lies there for a moment. She sits up. She fumbles for the switch on a nearby lamp. She slowly digs through piles of papers. After a moment she slumps back on the couch, covering her eyes. A beat. There's a cough, a moan. Then a rasping call from the dark hallway:)

MARCEL

Myra?

(Ada uncovers her face.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Myra? Myra, is that... Myra?

(Ada's response time is slowed by some childish need to sober up before going to a parental figure. She rubs her face.)

MARCEL (CONT)

MYRA?

ADA

Aunt Myra's not here. It's Ada.

MARCEL

Myra. Please--

ADA

It's Ada, Grandpa. I'm coming--

(Ada starts toward the bedroom but is stopped, by Marcel, lying helpless in the middle of hallway.)

MARCEL

Myra... Myra I'm-- Come back, please--

(Marcel feebly tries to turn or push himself up.)

ADA

Grandpa! Oh my God, what-- stop, stop, let me help you--

MARCEL

I can't-- I can't, can you--

ADA

You're too... I can't move you-- if you'd just stay still I could try and sit you up--

(Ada tries to help her grandfather up to rest against the wall, but he slides back down, unable to keep himself up.)

MARCEL

Myra, please--

ADA

Oh Jesus. You're bleeding. Your head is bleeding. Don't move, hold on I'm going to call--

MARCEL

MYRA!

ADA

She's not here! It's. I'm. I can't do this. I. I just need to. Call. For help. I. Fuck. Fuck. Where is my phone?!

(Ada scrambles to find her phone, on the coffee table, the couch, under stacks. Finally she finds it. She dials.)

MARCEL

Don't walk out that door. Myra--

ADA

I'm here, Grandpa, I'm not going anywhere will you just, hold on a minute-- Hello? Yes, hello, I need-- I need an ambulance, my grandfather-- he fell, please, I can't move him and there's. There's so much blood. I can't-- Yes. Yes, it is, thank you-- I will. I'm here. ... I will.

(Lights fade to blackout. End of Act I.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

(Music plays in as lights come up on a scene once more out of a 1950s Coronet Instructional Film.)

NARRATOR

Ah, here we have the perfect picture of the all-American family. The Father, arrived home after a long day's work, is greeted as always by his dedicated wife and doting, well-behaved--

(The scene is interrupted by something like a scratch or warp -- an old film glitch. The family seems unfazed except for the Daughter, who seems to become aware of her surroundings.)

Well-behaved children--

(Another scratch or jump in the film. The Daughter steps away from the picture perfect tableau of the family. She pulls the ribbons out of her hair, grabs at the lace trim of her dress. During the following, maybe she messes up her hair, puts in jewelry, does something with her makeup.)

I'm sure you're all familiar with the word "nuclear." We all know about the atomic bomb.

(A jump in the film.)

We all know the atomic bomb is very dangerous. Since it could be used against us, we should get ready for it, just as we would for other dangers that are around us all the time.

(A jump in the film.)

First you have to know what happens when an atomic bomb explodes. You'll know when it comes, we hope it never comes, but we must be ready. It will look something like this:

(The last piece of the transformation, the daughter tears off her 1950s, conservative garb and reveals a proto-punk/punk-era outfit underneath.)

NARRATOR (CONT)

Always remember, the flash of an atomic bomb can come at any time, no matter where you may be.

(Another film jump.)

It may even come in your very, own home.

(The daughter pulls out a boom box, hits play, loud and angry punk music takes over the catchy, cheerful 1950s score. The daughter pulls out anti-nuclear protest posters. The Father now breaks from the scene. He grabs one from her. A heated argument breaks out between the two of them.)

You know what to do: Duck and cover! Then stay where you are until you know the danger has passed. This family knows what to do--

(The Mother and Son, still trapped in the 1950s tableau, duck and cover as the instructional video shows they should.)

It's in the hands of the best and brightest American scientists--

(Another film jump. The Son stays in cover. The Mother stands, she looks out to the audience. The Mother starts to unbutton her dress, she lets it fall. A hospital gown underneath. She removes her wig to reveal a bald cap.)

It's in the hands of the best and brightest American scientists--

(The Father and Daughter stop arguing, they look to the Mother. She falters. The Father rushes to catch her. A suspension, a moment. This is intimate, something like a long kiss goodbye. The

Mother breaks away from the Father.
Another film jump.)

NARRATOR (CONT)

It's in the hands of the best and brightest American
scientists--

(The Mother exits. The Father moves
after her, but is stuck in the tableau.
The facade and the music all comes
crashing down.)

DAUGHTER

This is all your fault! I HATE YOU!

(Still hovering on the edges of space
and time, longing after his wife, the
Father collects himself just enough:)

FATHER

Myra. I know you're upset. We're all hurting right
now. I understand how you might feel but--

DAUGHTER

Fuck you! Fuck you for thinking you know how I feel.
You don't know anything!

FATHER

Myra, you are losing my patience... I know it's your
natural reflex to act out over every little upset, but
this is not the time-- this is the time for us to come
together, as a family, for your brother, for your
mother--

DAUGHTER

Don't you dare! YOU. Of all people. Don't you dare
tell me we need to come together now. You. Who was
always gone. Always working. Where were you when she
got the diagnosis? Where were you when she went
through chemo--

FATHER

I will not stand here and let you tell me how I am
supposed to take care of my family. You. You want to
talk. To talk about not being here. You have not. You
have not been here. Maybe you should just. Just leave.
Run back to Vassar and your liberal arts degree-- like
anything you're learning could have helped her--

DAUGHTER

At least I've gone to college! What have you done?!
What has your work done to help her--?!

FATHER

I have. I have worked. Tirelessly. For years. To
support. To afford. To ensure that your mother would
be comfortable--

DAUGHTER

You think leaving her alone to die made her
comfortable?!

FATHER

That is ENOUGH. Go to your room! You are... You are
GROUNDED.

DAUGHTER

HAH. HAHA. You may have missed it, but I am not a
child anymore. You think now that Mom's dead you have
the right to actually turn back time and PARENT me?!
Fuck you--

FATHER

If you will not listen to my rules, then you have no
place in my house--

DAUGHTER

GOOD. I would sooner die than spend one more minute in
your house. Being in your house is probably what
killed her!

FATHER

You don't mean that.

(The Daughter grabs some things and
storms toward the exit.)

FATHER (CONT)

Myra. If you walk out that door--

(She stops.)

