

Bound by Stardust by Claudia Haas

Cast: 3 (2f, 1 m)

Cast

Otto Schmidt (male; ageless shown in his prime – in his 30's or 40's) past vigorous Russian explorer, mathematician, astronomer. Learner. Larger than life – physically, emotionally, intellectually. (He was 42 when he led the Chelyuskin expedition. We needn't be literal. OTTO'S story is taken from Russian history – but the fanciful is all from the playwright (distantly related to OTTO).

Miranda (female) (14) Lost in a sea of change, Miranda's a bit like a porcupine.

Elsie (female) (60), Miranda's sensible great-aunt who suffers from crushing anxiety. She is sparse – a shell of her former self.

Voice (male, 60-ish) – phone recordings from Arnie (never seen)

Place: A small apartment and the Arctic Ice.

Time

Summer, today

Scenes:

The play takes place over five days. There are quick changes between Elsie's apartment and the polar ice. That can be accomplished simply with lighting. The scenes in ELSIE'S apartment are during the summer – today. The scenes in the arctic are in March, 1934 (the actual time of the sinking of the Chelyuskin and one of the many times that OTTO lived on the ice).

Synopsis

Miranda dwells in the past. Any past – as long as the world is prior to her father's death 2 years ago. Reeling from her mother's remarriage, Miranda spends a week with her great aunt and acquaints herself with an ancestor from her father's past – the Russian explorer Otto Schmidt.

In the confines of Elsie's apartment, Miranda travels back and forth to the North Pole gleaned information about the nature of the universe, loss and ever-lasting presence. As Miranda visits Otto in the past, Elsie is struggling to maintain the equilibrium she is barely holding to since her sister's death. Trying to keep her crushing anxiety at bay, Elsie tries to give Miranda remembrance and closure. Turning to the stars, Miranda devises a fanciful physics theory as a way of seeing her father one last time.

Running Time: 75-80 minutes

NOTES:

The play moves back and forth from today to 1934. Maybe it's in Miranda's mind, maybe she is daydreaming and just maybe it is happening. These are choices the actress and director can make. To get a feel of 1934, OTTO should be costumed suggesting the period. Photos of him are widely available on Wikipedia and other historical sites.

The plan can be staged simply in a black box using set pieces and the changes to the arctic can be made through lighting. If the lighting is not available, simply set aside a portion of the stage designated as the arctic.

If you have the means to do projections (of the arctic) and can do the special effects easily – by all means go for it. Because the play is episodic in nature, complete set changes are not advised.

The “sounds” of the arctic are optional. The ship's horn blaring is necessary and is an easy sound effect.

For “the mirror falling,” you can do this with an actual mirror, you may do it with lights, a projection or you may set it up in the staging without using an actual mirror. Miranda might even use a small hand-held mirror to catch the light.

When the scene shifts to the arctic, it will always be a starry night.

Bound by Stardust

Scene 1

It is a starry night at the North Pole and on the Upper West Side in New York City. The “present” meets the “past.” Time is of no essence.

Lights come up and we are in ELSIE’S small living room of her two bedroom condominium on Columbus Avenue and 81st Street, New York City. It is Elsie’s North Pole. A hallway leads to the bedrooms and another doorway leads to the kitchen. There is a small kitchen table with a large folder of take-out menus near the entrance to the kitchen. An old trunk has been hauled into the middle of the living room. It contains the papers and books relating to the history of OTTO SCHMIDT. It’s about 9 p.m. on a summer Saturday night.

The apartment is sparse – frozen in time from years ago. There are photos of Steven (MIRANDA’S father) and a few of Helga (MIRANDA’S grandmother) and of Otto (MIRANDA’S distant cousin). ELSIE enters with a fabric bag of groceries. She starts to unpack them on the kitchen table and we see sugary cereals, chips and soda. Treats that would maybe please a seven year-old girl.

ELSIE

What the hell do I know about teenage girls?

(She also has a bag of small brown paper bags. She will always have one – stashed in a pocket and hidden throughout her home. She runs around her apartment stashing more little paper bags all over. They are her lifelines. ELSIE takes out a small paper bag and breathes deeply into it then folds it up and replaces it in her pocket. A buzzer rings. ELSIE takes another breath into the bag and answers the buzzer.)

ELSIE

Everything will be fine. Just - breathe. Miranda? I’m buzzing you in. Take the elevator to the top. I’ll be - waiting.

(ELSIE buzzes her in and moves quickly around the apartment – adjusting thing – fluffing pillows on a couch or chair. Refolding a throw blanket. She lovingly and

deliberately kisses her fingers and touches the photos of Steven (her nephew), Helga (her sister) and Otto (distant cousin/ancestor). It is one of her routines. There is a knock on the door and she answers it. MIRANDA enters, She has one large suitcase, a laptop, and carries a caffeinated beverage. ELSIE moves to help with her luggage but MIRANDA holds back.)

MIRANDA

I got it. Thanks.

ELSIE

I hope you didn't mind me sending the car service to get you. I work Saturdays – and the museum uses them all the time for special guests. And ... you're a special guest! It was gracious of them to let me use their service, don't you think?

MIRANDA

Yeah. Really loved seeing a sign with my name on it held by a total stranger – it really rocked my world.

ELSIE

Yes. Well ... I do try. Come ... sit down. How are you? You're not cold are you? I know it's summer but I keep the a.c. on pretty high. I could lower it if you'd like. If you're cold. Are you cold?

MIRANDA

I live in Minneapolis. Nothing's too cold for me.

