

## AND THE UNIVERSE DIDN'T BLINK

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\*Excerpt from full length play. Scene is between 15 year-old Miranda and the great Russian, polar explorer, physicist Otto Schmidt (shown here is his prime). Otto is from the past. The play takes place in a NYC apartment that for this scene has been magically transported to the North Pole.

\*\*Read the play in full from the website.

(MIRANDA enters. She holds a purse-sized mirror in her hand. MIRANDA perches the mirror – somewhere. Maybe she stands on a chair or a table holding it high. As she hangs up the mirror, the lights change to the arctic. MIRANDA holds her mirror high as if in the stars. OTTO enters.)

OTTO

You'll never see your reflection with the mirror up that high.

MIRANDA

Is it true what you said last night? That when we look at the stars we are looking into the past?

OTTO

I said it was possible.

MIRANDA

If that's true – then the past could be looking down on us. The way we were a few years ago.

OTTO

There are lots of variables. One cannot be sure.

MIRANDA

I need to do that – look down on the world as it was a few years ago.

OTTO

It would be easier to take a photograph and look at that.

MIRANDA

A photograph doesn't have a heartbeat. I want to look back at life and see its beating heart. Is *that* possible?

OTTO

My dear, all things are possible. We are only limited by what we understand so far.

MIRANDA

Suppose I hung a mirror on a star – would it reflect back to me the earth as it was years ago?

OTTO

You could never hang a mirror on a star. It would burn up.

MIRANDA

An inflammable mirror – just suppose!

OTTO

Assuming you could hang a mirror on a star and assuming you can get it there faster than the speed of light – and assuming that a telescope could magnify its reflection - I suppose one could conceive of it. It is a bit fanciful. The universe is expanding. Even if you did travel at the speed of light, the light would always be just beyond reach.

MIRANDA

My head is spinning!

OTTO

Physics will do that. *If* – as you say – the mirror was in place and *if* there was a telescope that could easily view what the mirror reflected and if so many other variables occurred – what you propose is possible. But as of today – the laws of physics say that while you can see the past in the sky, you cannot view the past here on earth.

MIRANDA

But the possibility exists?

OTTO

It may be possible in a more advanced time. But not today.

MIRANDA

Don't you understand? That's all I need to go on – knowing that someday in my lifetime – it may be possible.

OTTO

Of course the further you go in the future – the harder it will be to glimpse that past.

MIRANDA

Don't do that! Don't hold out hope and snatch it away!

OTTO

Do you want the science or the fairy-tale?

MIRANDA

I want – the scientific fairy-tale - where the heroine meets her father one last time and talks to him. My happily-ever-after.

OTTO

If you want to propose a theory to find the past, learn your facts. Analyze what you know. Ask questions. But don't expect an answer overnight. I worked on a theory for decades.

MIRANDA

Decades! I'm only here for a week!

OTTO

A good theory will keep you going for decades. Take what you learn here and carry it home with you.

MIRANDA

But I'm here now. With you. You can help me find my father.

OTTO

It's the theory that's important. Your theory will be with you wherever you are. It will excite you. Tease you. Consume you. There is a wonder in waking up with the knowledge that today could be the day you make the final connection, the final proof of your theory. Why, I worked on the origins of the universe for years. I imagined/

MIRANDA

/Wait! Imagined? What do you mean imagined? Isn't that a little fanciful? Where are your facts?

OTTO

Didn't I say that in the early stages you need imagination for your theory?

MIRANDA

No.

OTTO

Oh. I should have. I did imagine the early days of the universe – what did it look like? Dust and matter colliding for years -

(OTTO could take out paper and crush it into a ball – use what materials are around or in the trunk to act out his theory. Or not.)

OTTO (cont'd)

–until eventually – our sun passes through a dust cloud attracting more and more pieces of matter – and then that matter - became planets. It's exciting – this theorizing!

MIRANDA

You do get worked up!

OTTO

Of course! It's science - a way of having a conversation with the universe! First the brain starts popping and then the body joins in this brain dance!

(OTTO spins with his paper snowball.)

Imagine these tiny planets just spinning. And as they spin - they acquire more and more matter – a tiny particle that will be part of Elsie, a bit of Miranda! A touch of Helga.

(OTTO spins MIRANDA in a joyful, twirling dance.)

OTTO (cont'd)

Spinning as a snowball does - as it careens down a hill – gathering snow until the tiny snowball is a massive snowman – and then finally - a frozen planet! Which would slowly warm up and produce life.

(MIRANDA enjoys the interlude as they spin and finally collapse on the ice.)

MIRANDA

How long would it take - this acquiring of matter - to become planets?

OTTO

What did you say?

MIRANDA

Did it take one year? 20 years? How long did these tiny planets take to become big planets?

OTTO

Young lady, that's a very good question. There's a mind hovering in that busy brain of yours. You might want to use it. What you asked? That was my downfall.

MIRANDA

I don't get it.

OTTO

The theory fell into great favor. It was endlessly discussed as all great theories are! Until – it was proven that the formation of the planets would have taken so long – they would have had to be formed before the universe. Which is not possible.

MIRANDA

How off were you? Like a million years!

(OTTO clearly enjoys being off billions of years in his theory. He booms like a trombone.)

OTTO

More! Billions! For my theory to be correct, our galaxy would have needed to have been created billions of years earlier than is believed.

MIRANDA

I want my own theory. A theory that will let me see my father again.

OTTO

I hope you have as good a time with your theory as I had with mine!

MIRANDA

And it makes you happy – that you were wrong? By like – a lot?

OTTO

*I love this theorizing!* I began again! I looked at it from another angle. I looked for evidence that the process of becoming a planet was not – at a turtle’s pace.

MIRANDA

So ... you worked on it even though you were wrong?

OTTO

I worked on it because I knew it was wrong! Which is the richness of the speculation! Failure is exciting.

MIRANDA

Failure is the end.

OTTO

No! It’s another chance to succeed! I looked at the theory from new angles. Where did I go wrong? It returned to favor and then would get discarded again. Time is funny. What is true is later false. What is fancy becomes reality.

MIRANDA

Gotcha! Notice how you – “Mr. Evidence Seeker” – speaks of the fancy!

OTTO

Perhaps there is room for both. But don’t get too caught up in the fancy – find the truth – that will give you the answers. But still, I had a rewarding life. Even if I never make it off this iceberg – my life has been good.

MIRANDA

Perhaps you were partly right. Maybe the planet did start out as frozen. It’s melting now – your ice, the poles – they’re melting.

OTTO

As is the ice with my stranded passengers. Look over there!

(MIRANDA moves over to look. OTTO pulls her away.)

Careful! The ice is sinking! You can't just walk blithely around without looking! Spring is coming and the ice won't hold us much longer. I am responsible for over one hundred lives. Now, I must check on the progress of the airstrip. It's our only hope.

MIRANDA

You're building an airstrip!

OTTO

Of course. How else will we be rescued?

MIRANDA

Won't a boat come by? Like with the Titanic?

OTTO

No boat will dare to go through the ice fields for months to come. Certainly not after knowing my ship sank! If we are to be rescued – it will have to be by air.

MIRANDA

How can you build an airstrip on ice?

OTTO

We have spades, two shovels and a crowbar. It is possible.

MIRANDA

Yes, but is it probable?

OTTO

Of course it's probable. Or I would have walked everyone to Siberia by now. The ice is shifting. I must work on the airstrip. It's time for you to get off the ice before you sink.

(OTTO exits.)

MIRANDA

Daddy? Can I see you? With your heart beating? Please! Let me see you!

(Lights fade to black.)