DAUGHTER

It isn't fair. You were the one working with fucking
uranium all those years. You fucking murderer. You
brought this on us. It isn't fair. It should have been
you.

(The Daughter exits. The tableau suspends: the Father helpless, the Son still in cover from the fallout all around him. The film music and narrator track loops back on:)

NARRATOR

You know what to do: Duck and cover! Then stay where you are until you know the danger has passed. This family knows what to do...

(The sound of the film running out of an old projector reel. Lights shift.)

SCENE 2

(In the transition, the apartment has been mostly packed, memories all in boxes, maybe only a couple leftover piles of photographs still to be sorted. Ada's own mess of work is still on the coffee table. Ada sits on the couch, working. Marcel enters.)

ADA

Should you be out of bed? How are you feeling?

MARCEL

I can't. So. Hrm. Cooped up. Going stir crazy in there. Just. Just staring at the ceiling.

ADA

Do you want to go out on a walk, then? The doctor said we should try to get you out to walk, just around the block--

MARCEL

Hrmph. Eh. No. I'm not. I'm fine. I just. Want to sit. Watch. Watch my shows.

(Marcel moves slowly to his chair. Ada helps him sit. He takes a moment, out of breath. He looks for the remote. He can't find it.)

MARCEL (CONT)

What. What have. Hm. Where is.

ADA

What do you need?

MARCEL

The. The. The thing. For. For the. Hrm. Hrmph. The clicker! For the TV! What have you done with it?

ADA

There's a chance it got packed up...

MARCEL

Why. Hrm. Why would you. It was. Was. Myra! Wasn't it? It's just. Just a thing. A thing she would do. To. To. Spite. Out of spite. Can't even. Let me enjoy. Wants to ship me off to an old folks home where.

MARCEL (CONT)

Where I don't even get to choose the channel.
Probably. Hrm. I bet. And she can't even let me enjoy
what. What little I have left?

ADA

It's fine, I'm sure if it got packed it's at the top
of one of these boxes. I'm sure I can find it. Just
give me a second.

MARCEL

Don't. Don't bother. Hm. I. I changed my mind.

(Ada sits back down. A beat. Marcel
grumbles.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Is that. That the. Our work? Our. Our project...

(At the edges of space and time, Young
Marcel and Young Irene appear.)

YOUNG IRENE

Hey there soldier, care to give a girl a dance?

(The memory fades.)

MARCEL

Let. Let me. Let me see what you've done.

ADA

Are you sure we should be...

MARCEL

It's a. I had a. A. Hrm. A concussion, Ada. I'm not.
Brain damaged. Let me. Let me do this. I can still. My
mind is still. Let me help you.

(Ada slides the papers toward Marcel.
He takes them eagerly.)

ADA

You can check the calculations I did this morning.

(Bridget enters, Ada greets her.)

BRIDGET

How are you feeling, Marcel?

MARCEL

Sick of. Hrm. Sick of people asking. Asking me that. Question. I'm still. Still of sound. Sound mind! See?

BRIDGET

Is this what you were doing while you were stuck in the hospital?

MARCEL

Better than a. A. A book of those. Crosswords! That's what Myra tried to get me from the gift shop! Hmph. This. This is the important. Important work. Isn't that. Isn't that right, Irene?

ADA

What?

MARCEL

Huh?

ADA

It's Ada, Grandpa.

MARCEL

That's what I said! Ada Irena! This work. It means something.

(Marcel turns back to work. Bridget joins Ada on the couch. At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel and Young Irene:)

YOUNG IRENE

We're not in Tennessee anymore.

BRIDGET

You've certainly made progress on the place.

YOUNG MARCEL

I have to believe that the work I've done has meant something, still means something.

ADA

My aunt has been down a lot with Grandpa in the hospital... This was mostly her work.

BRIDGET

That makes more sense.

YOUNG IRENE

Don't let the past keep you from our future, from our children's future, Marcel.

(A beat. Marcel sets the papers down.
The memory fades.)

MARCEL

Hm. Hrm. My. My head is. Suddenly. You were. Maybe you were right. Ada. I'm not.

ADA

Grandpa, are you okay?

MARCEL

Lie down. I just. I need to go back and lie down. Sorry. Ada. I'm not. Hm. I need to lie down.

(Ada helps Marcel up. He exits.)

BRIDGET

... I'm sorry.

ADA

For...?

BRIDGET

I can't help but feel somewhat responsible. I know this time with your grandpa is important to you. I could have suggested we reschedule with the realtor. Or postponed the dinner. Or at the very least waited until you found your phone. If I hadn't insisted I pull you away, maybe you would have been here, when--

ADA

Bridg, it was my decision, none of that had anything to do with you--

BRIDGET

It's been eating me up since you called the day after from the hospital. ... I wish you would have called me sooner.

ADA

It didn't really cross my mind in the moment--

BRIDGET

And that's. ... I should have been there with you. Been there for you. But you don't think. You don't include me.

BRIDGET (CONT)

You're always in your own world, focused on your own problems, ignorant of the world around you until it suits you. You don't let people in, and that's fine, but I'm not just people, Ada. I'm your partner.

ADA

I. Include you.

BRIDGET

Only when I make sure that you do! The energy I've spent, for years, just to feel needed by you.

ADA

It's not. I don't do it on purpose. I do need you, Bridg.

BRIDGET

I know you do.

(Beat.)

Maybe I should have said something sooner. But I feel like I barely see you. You've barely been home.

ADA

I know. I'm sorry.

BRIDGET

And then I realized this is just you. It's who you always are. But with work, I'm just usually right there with you.

Part of me thought that maybe moving here would be a new start for us. The possibilities we have now that I'm not the only one compiling your research into usable data. The feeling of never having to write another tedious grant proposal. Enjoying writing articles for publication because it's an achievement and not a life-line. And you... I mean. Look at you. The work you're doing.

(Bridget picks up some papers from the coffee table.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

Being with your grandfather has opened up something in you. This work. It's beautiful, Ada. Your mind is just. So... Can you believe... God, this is stupid... I'm jealous that he's been so inspiring to you?

ADA

Bridg...

BRIDGET

Let me finish, please. Finally it felt like maybe we had earned time for just us. It's taken years for us to earn this recognition. Not just professionally, either.

You know how some little girls fantasize about their dream wedding? Ivory lace dresses, and flickering tea lights... the rich, sweet taste of the buttercream frosting on vanilla cake as light as air... Neat bouquets of peony and cherry blossom...

ADA

I was definitely not that little girl.