ELSIE

Of course. The flight? How was it? You didn't have much of that turbulence, did you? I hated that. When I flew. Of course, I don't fly anymore.

MIRANDA

It was – fine.

ELSIE

What do you think? Does the place seem smaller than you remember? You haven't been here since – your Grandmother died.

MIRANDA

I don't remember all those photos – Grandma – what are those medals?

ELSIE

First place in a swimming relay and then there was the science fair senior year in high school – she investigated the brightness of starlight and how it changed with distance – quite innovative in its day.

MIRANDA

Grandma had a “cool” gene. Who knew? There are no photos of you>

ELSIE

I prefer the background.

MIRANDA

There’s a ton -

ELSIE

- of your father - I love these - from his fishing expedition in Alaska. They were so good that National Geographic offered him a job.

MIRANDA

But then he met my mother and the rest is history.

ELSIE

Yes. The photos – comfort me.

MIRANDA

It’s kind of– morbid. Like a shrine.

(Pause.)

ELSIE

How’s your mother?

MIRANDA

Whooping it up on the Virgin Islands with her new husband. That’s why I’m here.

ELSIE

Well ... maybe we can “whoop it up in New York!”

(MIRANDA just stares.)

Or -... just be quiet together. Are you still making collages? I remember all those cut-outs you created of the lakes with your Dad. You and your father could create for hours.

MIRANDA

No. Don’t like doing it alone.

ELSIE

Of course. How's school. Still a stellar student?

MIRANDA

Yeah. Stellar.

ELSIE

Good. Why don't you get settled and I'll scrounge around for something for you to eat. I'm at the museum a lot and don't really cook. I'm afraid I'm like most New Yorkers - I live on take-out.

MIRANDA

I can take care of myself.

ELSIE

Your mother told me that. Are you gluten-free? Vegan? Are there any foods that you hate? Because I will avoid them.

MIRANDA

Take-out. Not wild about take-out.

ELSIE

Oh! Well – I'll only do take-out from places that promise “homemade!” How's that?

(Pause.)

I'll see what I can manage. I arranged for you to meet the daughter of a colleague of mine. She's about your age –

MIRANDA

Aunt Elsie! Do not arrange a play-date for me! Fourteen-year-olds do not need play-dates!

ELSIE

I just thought – to get you out – it's the end of the quarter at the museum. I need to file taxes. I can't take any time off.

MIRANDA

That works – we won't get in each other's way.

ELSIE

I thought you could go to work with me tomorrow. Explore the Museum of Natural History. The Planetarium's right next door, You could explore the universe!

MIRANDA

I have the universe right here in my laptop. You *do* have Wifi don't you? That's a necessity.

ELSIE

Yes, I have Wifi. Your mother called to make sure.

MIRANDA

Then I'm set. You can ignore me all week.

ELSIE

I have no intention of ignoring you -

MIRANDA

I like being ignored. It's much better than being "entertained" – Greg does that.

ELSIE

Your stepfather –

MIRANDA

The man who is on his honeymoon with my mother.

ELSIE

Yes.

MIRANDA

He thinks he can replace my father. He can't.

ELSIE

Of course not.

MIRANDA

Am I in Grandma's room? The room where she died?

ELSIE

Yes ... it's been cleaned. Oh! When I was refreshing her room – I found the old trunk. Remember? You and your Dad would go through the family history stored there– all the stuff about Otto Schmidt. Remember your father pretending to be Otto on a polar expedition – trying on that terrible Russian accent ...

MIRANDA

Don't remember.

ELSIE

I see. I would like to take you to the museum tomorrow. Would you like that?

MIRANDA

No. Thank-you.

ELSIE

The Museum of Natural History is rather famous.

MIRANDA

I'll visit it on my computer. I can visit a café in Paris at 10 a.m. and be in the North Pole at Noon. That's enough for me. I'm not needy.

ELSIE

I'll turn down your bed.

MIRANDA

I can –

ELSIE

It's ... I like doing it.

(ELSIE fingers her little paper bag and abruptly exits. MIRANDA goes to the trunk in the living room. She opens it and looks at a paper or two and holds up a photo of Otto. She does remember. She hears ELSIE return and quickly closes the trunk but she's still holding the photo.)

ELSIE (cont'd)

There's some wonderful stuff in there. I love that photo. He was quite imposing, don't you think?

MIRANDA

That huge beard – gross! Like - Santa Claus - on steroids!

ELSIE

It was rather bushy. Not at all like the sleek “Lenin mustaches” everyone else sported.

MIRANDA

This stuff smells.

ELSIE

Old papers do give off a whiff of the past. I thought - you might like to get reacquainted with him. He was quite famous back in the day and you do share a last name.

MIRANDA

(Reading an excerpt from a book or a paper.)

“Otto Schmidt – Editor of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, physicist, polar explorer ...”

Just stab me in the eye now - so I don't die of boredom!

ELSIE

They called him “The Russian Lucky Lindbergh” of his generation –

MIRANDA

Why are you pushing this stuff on me?

ELSIE

He's your history. Your family. He captured the fancy of young girls – they'd cut out pictures of him from magazines and hang them over their beds.

MIRANDA

Seriously? He's not exactly - hot.

ELSIE

He was a genius.

MIRANDA

I'm not into ugly geniuses.

ELSIE

He was a hero – he led an expedition on a ship that became known as the Soviet Titanic.

MIRANDA

A sinking ship. So appropriate for this family.

ELSIE

Stevie was fascinated by Otto. Especially that polar expedition where everything went wrong. And “Otto saved the day!”

MIRANDA

My father's name was Steven – not Stevie. He hated nicknames.

ELSIE

I called him Stevie all his life – he never minded. He – was my nephew. I did help raise him.

MIRANDA

Life will go a lot easier this week if we avoid discussing my father, deal?

ELSIE

And your mother? Am I allowed to mention your mother? I promised her you'd call.

MIRANDA

That's your promise. Not mine.

ELSIE

Life's been hard the last two years. For you – and your mother.

MIRANDA

Tell that to the woman who just got married.

ELSIE

Some people – need to be married – like your mother. And your grandmother.

MIRANDA

That didn't work out.

ELSIE

Your grandmother married a bum. And threw him out when she realized her mistake.

MIRANDA

Maybe we're cursed – to grow up without fathers. Do you ever feel like that? Like we're all cursed?

ELSIE

Life does deliver challenges. Is there something I can fix for you? I bought you some stuff for a late-night snack.

(She shows Miranda the junk food.)

MIRANDA

Are you serious? You do know this stuff is full of empty calories that will send you to an early grave. Where you won't decompose.

ELSIE

Yes. What was I thinking? I also have organic pizza with goat cheese and vegetables? The fridge is stacked with carton boxes. Of organic, just-like-homemade take-out.

MIRANDA

I'm good with the drink.

ELSIE

Caffeinated. Is that a good idea so late at night?

MIRANDA

Caffeine doesn't affect me like it does old people.

ELSIE

I see.

MIRANDA

Look – I know I say a lot of the wrong things and this is kind of – well – awkward. I'm being thrown at you and you're my great-aunt who I barely know and I get that you don't know what to do with me – just like everyone else. I just want to go to my room and sit in the quiet. Can I do that?

ELSIE

Absolutely. Let me show you -

MIRANDA

I can find Grandma's bedroom. It's Grandma I'm starting to forget. Is that normal? To forget people once they're gone?

ELSIE

I don't have an easy answer to that. (Whisper) Night little Rybka....

MIRANDA

What?

ELSIE

Nothing ... slipped out.

MIRANDA

My father ...

ELSIE

We called him that.

MIRANDA

He called me that. Little Rybka.

ELSIE

Little fish. He always squirmed ... oh dear Lord.

(ELSIE moves to hug MIRANDA who immediately steps away. MIRANDA takes all her things and exits to Helga's bedroom. ELSIE takes a deep breath. She takes out a bag and looks at it.)

And your father would echo back, “Back at you, Ryba. Back at you, Big Fish.”

(And she breathes into the bag. A landline rings in the kitchen. The answering machine picks it up.)

VOICE

Hi, Elsie. It’s Arnie. Remember the photography exhibit I told you about on Friday? I just found out that tomorrow is the last day and if you wanted to see it – I could take you. I know your young niece is visiting and I’d be happy to take her also. I was going to head down around noon – but I can go earlier – or later – if you want. And you can call me back on my cell phone! I did it, Elsie – I joined the twenty-first century. And you know what’s even better? It’s a “smart” phone – smarter than me! So call me. Or I’ll call you back. My number is – 646 – that’s the area

VOICE (cont’d)

code – it’s a new one, 823-8693. Got it? 646-823-8693. I think. It’s hard to read. Or call me on my landline. Bye, Elsie. Nice talking with you.

(ELSIE listens and shakes her head. SHE goes into the living room and lovingly touches photos of Steven and Helga and OTTO and exits.)

(OTTO enters and goes to the trunk and flips through some papers. He is delighted with those that inform of his heroics in the arctic. MIRANDA peeks in and then enters with her laptop. She takes a paper from the trunk. She uses it to look up information on her computer.)

OTTO

Look up “Hero of the Soviet Union.” I’m there. There’s an island in the Kara Sea named after me! As well as a planet. True, it’s just a minor planet – but still an honor. Find me. Your father did. Resurrect me. I’ve been too long forgotten.

(MIRANDA types.)

Stop! There it is! The Chelyuskin! A ship that I refitted to crash through the arctic ice! I was so sure that I would be the one to forge a new trade route for the Soviet Union. I would succeed where others failed. I spent a lot of time congratulating myself.

(The lights change to the arctic. We hear cheers.)

I intended to sail to the Bering Strait without having to winter in Siberia. Who wants to winter in Siberia? I would succeed. Two babies were born on that ship. Healthy and lively! I had months of supplies – I had thought of everything.

We were within one mile of the Bering Sea. We could see open water. Applause rang out on deck – all in celebration of what we had not yet accomplished.

(OTTO is now on his ship. A ship horn blares loudly. MIRANDA suddenly sits up. This is the first time she sees and hears him. OTTO is busy evacuating the ship. You may use as many or as few sound effects as you wish to cover the evacuation. We are now in this in-between world of “then” and “now.” A world Miranda will frequent during her stay at ELSIE’S.)

OTTO (cont’d)

EVERYONE – GET ON THE ICE! ON TO THE ICE! WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST! THEN THE RADIO! GRAB THE SUPPLIES AND GET ON THE ICE!

(MIRANDA approaches OTTO.)

OTTO

Don’t just stand there! Help us get everything off and abandon ship!

MIRANDA

What -

(OTTO starts to exit – barking out orders on “the ship.”)