BRIDGET

Of course you weren't. But I was. And up until recently... I remember the look on my mother's face when I asked her if girls could married the same way normal couples do.

(Ada knows this. There may be something here, a touch, a connection.)

BRIDGET (CONT)

It has taken this long for me to finally feel legitimized for who I am. I couldn't have done that without you. This year, I thought: this is finally our year.

ADA

And it is, Bridget. We're here. It's happening. Where are you going with this?

BRIDGET

I'm frustrated by things that are out of my control. By changes I want to see but that I know can't happen overnight. The fact that you're distracted--rightfully so--and it's slowing down my plans for our future together? It's maddening, and I feel horrible for feeling that way. It isn't fair. Not to you, not to either of us.

ADA

Oh.

BRIDGET

So. I'm sorry.

ADA

... You know I'm not. I'm not good with words.

BRIDGET

I know that--

ADA

You've been so understanding. Of all this. I'm sorry. Too. You didn't sign up for this.

BRIDGET

Of course I did. Ada. This is what you sign up for in a relationship. A marriage. This is being family. It's exactly what I signed up for.

ADA

You're right. I'm sorry--

BRIDGET

Stop saying "I'm sorry--"

ADA

What can I do?

BRIDGET

Just. Remember. We're in this together. Okay? You and me.

ADA

And Lise Bitener. ... Okay.

(Ada pulls Bridget close. A moment.
Bridget takes a breath.)

BRIDGET

And with all that said. ... They're delivering our conference table today. It'll be impossible to move if they don't put it in the right spot, so I best be off to supervise.

(Ada holds onto Bridget.)

ADA

You can stay a little longer, can't you...

BRIDGET

(Teasing:)

Ada... Please, what if your grandfather catches us--

(Ada pulls Bridget to the couch, a beat. Then Myra enters, brandishing her phone.)

MYRA

THE N. N. S. A?!

(Bridget and Ada spring apart like they were teenagers caught by a parent walking in.)

ADA

Aunt Myra--!

MYRA

What. What do you have to say for yourself, Ada?! Hm? What is your. Precious. Government agency--

ADA

Aunt Myra, clam down... Grandpa is asleep--

MYRA

I don't care! Wake him up! He is. He is just as responsible for this as you are--

ADA

What are you talking about?

MYRA

Tell me: is the government still planning to move forward with your power plant, or is all your time going to be spent building nukes?

ADA

Building nukes--?

MYRA

I'm scandalized, Ada. Absolutely scandalized to even be related to you. There's a whole exposé with your name on it on one of those... Internet zines.

ADA

Do you mean a blog?

BRIDGET

Aha.

MYRA

A friend of mine sent it to me in an e-mail. "Myra, isn't this Ada Lange your niece?"

An anonymous source from the Lab provided documentation to a local journalist--

BRIDGET

An unverified tabloid dealing in slander and scaremongering--

MYRA

--That the very same government institution responsible for the country's stockpile of nuclear warheads will be redirecting the Lab's "nuclear energy project" to instead research and manufacture new nuclear weapons technology!

ADA

The NNSA has money they want to put toward energy and the future. A better future. There's no way they'd shut down construction on my fusion reactor.

MYRA

I'm sure they believe they can use the miraculous power of fusion to create cleaner, more reliable, more efficient bombs.

BRIDGET

Please. The NNSA cares more about anti-proliferation and disarmament than they do about developing any new technology. President Obama has repeatedly made clear his position on a "world without nuclear weapons" and I doubt whoever takes over will want that to change.

MYRA

And what of who takes over? Hm? I know you're not that young, either of you, but I lived through Nixon, Reagan.

BRIDGET

Reagan was the one to sign the INF treaty with Russia to end the Cold War--

MYRA

Ada! Tell me you have better taste than to share your bed with a Reagan apologist--

ADA

Aunt Myra she's not--!

BRIDGET

This has nothing to do with politics.

MYRA

Nothing to do--!

BRIDGET

The NNSA's primary missions is, and I quote, "to maintain a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear stockpile through the application of unparalleled science, technology, engineering, and manufacturing." That's us! We are the unparalleled science and technology.

MYRA

So you admit it!

BRIDGET

This is asinine. If you don't care to listen to anything but the fiction spouted by radical-ex-hippy tabloid writers--

ADA

Will you both please--

MYRA

Is this what you want to be remembered for, Ada? What you want your name attached to. The Lange name attached to for the rest of history? Your grandfather couldn't do it, so why not take up the torch!

ADA

Grandpa has nothing to do with this.

MYRA

If you want to know what it means to be a tool for the government, why not ask him! A brilliant scientist, doing what's best for society! See how well that worked out for him? You're standing in it!

ADA

Now you're just being cruel.

MYRA

Nuclear science never did a thing for this family but help me watch my mother die from a disease it caused in her. And where was he in all of it? Couldn't pull himself away from his precious work at his precious Laboratory! Your precious Laboratory!

ADA

Aunt Myra, stop--

MYRA

You're the one who claimed you want to save the world. What is the point of any of it if there's no world left to save and no family left to save it for?

(Marcel enters. The three women freeze.)

MARCEL

Would you. What are you. Hm. All of you! First you tell me. Tell me. Hm. Lie down, Marcel! Rest, Marcel! Then you enter his. His. Hm. His home and cause a. A ruckus. Over. Over. Nonsense.

MYRA

Dad. You of all people should know better than--

MARCEL

Just. Don't. Don't bother! If you'd all kindly just. Just. Get out! Get out of my house!

(Marcel exits to the kitchen, where he clangs around loudly as a demonstration.)

BRIDGET

I'm sorry, Ada. But honestly, your Aunt is a madwoman...

MYRA

And your fiancée is a war profiteer!

ADA

Aunt Myra, that is enough!

(To Bridget, softer:)

You should go. You're going to miss the table.

BRIDGET

... You're right. I'll see you tonight?

(A brief exchange goodbye, then Bridget exits. Ada turns on Myra.)

MYRA

I'm not apologizing for anything I said.

ADA

He wants us to leave.

MYRA

I have a meeting with the woman at the assisted living facility in an hour anyway, have to make sure things are all in order for him to move in.

(Myra leaves without another word. Ada slowly collects her things as Marcel enters with a cup of coffee.)

MARCEL

No. No, Ada. Stay.

ADA

I'm sorry for--

MARCEL

You have. Hm. Nothing. Nothing at all to apologize for. You weren't. Weren't the one who. Causing all that. Commotion. Come. Sit.