OTTO

Make yourself useful! Everyone works! ERNST! THE RADIO! GET IT OFF! THE TENTS GO NEXT - every bag of food must make it on the ice – gently – it’s slippery – I will help –

(MIRANDA puts a throw blanket around her for comfort as the ship horn blares. It will then turn into a more mournful sound and become more distant. OTTO exits as the ship horn dies down and MIRANDA falls asleep. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2

(ELSIE enters dressed for the day. ELSIE tiptoes in the dark – likely making more noise than if she just walked into the room. She walks into the living room and touches the photo of Steven, Helga and

Otto. She takes note of MIRANDA sleeping in the living room She puts the photo down and goes to the kitchen, stubs her toe and drops her purse.)

ELSIE

-Damn ... DARN! I mean DARN! Damn chair! Oh hell!

(MIRANDA stirs. ELSIE freezes and quietly limps back to her bedroom. MIRANDA sits up and looks around and seeing nothing lies down again. ELSIE returns with a flashlight to guide her to the kitchen. The phone rings. MIRANDA sits up again. ELSIE answers the phone.)

Hello. Hi, Rose. No, you didn't wake me. Miranda? She got in late last night safe and sound. I believe she's sleeping.

(MIRANDA dives back under the covers. ELSIE shines the flashlight into the living room.)

ELSIE (cont'd)

Yes, she's sleeping. Did you want me to wake her? Yes, I'll tell her to call you. Everything all right with you? And Greg? Good. Talk to you later. Yes, I'll tell her! Bye.

(ELSIE comes out of the kitchen with her flashlight. She looks for her purse and finding it makes her way to the door – jingling her keys and making noise.)

MIRANDA

Aunt Elsie? Are you trying to wake the dead?

ELSIE

I'm getting ready to go out. Quietly. Your mother called.

MIRANDA

How nice for her.

ELSIE

What are you doing in the living room?

MIRANDA

Nothing.

ELSIE

Reading? About Otto?

MIRANDA

Sort of. I can't figure him out. You talk about him as a hero – but all I can see is some guy on an ego trip making a dumb decision to take pregnant women and children to the arctic and then sinking his ship. *Then* he claims he saves everyone. Isn't there a disease like that – where you cause a catastrophe and then save everyone? He's a catastrophe.

ELSIE

Stevie – Steven was fascinated by him.

MIRANDA

I thought we'd agreed not to mention my father.

ELSIE

It's hard not to. Especially when I have his daughter right here. What's wrong with mentioning him?

MIRANDA

I keep him inside. I'm not letting him out. I'm not my mother.

ELSIE

I'll try harder. I thought I'd go out and get us some bagels and lox. It's a New York Sunday tradition. It's takeout – but very special. And I'll pick up something for dinner. I found a recipe! It'll be homemade.

MIRANDA

Suit yourself.

ELSIE

I do still want to take you to the Dinosaur Exhibit at the museum. It was redone last year and is quite thrilling.

MIRANDA

Dinosaurs? I'm not exactly an eight-year-old boy ...

ELSIE

Neither am I but I do love the glimpse of our long-ago world.

MIRANDA

Are you looking for bonding time or something?

ELSIE

I'm looking – to get you out of the apartment before I go back to work tomorrow.

MIRANDA

All right. I'll hang out with you and the dinosaurs.

ELSIE

Good. I'll be right back. You might want to get dressed. And – call your mother.

MIRANDA

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ELSIE

And Miranda, you're welcome to use the phone if you want to call friends ...

MIRANDA

I have a cell phone!

ELSIE

Of course.

MIRANDA

But – thanks. I'm taking a break from everyone in Minnesota right now. Don't feel like chit-chat. Looking for quiet.

ELSIE

I understand.

(Beat.)

Any particular flavor bagel you like?

MIRANDA

Blueberry. I like blueberry bagels.

ELSIE

Blueberry bagels and lox – different.

(ELSIE exits. MIRANDA gets up. The phone rings.)

MIRANDA

I'm not answering, Mom. I'm on vacation, too.

VOICE

Elsie? It's Arnie again. Just checking on the photography exhibit. I heard it was pretty remarkable – New York City in the 20's and 30's and well – I know you like that sort of stuff –so – give me a call. On my new cell phone. You should get a cell phone, Elsie. Then I wouldn't have to leave messages on your answering machine. Bye, Elsie. Oh! 646-823-8693. That's my cell phone. Call it. I need to see if it works.

Arnie? Who's Arnie?

MIRANDA

(SHE gathers up the folders from last night and looks at a photo of OTTO. OTTO enters and we are in the arctic.)

OTTO

ERNST! I told you to dismantle the radio! Without the radio, we are lost!

(He addresses the people on the ship. All are getting supplies off the ship.)

Are the women and children on the ice? And the food – the heaters? The tools! Grab the crowbars and the the shovels and then GET OFF! Ernst! Contact Moscow later. Get the radio off!-That's an order! Seaman Youstevich – put some of that down – I will take it – Seaman Youstevich! Man overboard! MAN OVERBOARD!

(A car horn blares and we hear a crash.)

MIRANDA

DADDY!

(OTTO approaches.)

OTTO

Get off the ship!

MIRANDA

I need to find my father. He's hurt!

OTTO

Get on the ice!

MIRANDA

I'll slip –

OTTO

I'll help you -

MIRANDA

My father –

OTTO

The ship is sinking –

I can't leave him –

MIRANDA

(OTTO holds out his hand.)

Come here.

OTTO

(MIRANDA looks at OTTO and takes his hand and looks out. There is a sound of waves.)

You're safe.

(MIRANDA looks out over the ice as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

(We are in the apartment. Keys are heard by the front door. ELSIE and MIRANDA enter.)