(They both sit. After he's settled:)

MARCEL (CONT)

I. Hrm. I can't help but. But feel that this is. My fault. I made things harder for you.

ADA

What do you mean? You haven't done anything. I'm happy to be here, Grandpa--

MARCEL

I didn't mean to. To. Eves... It's your private business. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. Listen. Thin. Thin walls. But I did. Listen. And so. I know when to say I'm sorry.

ADA

It's okay.

(Beat.)

MARCEL

I've been thinking. Since the. The. The hospital. Hm. And. And what you. The things you've. Asked me. The questions. And the memories. And. Now. Now you. This job. This job you've got here. It's all. It's all coming back. And. And. And I don't. We don't. Talk. Talk about these things.

ADA

You've said that before. I don't know what that means.

MARCEL

If you will. Listen. Let me. Let me talk. Ada. I'm. Hm. I'm trying. To. To figure out. Hm. Where to. Where to begin.

(Beat.)

While I was stuck there. In the hospital. I remembered. In the hospital. After. After the. The. Hm. After I was discharged from the service. This man from the. The military. High up. Big brass. Coat all covered in medals. This man. Somehow my record had gotten across his desk. I tell you. I. I was so nervous that first day he came in. Convinced. Convinced I had been found out and was going to be in big trouble for lying about my age--

ADA

You said they didn't look too closely--

MARCEL

But that wasn't. That wasn't why he came. He knew I had training. In chemistry. And he came to tell me about this new. New project. The government was working on. Top secret. Wouldn't tell me much. They never told you much. That was the way back then. Secrets. Secrets are national security. You never knew. Never knew if an Axis spy could be lurking around the corner. That attitude. The secrets. It. It permeates. Into everything. All of us. All of us there at Oak Ridge and after. Me, Irene, all of us. You just didn't talk about. About the Project. That's why. That's why we never talked about it to Myra, Peter--

ADA

They never knew you worked on the Manhattan Project?

MARCEL

They. They knew. ... Smart. Smart kids. Clever Langes. The both of them. ... And what I did after. They knew.

MARCEL (CONT)

(Beat.)

There was a car waiting the minute I stepped out of the hospital. Took me out to Tennessee. ... I remember driving up to town... Getting out of the car. Mud, everywhere. Everywhere you stepped you were sinking in mud.

(On the edges of space and time, Young Marcel carries on Young Irene, mud-caked shoes dangling from her fingertips.)

MARCEL (CONT)

I remember. I remember those white. White shoes Irene loved-- caked with mud. She didn't care.

ADA

What did you do in Oak Ridge?

MARCEL

Hm. Hrm. It didn't take long. For me to show my worth. To prove myself a. A. A dedicated soldier for the war effort. I just traded out an open cockpit airplane and a machine gun for. For. A different. ... Different weapon.

I didn't know. At the time. What it was for. What any of it was for. We didn't. We didn't talk. Nobody talked about the Project. But I was high enough in the. The work I was doing was important. Important enough. That I listened. I heard. Not enough that anyone cared I overheard. I was a good. Good scientist. A good soldier. ...

After. 1945. After 1945 things continued there for a time. But. But the people got shipped back, sent home, back to their normal lives. Irene. I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye. ...

I kept working for them. The Project became public. Public information. We had. We had split the atom. And won the war. It was a reason. A reason to celebrate. Good. Good scientists made it possible to. To celebrate. What. What were we celebrating...

What were we continuing that work for. I was shipped off to the metallurgy lab in Chicago... Then... Then Truman came along and said. Said to.

MARCEL (CONT)

Continue the research. And another job came. And I took it. Because. Because it was good money. And I could do the work. And we moved here to Los Alamos after that.

The more time went by the more. The more we knew. The more that became muddled up in secrets and lies to tell us the work we were doing was still for our good. The common good. Because the Soviets. Because the fight wasn't over. It was more important than ever. They told us. The work we were doing was more important than ever, and the consequences...

The radiation wasn't. The long-term effects. It took. It took years. So we kept working. To. To keep us at the front of the race. Even after. Then there was. Was. Hydrogen. And the. The castle. No. The. The island. Castle Bravo. And the wrong. Wrong reaction. There was. This was.

Just after Myra was born. What world. What world was I. Was I bringing my children into. I didn't know. I was a kid. A dumb kid. And I didn't know. And then I knew.

And I kept doing the work. And I'd wake up at night in a cold sweat thinking I saw the flash... With no warning. The flash would come and I would watch Myra... Peter... Irene. I would watch the house fall around us. See their skin burn. And when I went to them. To save them. To cover. Duck and cover, the song said. They would be some other family I didn't recognize. From some place far, far away from here. A family who. Who died. Who actually. ... Who I. I had a hand in--

I didn't know back then. About the Project. And I was. A. A good soldier. A dumb kid. If I had known then. What would happen. Would I have done anything different.

(Marcel is silent. Ada doesn't know what to say. A beat. At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel paces. Young Irene catches him and takes his face in her hands.)

ADA & YOUNG IRENE

None of it was your fault.

MARCEL

Hrm. ... Irene. Irene would tell me that. ... But it didn't matter much when she. When she wasn't around anymore to tell it to me. When I. When I didn't listen to her when she did.

(At the edges of space and time, Young Marcel breaks away from Young Irene and walks away.)

MARCEL (CONT)

I don't. Hrm. I don't like to. We don't talk. We don't--

ADA

It's okay. Grandpa.

(A silence. Marcel huffs. He sits forward.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Where. Where is the. We should. We should get back to the. Hm. The other work.

ADA

... You don't look well, Grandpa. It's a lot. What you just... It's okay if--

MARCEL

It's not about. I'm not. I'm well. I'm able. My mind is. Still able. Let me. Help. Let me work. Let me help you with the work. The important work. Don't let. Don't let my past. Distract. Don't let the past... keep you from the future.

(Ada brightens. She picks up the notebook with her calculations and hands it to him. Marcel and Ada set to work. As they unlock the theory of nuclear of fusion, lights shift.)

SCENE 3

(Myra sits on the couch, Marcel in his chair.)

MYRA

Dad. You look tired.

MARCEL

I'm fine.

MYRA

You should be resting. You honestly look unwell.

MARCEL

Don't. Don't tell me what--

MYRA

I'm not telling you what, I'm just suggesting--

MARCEL

You're not, you're telling. You're trying to tell me how. How to--

MYRA

Fine. Fine! Pardon me for being concerned over your health--

MARCEL

Concern. Concerned wouldn't. It would be. It wouldn't be... Kicking me out of. Out of my home--

MYRA

I will not get into this again. Ada will be back with the moving truck to take your things to storage--

MARCEL

All boxed up! All ready to go. Into. Into a dark... forgotten space! Collecting dust.