ELSIE
The height of the barosaurus always amazes me. Imagine meeting him in the jungle!

MIRANDA
It's a bag of bones.

ELSIE
Exactly! Refitted and put together expertly. Truly an amazement.

(MIRANDA sits and plugs herself into her computer or phone. ELSIE takes note.)

Dinner should be ready. I threw everything into a slow cooker. Helga used it all the time – I don't know why I never have!

(The phone rings. ELSIE looks at Caller ID.)

It's your Mother.

(MIRANDA shakes her head "no" and goes into the living room. She spots the "paper snowball" that OTTO left behind and plays with it.)

Hello? Hi Rose. I'm fine. And you and Greg? Good. Miranda? She's - well. No – sorry – she's – in the shower. We were out and about and New York can get quite grimy in the summer... yes, of course I told her to call you! I know but you must understand that I cannot put my hand on hers and press in your phone number. She's not a toddler. Yes, Rose - I'll tell her. Now try and enjoy your honeymoon, all right? Yes.... Yes. Bye.

(ELSIE returns to cooking and MIRANDA peeks in.)

MIRANDA

All clear?

ELSIE

She said to tell you that she loves you. You should call her.

MIRANDA

Would you want to hear from your kid on your honeymoon?

ELSIE

Yes.

MIRANDA

Dinner ready?

ELSIE

I think so.

MIRANDA

I'm starving.

ELSIE

Good. That means you'll eat whatever it is I'm cooking. Dinner is served!

MIRANDA

What is it?

ELSIE

It's a hot dish! I read that you eat a lot of those in Minnesota. It's homemade!

MIRANDA

Looks – scary. Like – zombie flesh.

(MIRANDA takes a bite.)

What's in it?

ELSIE

Noodles, ground beef, peas and French dressing.

(MIRANDA takes another tentative bite. ELSIE does also.)

MIRANDA

The peas are cold. How can the peas be cold in a hot dish?

ELSIE

The directions said to just put everything into the slow cooker and cook on low for six hours. I followed the directions. Maybe I should have defrosted the peas before I threw them in? I don't know. I've never had a hot dish.

MIRANDA

Did you even brown the meat?

ELSIE

Are you supposed to?

MIRANDA

Did you even turn the cooker on?

(ELSIE checks.)

ELSIE

Of course I did – it's on low ... oh! *Don't eat it!* It's not plugged in. Leftover pizza? Leftover sesame noodles? What do you think?

MIRANDA

I think I'll take a look at your junk food bag.

ELSIE

You know, Miranda – you could meet me halfway.

MIRANDA

What?

ELSIE

I've done nothing but try to please you and frankly – it's exhausting.

MIRANDA

You're trying to please me? Give me a break! I spent the whole day pleasing you in a dinosaur graveyard!

ELSIE

You liked the show at the planetarium.

MIRANDA

Fake stars. Everything's fake!

ELSIE

We prefer to say "simulated."

MIRANDA

Why do you need that when you have the sky?

ELSIE

There is a program actually – where you go out and look at the night sky –

MIRANDA

Why a program? Why not just go outside and look at the stars?

ELSIE

The program's a guide. So you know what you are looking at.

(MIRANDA puts in her earbuds.)

ELSIE

Don't - turn yourself off. Talk to me. We need to talk.

MIRANDA

When an adult says something like that – it usually means, "I need to tell you something you don't want to hear" or "I want to give you advice you don't need." So if it's all right with you – I'd rather not.

(MIRANDA exits into the living room watching ELSIE for a moment. ELSIE gets up to clear the table and then sits - defeated. MIRANDA exits.

ELSIE takes out a brown paper bag and breathes into it. We hear sounds from the arctic. OTTO appears. ELSIE does not see or hear him – maybe she once did – but not anymore. But she may feel his presence.)

OTTO

Elsie ... sweet Elsie. So many plans. So many dreams.

(ELSIE listens intently and her breathing becomes more regular and easy as OTTO speaks. Maybe – she is connecting to a memory as OTTO speaks.)

Remember that story you told Stevie? How you and Helga originally came from the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor? And just as Ursa Major and Ursa Minor cared for Zeus – you two cared for Stevie. Stardust. You were always enchanted by the idea of being stardust. And you are. You, Helga and Steven are still bound together by early stardust. That will never change.

(Now calm, ELSIE starts to clear the table, stops, goes into the living room, touches the photos and exits.)

Sweet dreams, Rybka. I am still here for you.

(The lights turn to the arctic. MIRANDA appears.)

The sun is down. Don't be afraid. Come out. It is beautiful, isn't it? The purity. The isolation. The spectacle that the sky puts on in the evening.

MIRANDA

The stars. I want to be up there with them.

OTTO

But they may not be there.

MIRANDA

Of course they are! I can see them!

OTTO

What you are seeing is what they looked like in the past. The stars are so far away it takes years for their light to reach us. A star could be burned out and we wouldn't know that for hundreds of years.

MIRANDA

We are looking into the past.

OTTO

Yes.

MIRANDA

That's – awesome! Hundreds of years ...

OTTO

Maybe thousands. Even when you look at the sun, you're seeing how it looked eight minutes ago.

MIRANDA

So, if I want to see the sun as it is now – I have to wait eight minutes?

OTTO

Yes.

MIRANDA

And the light coming at me from a star could have started beaming in the sky when the pyramids were being built? And some of those stars could have burned out when the wagon trains were going across the country?

OTTO

All that is possible.