MYRA

They were collecting dust here!

MARCEL

It would be easier. Hrm. To just burn everything. In a. A. Big. Big bonfire. That's what I want done with me. When I die.

MYRA

Yes, Dad, I know, I was the one who made you find a lawyer to finalize your will--

MARCEL

Don't. Don't bury me in the ground to. To. Rot. To. Decompose. More than I. Hrm. More than I have already.

MYRA

Don't be macabre--

MARCEL

I'll be. I'll be any way I. I want. I'm entitled--

MYRA

Yes you are.

MARCEL

I am entitled! To act how I please. At my age.

(Ada enters.)

MYRA

Ada, thank God. Any problems with the truck?

ADA

No, we're all set to go.

MYRA

You know this would have been easier if your father--

ADA

I know.

MYRA

Wouldn't give me a straight answer if he could make it out or not, travel this, schedule that--

ADA

I know...

MYRA

I figured at the very least after I told him our father had been hospitalized. Again! Really, Ada, I think if you called him--

ADA

I know.

MYRA

Well. It's fine. We have time. ... Dad. Stop moping.

MARCEL

I. I am not--

MYRA

You are.

MARCEL

You're not looking at me. You. You can't. See. What I'm--

MYRA

I can feel you moping. I do not want you pouting and huffing every time we take a box out, why don't you go lie down--

MARCEL

I will not. I am fine--

ADA

Grandpa, we've been up working practically into the morning the last couple days. It's really okay if you want to go sleep.

MARCEL

Hrmp. Hm. I do not--

MYRA

What could be so important you would--. He is an old man, Ada, he wa just in the hospital. He cannot run ragged the way he could when he was half his age--

ADA

I've tried to tell him that, but he insisted he help me with work.

MYRA

With work--!

MARCEL

I. I. Am still. Capable. Useful. I like to be. Hm. To be useful. Myra. I am not.

ADA

He's helped me with a lot of new ideas.

MARCEL

Little. Little details. I. I'm not much. It's her work. She's the one who got all the... All the smarts in the family.

ADA

Don't let him fool you. He's still pretty sharp. ...

MYRA

Yes. He was always that.

(A beat.)

MARCEL

This... This reminds me. Did I ever. Did I ever tell you. Hrm. The story of. The story--

MYRA

Yes, Dad, I'm sure whatever it is we've both heard it before--

MARCEL

How do you. I haven't told it yet. If you would just. Hm. Just let me tell it--

MYRA

We have a lot of work to get done, a lot of things to move, we don't have time for--

ADA

Oh, come on, Aunt Myra. Let him tell it. I want to hear it.

MARCEL

Hrm. Thank you, Ada Irena. Now. As I was. This was. This was back in. Nineteen... 1950... something or... Late-1950-something. We were in that... I don't know if you remember. Peter was only. Only. Still just a toddler. And you-- six or seven maybe. We were in that old, two bedroom... Town style... townhouse. On a cul de sac. You used to ride your... This little pink bicycle around in circles at the end of it. Little pink thing with training wheels and fringe on the handlebars.

MYRA

I do. I remember that bike. I did not have training wheels--

MARCEL

You had training wheels until after we moved away from the cul de sac--

MYRA

I did not!

MARCEL

There is. No. No shame in needing training wheels! I tell you, you had training wheels because I distinctly remember the day we took the training wheels off and--

MYRA

Fine! Fine, I had training wheels, that isn't the story you're telling--

MARCEL

Well if you would let me finish the story and not. Not. Interrupt! Every second--

MYRA

I was not--

ADA

Grandpa, you were talking about the house on the cul de sac.

MARCEL

Right. I was. Where was. ... Right. The house isn't important. This was. This was 1950-something. I was working in this lab, on a government project, like... Like Ada. I was working for the government doing. Uranium fluorine work. Not too different than... Than what I was doing during the war.

(Myra makes a throat-clearing noise of disapproval. Ada shushes her.)

MARCEL (CONT)

And I was... It was good. Good money. We bought this. This little house. To get us going. On the cul de sac. And the bicycle with the fringe. And I had a pension... Building savings. So we could. Could move up eventually to a. A bigger house. A different cul de sac.

(At the edges of space and time, Young Irene enters, in a dress not dissimilar from the Mother.)

MARCEL (CONT)

And I came home at five o'clock every day and we were comfortable. A comfortable. Traditional. American family. And that was. That was going to be the rest of our future.

(Young Marcel enters, in a suit not dissimilar from the Father. He hands Young Irene his briefcase. She kisses him on the cheek.)

MARCEL (CONT)

But. But the work I was doing. I was. After. After everything. I tried to tell myself and Irene that the work was for the good of everyone. Of our family. I told myself. The work was important. But. But Irene wouldn't. Couldn't reconcile.

I came home one day. And I was tired. And I was. My temper. Has never been. You know. You know my temper. I'm sorry. Myra. You know that I'm sorry.

(A beat. This honestly may be the first time Myra has ever heard him say this.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Irene was always the better of us. I think. I think she asked me to take Myra out. On her little pink bicycle. Around the cul de sac.

YOUNG IRENE

She wants to try riding without training wheels.

MYRA

I told you--

ADA

Shh!

MARCEL

And I remember I snapped at her. Raised my voice. I'm not. I'm not proud of when that happened, but it happened, and...

MARCEL & YOUNG MARCEL

For crissake, Irene! Can you not just let me be for five minutes when I get home?!

YOUNG MARCEL

I am at work every day. Standing over test tubes and reports until my back aches and my eyes cross. Giving my. My all for my country. And I just want. Five. Minutes. To myself at the end of the day without you asking me to do something you should be taking care of before I get home!

MARCEL

And oh. Irene let me have it. But. But in her way. She. She never raised her voice. She never got angry. She just had this matter of fact way about putting me. Putting me in my place.

YOUNG MARCEL

I'm sorry. It's just work.

YOUNG IRENE

I know you provide for me, for the children... And we're comfortable here. But comfort isn't the same as happiness, Marcel.

MARCEL & YOUNG MARCEL

I'm doing the best I can for us, Irene.

YOUNG MARCEL

What do you expect me to do?

YOUNG IRENE

The work is killing you, Marcel--

YOUNG MARCEL

The work is not the problem!