MIRANDA

So - for sure - there is starlight just reaching me from two years ago.

OTTO

Definitely.

MIRANDA

I am seeing light from when my father was still alive. There's a star up there who still sees my father. Somewhere in its light – is my father.

OTTO

That's not a scientific conclusion.

MIRANDA

But – it's a beginning. I've spent the last two years living with an ending and now you've given me a beginning.

OTTO

A beginning of what?

MIRANDA

Of seeing what they see. Seeing my father.

OTTO

That's more science fiction than science I'm afraid.

MIRANDA

You never know. It's what I will take into my dreams tonight.

(MIRANDA starts to run off.)

OTTO

Careful! Don't slip!

(MIRANDA takes note and exits to her room. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 4

It is the next morning in the apartment. ELSIE enters dressed for work. She touches her photos, grabs her purse, fabric bag and exits.

MIRANDA peeks in and seeing that ELSIE is gone 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 rather 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 – I am sure the laws of physics say that 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 some day 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. My hope.

OTTO

I don't deal with hope. 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 he's here. My father's here. Here is where I need to look.

OTTO

Your theory will be with you wherever you are. It will excite you. Tease you. Consume you. I would wake up with the knowledge that today could be the day that I would make the final connection, the final proof of my theory. Do you want to know what it was?

MIRANDA

No.

OTTO

One never knows what information could be useful later. It may even set you on a new course for your scientific fairy-tale ...

MIRANDA

All right. Just don't make it too complicated.

OTTO

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.)

OTTO (cont'd)

–until eventually – our sun passes through a dust cloud attracting more and more pieces
of matter – until the 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 here! Helga there!

(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

But wait – would it melt? If the earth began as a massive snowman – wouldn't it melt as
all snowmen do?

OTTO

I did wonder when the earth would become stable.

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 and worked on – as all great theories are! Until – it was proven that the formation of the planets would have predated the earliest birth date of the universe.

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 be created billions of years earlier than is believed. Take my theory – think of it as inheritance. Work on it. I can see you have a feel for it.

MIRANDA

I did look at it.

OTTO

And ...

MIRANDA

Didn't understand it.

OTTO

Perhaps in time.

MIRANDA

I want my own theory. A theory that will let me see my father again. That's my mission.

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! There are things to discover even with a flawed theory! 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? Others found it interesting. 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. I had hoped to make my mark on the world with that theory. *That* didn't happen. But I had a good life. Even if I never make it off the ice – my life has been good. There's a rumor that Stalin is sitting in Moscow hoping to hear news of my passing. He's not terribly interested in rescuing me. Stalin doesn't like me.

MIRANDA

For reals?

OTTO

For very reals.

MIRANDA

Perhaps you were partly right. Perhaps the planet did start out as frozen. It's melting now – like your snowman. 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 and the lights turn back to the apartment.)

MIRANDA takes the photo of her father, cradles it and sits. OTTO is seen in the background with a large mirror. He launches it upwards and it climbs and climbs until it is above MIRANDA'S head and she can see it. MIRANDA reaches for it.)

MIRANDA

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

(She sees OTTO.)

Not you! Him!

(OTTO moves the mirror further and further away. MIRANDA starts to reach and stops.)

Please! I need to find him!

(MIRANDA grabs her purse and leaves the apartment. The lights fade.)

SCENE 5

(It is evening in the apartment.)

ELSIE

Miranda? MIRANDA - ARE YOU HOME?

(MIRANDA enters with table settings.)

MIRANDA

It's a small apartment – you don't have to shout.

ELSIE

What's all this?

MIRANDA

I - made dinner. I thought I should do something ... to earn my keep. Help out. It's no biggie. I found this really great fish shop – just two blocks away.

ELSIE

Not sure I'm wild about you roaming the streets alone.

MIRANDA

Just two blocks! Did you know about that store? It has *everything* - well almost everything – couldn't find Walleye – guess that's a Minnesota thing. But I found the freshest whitefish. I love the little swimmers - so I felt inspired and bought some. It's ready. And it's not take-out. I think you'll like it. Don't worry – we're just going to eat. We don't have to talk or anything.

ELSIE

(ELSIE puts away her food.)

Anything I can do?

MIRANDA

It's all done. Just sit and eat.

(ELSIE does so as MIRANDA brings a bowl of pasta with fish to the table.)

It's super-easy – I haven't had it in – well – two years. I used to cook it over a campfire! It's just fish in a packet with onions and garlic and you cook it and throw it in with curly pasta and lots of fiery red pepper flakes. It's called -

ELSIE

Twisted Fish.

MIRANDA

Yes.

ELSIE

It's delicious.

MIRANDA

He made it for you.

ELSIE

After his first fishing expedition in Alaska.

MIRANDA

We ... made it every spring for the fishing opener. And whenever we camped ... and whenever I nagged...

ELSIE

You camped? Outside?

MIRANDA

Yeah! I love sleeping under the stars. My mother hated it so it became a thing I did - with my dad. We could sit for hours in the quiet – just gazing at stars.

(MIRANDA twists some noodles on to her fork and lifts it up and just looks at it.)

I used to call it “twisty-fishy.” “More twisty-fishy, please....”

(She takes a bite.)

It’s ... just like it always was ... it’s -

ELSIE

Perfect.

MIRANDA

It is, isn’t it? Who’s Arnie?

ELSIE

What?

MIRANDA

Not what – who. Who’s Arnie?

ELSIE

Nobody.

MIRANDA

He left a message. He’s somebody. Somebody with a new cell phone.

ELSIE

You don’t need to concern yourself with Arnie.

MIRANDA

Just curious. I mean – even people your age have boyfriends.

ELSIE

Not a boyfriend. Just a friend – Helga’s friend actually - from our olden days. She used to call him her “gentleman friend.” When Helga died, Arnie made it his business to stay in my life. He’s very kind.

MIRANDA

Grandma had a boyfriend!

ELSIE

Some people need to have a man in their life. And he's a very good man.

(A beat.)

MIRANDA

Your knives need sharpening.

ELSIE

I suppose. Helga was the only one who used them.

MIRANDA

I bought you a fillet knife. You didn't have one.

ELSIE

You filleted this?

MIRANDA

Well yeah! I can do some things! It's super- easy! I can teach you! Then you can have fresh fish instead of take-out.

ELSIE

I don't think I can do that. Knives scare me.

MIRANDA

Nothing to it. You just need to be smarter than knife.

ELSIE

I'm too old to learn new tricks.

MIRANDA

I'll teach you just like Dad taught me – with a sponge!

(MIRANDA jumps up and gets a sponge.)

ELSIE

I can't do the gross stuff.

MIRANDA

Get real, Aunt Elsie. You're filleting a sponge.

(MIRANDA brings over her fillet knife with the sponge.)

Okay – so the head is on the right and tail is on the left. And you’ll buy it gutted so you don’t have to deal with the disgusting stuff. Put your hand on mine. Let me be your guide. With the fish, you’d feel where the bones are and then just above it, slowly and deliberately, just cut across....

(And they fillet the sponge. The closeness is a bit uncomfortable and a bit sweet.)

ELSIE

I did it!

MIRANDA

Cool, isn’t it? It’s actually easier to fillet the fish.

ELSIE

I’ll make a note of that.

MIRANDA

Do you think it will ever be possible to travel faster than the speed of light?

ELSIE

How did we go from filleting a sponge to the speed of light?

MIRANDA

Just thinking.

ELSIE

I think your thought patterns go faster than the speed of light!

MIRANDA

But seriously – could we? Could I – ever – someday – maybe?

ELSIE

From all that I’ve read, it doesn’t seem possible.

MIRANDA

But we broke the sound barrier, right? Eons ago. So, why not go faster than the speed of light?

ELSIE

Apparently our Cosmos has a speed limit of 186,000 miles per second.

MIRANDA

Aunt Elsie! You know stuff!

ELSIE

I've picked up a few things along the way. What got you thinking about this?

MIRANDA

Just thinking about the future and the past and how muddled it is. And the stars and stuff. And my Dad. When I was cooking, I could almost feel Dad's grin over my shoulder – you know that twisted grin he would get – kind of like the curly pasta?

ELSIE

It was a bit crooked, wasn't it?

MIRANDA

This is the first time in two years that I've allowed myself to see him - funny what a piece of fish can do.

ELSIE

It's actually quite wonderful. The meal. The memory. Hard wonderful.

MIRANDA

You know what's even more wonderful? When you have it outside under the stars. The outside adds flavor, you know? Maybe some stardust gets mixed in. That's what we need. Stardust. We come from the stars you know.

ELSIE

So I heard.

MIRANDA

So, it only makes sense that we should reconnect with them from time to time.

“Hey, Stardust! How's it going? Remember me? Do you see yourself in me?”

Let's go out and collect stardust! You could use some stardust, Aunt Elsie. You don't get out enough.

ELSIE

I go to work everyday.

MIRANDA

The outside isn't just a place for getting places! It's - a way of belonging – somewhere.

ELSIE

It's a sweet idea, Miranda. But I like my routine. My bubble bath, my book, my early nights.

MIRANDA

Just till the first star comes out? If I'm nice and say “please?” Pretty please? With a cherry on top?

ELSIE

Maybe for a little bit.

MIRANDA

I'll find a bag for the stardust –

ELSIE

Oh my, you're serious.

MIRANDA

We're going to do this!

ELSIE

I'll just clean up a bit.

MIRANDA

I'll throw these in the sink and clean up when we get home.

ELSIE

Let me get my purse.

(ELSIE goes into her bedroom as MIRANDA puts the dishes away. MIRANDA grabs a bag – maybe one of ELSIE'S lunch bags that she stashes everywhere and goes to the door.)

ELSIE

How about an ice cream cone? There's a gelato place down the block.

MIRANDA

Sign me up for a pistachio and chocolate cone!

ELSIE

Coming up!

MIRANDA

And then we can take our ice cream into the park.

ELSIE

The park?

MIRANDA

That's the only place we can see the stars! Away from the city lights.

ELSIE

No. Not the park. It's not safe.

MIRANDA

Sure it is – it's crammed with people walking dogs ... biking ...

ELSIE

Not the park.

MIRANDA

It's the only place we can gather the stardust –

ELSIE

I didn't think you really meant to do that –

MIRANDA

I do!

ELSIE

No. We can't do the park.

MIRANDA

I don't get it – one minute you're good with everything and then – you turn off.

ELSIE

It's – just not safe. I'd never forgive myself if anything happened.

MIRANDA

It's not even dark out yet!

ELSIE

No. Not the park.

MIRANDA

What's with you? Why can't we just go out and have an ice cream in the park like everyone else?

ELSIE

I have a rule about the park. I don't go there. Ever.

MIRANDA

Where *do* you go? You're like some demented hamster on a treadmill! Get on, go to work, come home! Do not pass Go! All I want is a bit of stardust! Can't you give me that?