(Beat.)

... When I enlisted, when I was sent to work on the Project... All I wanted was to serve my country. To help people... To keep them safe. This job. I do this job to keep people safe. To protect our country. ... The house. The kids. ... Even if I. ... We don't have a backup plan. If I don't do this job. How am I supposed to provide for you?

YOUNG IRENE

We'll provided for ourselves. The both of us. And we'll figure it out as we go. We can sell the house, dip into our savings when we have to. We hit the road and go... Wherever we want to. It might be a harder road, but to me...

YOUNG IRENE (CONT)

It's better to face the great unknown one day at a time than watch you slowly lose your soul here.

YOUNG MARCEL

I wish I could see the world the way you do, but, what you're suggesting is irresponsible. Insanity. You think we should walk away from a stable life because... Because I. What I've. The work I'm doing--?

YOUNG IRENE

We're not in Tennessee anymore. We are past the point of doing what we're told because we're patriots and it's for the greater good.

YOUNG MARCEL

You do not mean that, Irene. We are. I am a good. Good soldier. Good citizen. I--

YOUNG IRENE

Is it really for the greater good anymore, Marcel? Is it?

YOUNG MARCEL

I have to believe that it is. That the work I've done has meant something, otherwise-- what? What else would it all have been for?

YOUNG IRENE

Don't let the past keep you from our future, Marcel.

MARCEL

I wish I could tell you I had listened. To listened to my better part. The smarter of us. Always. Irene was. Irene was the best of us. Made us better. ... I wish I could tell you that I held her hand and looked into the unknown future with her at my side and was sure-- that we had sold the house, packed up the station wagon, and drove... That little pink bicycle hitched to the back of the trunk, fringe blowing in the wind behind us. Every now and again I could look up and catch them in the rear view mirror...

MYRA

But that's not what happened.

MARCEL

I didn't know. Know how. I thought I. Was sure I knew. Knew better. Knew best. To stay where we were. To continue the work. That if I just continued the work I could be responsible for something good.

YOUNG MARCEL

I know what's best for my family, Irene. For the future. I have to believe I know what I'm doing is best.

MARCEL

And somehow. Somehow Irene endured when I couldn't. Because she knew what was really best for our family. So she was always there, to make us happy, to make you happy. Even if I. If I couldn't. You. I hope you saw that. At least.

MYRA

I did. Dad. I did see it. ... I miss her. Every single day.

MARCEL

Hm. She. She loved you. Very. Very much. Myra. We both. We both. After she was gone. I wish I had listened. To her. To both of you. I wish I had known what to do. But I didn't. Myra.

(Myra takes her father's hand, and squeezes. A beat. The memory of Young Marcel and Young Irene fades.)

MARCEL

(*A bit lost:*)

Did I. Did I ever tell you. The story about the first time. Hm. The first. First time I took. Took Peter out flying?

ADA

Grandpa...

MARCEL

A little. Two-seater. Open. Open cockpit. It was. He was. So little. He. He could barely see. Over the. The. Controls. Little. Little two-seater.

MYRA

Dad. Are you feeling alright?

MARCEL

Took him up. Up. Over the. Over the mountains. It was. Fall. The aspens. The aspens were turning. Gold. Everything was. Gold. All across the mountain. ... Did I ever tell you. Tell you the story. The. The... He could barely see. But. But we. He. And we. Took. We took off the training wheels. And. And he. He got in that plane. And kept. Kept flying. Both. Both my children... Gone.

(Marcel gets up from the recliner and goes toward the edges of space and time, to some unseen window.)

MARCEL (CONT)

Would you look at that. The aspens have started to turn.

MYRA

It's barely the end of August.

(A tinny recording of a slow dance echoes faintly from the edges of space and time.)

MARCEL

But that mud, sure something. Everywhere you step.

(Young Irene enters and approaches Marcel.)

YOUNG IRENE

Hey there soldier, care to give a girl a dance?

(Marcel and Irene dance, the way they did seven decades before. Then, Irene leaves Marcel. He falters. Ada and Myra leap up.)

ADA

Grandpa!

MARCEL

Don't. Don't. Hrm. I'm fine. Just a. Hm. Case of weak. Weak knees.

MYRA

Dad. Why don't you go lie down?

MARCEL

(As if only realizing for the first time she's come back home:)

Myra. You came home. You. ... What? What was I. I. Hrm. Yes. ... I think I. I'm tired. I need. Hm. I need to lie down. Just for a. A quick nap.

(Marcel exits. Ada and Myra on the sofa.)

MYRA

I wish you could have known your grandmother.

ADA

Yeah. I do too.

MYRA

You unquestionably inherited the Lange disposition... I have it too. But. You remind me of her. In a lot of ways.

(A beat.)

MYRA (CONT)

I don't think I ever let myself see what he lived with. What he sacrificed. When it felt meaningless after the money was used up because of her treatments, and all of us were miserable...

ADA

Do you think it would have changed things for you? For your relationship with him?

MYRA

Who really knows. Maybe it would have been easier to come back. I knew. A long time ago, really. That her cancer wasn't his fault. But. It was easier to blame him. ... The both of us. Stubborn fools until the day we die, I suppose.

ADA

I guess I'd be lying if I said I didn't know what that was like.

MYRA

You should really call your father more often.

ADA

It's not like he ever bothers to pick up the phone and call me--

MYRA

Ada...

ADA

Yeah. I guess I probably should.

(A beat.)

MYRA

Well. These boxes aren't going to move themselves to the truck. I suppose we should.

ADA

I'll go get it ready.

(Ada exits. Myra sits a minute more. She notices, on the floor, maybe just peeking out under the couch, a photo that was overlooked. She lets out a laugh.)

MYRA

No training wheels. I told him I did not have training wheels at that house--

(Myra gets up and exits toward the bedroom.)

MYRA

(Exiting:)

Dad? We're about to start moving boxes, it might be loud, I just want to make sure you-- Dad? ... Dad? ...
ADA!

(Ada enters. Myra rushes in from the bedroom at the same time.)

ADA

Alright, back's up, ramp's down, it's all ready--

MYRA

Ada. You have to call your father.

ADA

Jeez. I got the message--

MYRA

Call your father.

(Lights shift.)

SCENE 4

(The apartment hasn't changed, but it feels emptier somehow. Ada stands in the middle of the living room staring at the recliner. Bridget enters.)

BRIDGET

This is where you went. The funeral is going to start soon. We're only waiting for your father... Do you need anything? What can I do?

ADA

I'll be fine.

BRIDGET

That's not what I asked you.

(Beat.)

You can take a little more time off work, if you need, there's no rush--

ADA

Right. Since they shut down construction on the reactor.

BRIDGET

They didn't shut it down.

ADA

Indefinitely suspended. That's what the e-mail said. Indefinitely.

BRIDGET

Of all the times for you to finally read your e-mail. Temporarily. Only while we figure out how resources are being allocated.

ADA

All of my research, all of my time over the last few months... The last few years? We were supposed to be moving forward.

BRIDGET

This is moving forward. Sometimes the path ahead requires you take a detour, but the destination is the same.

ADA

They've as good as taken the destination off the map! We were on a time-line, we had a target-- ten years. In ten years we would have had a working fusion generator up and running. Sooner, maybe. A model that could compliment existing solar and wind systems, push us into the future of energy.

BRIDGET

The hope was ten years, but you know that was being generous. Can you blame them for not wanting to go all in on a hypothesis?

ADA

Ten years is nothing. It's. It's the blink of an eye in scientific terms. Other teams understand that. Other investors. But why expect the government to be interested in taking risks for the betterment of mankind--?

BRIDGET

Jesus, Ada, you sound like your aunt. You're overreacting. After we oversee whatever plans the NNSA settles on, we assign some team to keep it running, and we can get back to researching fusion in a few years, only slightly behind schedule.

ADA

It's not good enough. I'm onto something. I've been working. I have calculations and models I need to test. Not in a few years. Now. We don't have a few years. Our planet doesn't have a few years--

BRIDGET

Well, I'm sorry you can't always get your way--

ADA

I've sent some material out to the other labs we were working with in California and Chicago.

BRIDGET

You did what? What material?

ADA

It's preliminary. Calculations, ideas. I just wanted to get it out there in case--

BRIDGET

Why didn't you show me?

ADA

It's the work I was doing with my grandpa. He was checking calculations for me, we did it together.

BRIDGET

With him--? You sent un-verified calculations. We are scientists, Ada, there is a process, a process I have always been the one to do for you, that I should have done for you--

ADA

It was on a whim. To get some feelers out there--

BRIDGET

You should have talked to me about this--

ADA

There's nothing to talk about. I made a decision.

BRIDGET

It isn't just your decision, Ada--

ADA

What did you expect me to do? The NNSA is all but erasing my life's work--

BRIDGET

It is OUR life's work. Have you been completely blind to everything I've done in this partnership? Do you not think I have a stake in this, too?

ADA

What exactly is your stake? Is it actually the research? A cleaner future? Or is it the money, the fancy office chairs, the five-bedroom house in the woods that you'll live in comfortably until you die?

BRIDGET

It can be all those things! I know you. I know you better than you do. Your ambition is too big. You thrive off the knowledge that you, and your brilliant, beautiful mind... that Ada Lange will be remembered throughout history for what she has contributed to saving the world.

ADA

Then let's save the world! We don't need the NNSA or the Lab to do that.

ADA (CONT)

We don't need to waste five or ten or twenty years helping the government kick its feet when the key to a truly clean, renewable energy is at our fingertips.

BRIDGET

With whose money? I'm getting old, Ada. I want to start our family. I can't go back to seventy-hour weeks writing grants and living like beggars just to keep the lights on month to month.

ADA

Other teams have private investors who care more about philanthropy than the bottom line.

BRIDGET

You would trade the reliability of the government for the whims of a philanthropist billionaire?

ADA

No one is going to look at the work we're doing now and remember me as the woman who revolutionized nuclear energy. Not if a bunch of faceless men in uniform could wipe it all out with the push of a button. That button, that would have my name on it. That is what my name would be seen as and remembered for.

BRIDGET

What men?! What button? You're making up futures that don't exist, Ada. You know as well as I do the NNSA can't use our research on fusion to make weapons--

ADA

What if my aunt is right? What are they waiting for? What are they deciding? How best to use me in developing missiles?

BRIDGET

Ada.

ADA

It's just. It's not fair. To work so hard to be taken seriously as a woman in this field. The work we had to do for years, on our own, that no established labs would even look at because we were women. The thought.

ADA (CONT)

Just the very thought that we're now welcoming those same men who turned up their noses to us before to take our work, our names, and use them for their own profit, their own ends.

BRIDGET

You're being a child. Fair. It's not fair? Don't act like your genius, your accolades, couldn't have gotten you a top position in any lab in the country. I know the offers you got for your post-doc. You chose this work. This path. You had the privilege to!

Don't tell me about fair in this field. I don't have your talent. Your advantages. I have studied twice as hard, done twice the work, suffered twice the time over to even get close to reaching the success that you-- that I had to rely on your research to get me to. If you want to complain about how unfair your life has been, don't think you'll find sympathy from me.

ADA

I am not. I am not looking for sympathy. You are my partner, Bridget--

BRIDGET

At least you acknowledge it!

ADA

I assumed we were in this together. For the same reasons.

BRIDGET

No. You assumed I was in this with you.

ADA

Is there a difference?!

BRIDGET

That is not together! God! You are so buried in your own daydreams of how the world works. You have built yourself up to be some sort of martyr because you think your idea of a beautiful world where there is no war, no suffering, is only possible if you, Ada Lange, can bestow the gift of safe and clean nuclear power to the people. Where we can join hands in fields covered with wildflowers and have picnics in the shade of our sleek, eco-friendly, fusion reactors.

ADA

What is wrong with that dream?

BRIDGET

The dream is not the problem. It's a beautiful dream. But it isn't reality. You need to come back to Earth. You need to see things how they are, and understand that the necessity of survival is to adapt to the situation in front of you, not to ignore it.

ADA

Moving forward at the whims of the NNSA would be ignoring it! I can't. Bridget. My grandfather. He. He made his choice, he knew what the work he was doing meant, and he still made his choice. He thought he knew what was best for his family, and it tore them apart.

BRIDGET

And the decision you're making is any different?

ADA

I will not follow in his footsteps. I can only make the decision that I know is best for me.

BRIDGET

(Softening:)

Ida, my sweet Ida Noddack... Think of everything you haven't been able to do yet. Your research on fusion will only be the beginning. The complete removal of radioactive isotopes, any risk of nuclear proliferation. You can be the one to help move the NNSA in that direction. That is how you can save the world, my love. Focus on what is in front of you. Your dream is out there, but you have to see that this. This. Is the only path we can take that gets us to it.

ADA

I don't know how to continue doing the work I need to if I believe that is true.

BRIDGET

God, Ada. What else do I need to say to get through to you?

ADA

That you know, with no uncertainty, that the NNSA is only interested in energy and this is all just a big mistake.

ADA (CONT)

That the D.O.E. actually gives a shit about saving the planet, about saving people? That my aunt was wrong and there is no chance in hell we would ever be asked to help the government improve their nuclear stockpile.

(A beat.)

ADA (CONT)

Bridget.

BRIDGET

We were hired to do this work for a reason. You and I. We are the best in the country. But if you think the NNSA won't just find someone else to take over their work so long as the mention of nuclear weapons doesn't make them blink, even if it set them back by twenty years--

ADA

Was my aunt right? ... Did you know?

BRIDGET

Of course I knew. I. Manage. Ada. That's what I do. And I made a decision to manage this project the best way I saw fit.

ADA

I cannot believe you would keep information like that from me. That you would lie to me.

BRIDGET

I never lied to you. I gave you opportunity after opportunity to read the documents, attend the meetings. To be part of the planning process. You were the one who was content, as always, to let me do all the busy work, so I did--

ADA

Work to allow the government to pervert my research--
?!

BRIDGET

Our. Our research. Stop. Insisting. It has only ever been you. Who deciphered and cataloged the kindergarten chicken-scratch in all the dozens of notebooks you went through?

BRIDGET (CONT)

Who wrote programs for analysis and built models for you? Who wrote the journals. Got them published. It is not just your research, Ada, it is mine too--

ADA

But the difference is that you can't keep doing it without me, and I can keep going without you.

(A silence. After a moment Bridget lets out something between a laugh and a sob. Ada doesn't move. Bridget steels herself.)

BRIDGET

If you plan on coming back to the apartment tonight... Just. Don't.

ADA

Bridget--

BRIDGET

Don't. Just. I need some time.

(Bridget exits. Ada stands there, unsure of what to do next. A beat.

Then, music plays in with the voice of the Narrator:)

NARRATOR

Ah, here we have the perfect picture of the all-American family.

(The sound of the film is cut out suddenly as in through the door walks PETER. Suitcase in hand, dressed like he just flew into town, used his own plane, probably, too.)

ADA

... Dad.

(Ada wipes her face. Is it really so hard to let your dad see you cry?

Peter sets down his suitcase. Ada goes to him. They hug. The sort of hug that has been waiting to be given for a long time.)

(Breaking the edges of space and time,
a new narrator enters: Young Irene.)

YOUNG IRENE

Ah, here we have the imperfect picture of a real,
nuclear, American family.

The Father, arrived home after traveling a great
distance, is welcomed for the first time in a long
time by his daughter...

(Myra enters.)

YOUNG IRENE (CONT)

And his sister.

MYRA

Peter! Ada. There you two are. Are you coming or not?
We don't have all day.

PETER

Just come sit a minute, Myra, will you? ... It's good
to see you, sis.

(Myra joins Peter and Ada on the
couch.)

MYRA

It's good to see you, too.

YOUNG IRENE

Their father worked a very important job, for the
government. And his granddaughter did for a time, too,
as a scientist. A Nuclear Scientist, to be exact.

(Peter takes Ada's hand. He looks out
an unseen window.)

PETER

Would you look at that.

YOUNG IRENE

I'm sure you're all familiar with the word "nuclear."

PETER

The first aspens are changing.

YOUNG IRENE

We all know about the atomic bomb. In World War II, brilliant scientists, like the young woman's Grandfather, made a discovery that changed some families irrevocably for the worse... or so, perhaps, they once thought.

PETER

Did I ever tell you the story about the first time Dad took me out flying?

MYRA

Oh, honestly, Peter--

ADA

No. No, you never did.

YOUNG IRENE

The world changes in a flash. Treaties once signed in good faith to end the Cold War were broken; but war is war, it's always going on -- the players only change. The U.S. and Russia, China, North Korea, India and Pakistan, Iran.

PETER

It was a little two seater. Open cockpit.

YOUNG IRENE

Each country with a deadly, metal army lined up like fat men and little boys, ready to be deployed.

PETER

It was a bi-plane. I remember seeing a stunt performer walk across the wings of one at a county fair in Santa Fe, I think? I begged Dad to let me go up in one for weeks after. "You're too small!" He said. "We hit a patch of turbulence and you'll fly right up out the damn plane!"

YOUNG IRENE

And unlike the videos used to tell you, we know better now that "duck and cover" will not save you.

PETER

But I didn't give up. I pestered him. And pestered him.

YOUNG IRENE

Progress built over decades can be obliterated by the shockwave caused by one, tiny atom.

PETER

Imagine my surprise when I finally found out he had flown before, during the war.

YOUNG IRENE

But the same, tiny atom is also the key to the future the young woman hoped it would be.

PETER

He called up an old Air Force buddy of his who still flew, and we went out to the little airport at the edge of town.

YOUNG IRENE

One hundred years from the day we entered the first nuclear age, we will stand on the threshold of another. One built by a brilliant scientist by the name of Lange. One which is safer, cleaner, better. If we choose it.

PETER

Now, when Dad warned me about the turbulence I thought he was exaggerating, but the air that day couldn't seem to make up its mind and every bump we hit made the whole world feel like a rollercoaster, and the two bowls of Sugar Smacks I had eaten that morning were doing loop de loops in my stomach...

YOUNG IRENE

We all know the atomic bomb is very dangerous. Since it could be used against us, we should get ready for it. So be sure you follow the necessary next steps.

PETER

But, Ada, I tell you... There's nothing in the world like it. When you take off, you soar straight past the edge of the mesa and watch the whole world suddenly fall away beneath you.

YOUNG IRENE

Particles of the past collide with particles of the future at an astounding rate.

PETER

It was around this time of year, a little later, and Dad, he looped us up and over the mountains where we could see the aspens turning -- gold ribbons of sunlight reflecting off a sea of green pine that stretched for miles...

YOUNG IRENE

The flash of an atomic bomb can come at any time.

PETER

After we landed, Dad and I just sat there at the end of that runway and watched the sun set across the valley. And I remember thinking...

YOUNG IRENE

But remember, fusion's a nuclear reaction, too.

PETER

This is my home. This is our future. The one Dad built for us.

YOUNG IRENE

This family maybe. Finally. Knows what to do.

(Music plays out and the lights fade to blackout.)

End of play.)