ELSIE

Not when it comes to the park. I'm sorry Miranda – I can't –

(MIRANDA exits to her room slamming the door.
ELSIE breathes into a bag and then removes the
dishes from the table. She goes to her photos.
OTTO appears.)

OTTO

You're breaking through, Elsie. She's Stevie's daughter. Part of him is inside her. Don't give up.

(ELSIE exits. The lights change to the arctic.
MIRANDA enters.)

MIRANDA

Nothing's going right! I need to know more. About seeing the past.

OTTO

If something is important to you, then – learn! Delve into your theory. Maybe my theory can help! If you find the origins of the universe, who knows what will present itself!

MIRANDA

There you go again – trying to push your theory on me.

OTTO

It's – unfinished - a perfect jumping off point for you. Someday you could have it published. "The Origins of the Universe" by Otto Schmidt and Miranda Schmidt!

MIRANDA

Alphabetical. Miranda Schmidt and Otto Schmidt!

OTTO

If you say so.

MIRANDA

You're having a little fantasy here, aren't you? Better be careful.

OTTO

You're rubbing off on me! Still, I would like to see my theory in play again.

MIRANDA

You don't want to be forgotten.

OTTO

Is that so terrible?

MIRANDA

But – you have a minor planet named after you!

OTTO

And an island!

MIRANDA

I understand where you're coming from. I'm afraid of the same thing.

OTTO

Of being forgotten?

MIRANDA

Of forgetting. That's why I want to get a mirror on a star, look back in time – see my father. Before my memory of him gets hazy.

OTTO

That could take a lifetime.

MIRANDA

I am starting to realize that it will take longer than a week. And I have been reading. I'm trying to understand. But all I find is endless stuff about fusion and hydrogen and helium. "A star glows because fusing atoms release energy." *That's not what I want to find out!* The stars! They keep secrets! They won't give me anything!

OTTO

The stars have no thought or care about us.

MIRANDA

I *need* to learn how to see what they see.

OTTO

I look at the stars and I want to know their origin. You look at the stars and yearn for the fanciful.

MIRANDA

"What is fancy becomes reality." Didn't you tell me that?

OTTO

You do listen! The fanciful can ignite a spark to encourage the science. But it won't sustain you.

It's the science that keeps us alive on the ice.

MIRANDA

Wouldn't you love a chance to go back? A chance to fix stuff?

OTTO

We can't go back. We are a forward-looking race.

MIRANDA

I like it here. The quiet. I feel – like nothing can hurt me – nothing can touch me.

OTTO

But it is here – where you can be touched.

MIRANDA

Wouldn't it be cool to be here forever – if we had warmth and food and all that survival stuff – just to be here and feel the approval of the stars?

OTTO

Your flight of fancy is showing itself again.

MIRANDA

I feel connected here. I imagine a molecule or two in my body is saying, "Remember when we were up there? Remember when we were in the stars."

OTTO

Such a story!

MIRANDA

But there's truth there, isn't there? There's something in me that came from them.

OTTO

Yes. In a long, roundabout way.

MIRANDA

It's too bad we don't return to them. That would give me a happily-ever-after.

OTTO

You could look at the amazement of the universe as a happily ever after.

MIRANDA

I want a forever connection, you know? That I'd return from where I came and be reunited with my father. I want – a circle. Not a line with a beginning, middle and end – but a circle.

OTTO

All tied up with a nice pretty bow.

MIRANDA

Well ... if we want to dream big! I do feel safe here. For the first time in two years.

OTTO

It's a precarious safety. I am doing all I can to have us rescued. And when I leave, you leave. Immerse yourself in the sky while you can.

MIRANDA

Look!

OTTO

The aurora borealis.

MIRANDA

Look at the colors and shapes. My father used to say they were unborn children playing in the heavens. Can you see them? Little souls chasing each other in a game of tag.

OTTO

They are merely energy particles from the sun colliding with the Earth's magnetic field.

MIRANDA

I like my explanation better.

OTTO

It is sweet. What happens in your story? To those little souls playing tag?

MIRANDA

They are born, I guess.

OTTO

Do they remember playing in the sky?

MIRANDA

Probably not. Too bad. That would be a nice memory to have. Once you're born – the memories are hard.

OTTO

Your tale is filled with wonder . But the reality is more astonishing.

(He acts this out.)

Light particles blown into the atmosphere! Look out over the ocean!

(MIRANDA does so.)

Now imagine the atmosphere – as this ocean – an ocean of air covering the earth. And as the light particles hit this ocean of air – the energy of the impact causes the gasses to glow – bringing us ribbons of color: violet! Blue! Red! And green! Science creating watercolors.

MIRANDA

A three-D painting!

OTTO

Created by the natural world.

MIRANDA

Look what the sky can do! We don't know everything. We don't know that it can't give me what I need! I want a mirror up there. I want to see the earth – as it was two years ago – I want one more glimpse of my father.

OTTO

You are a lot like me, aren't you? All ego and "I want." Suppose you do get the mirror up there – then what? Are you sure of what you will see?

MIRANDA

I know what I want to see.

OTTO

That may not be the same thing.

MIRANDA

You're twisting everything! You hold out this life preserver and when I go to grab it – you snatch it away!

OTTO

I'm giving you a life-line but you insist on grabbing at straws!

MIRANDA

I'm trying to take what you know and move forward.

OTTO

Do it, Miranda! Take everything I know and use it! Expand on it! Introduce it into your own time! You search for answers. I search for answers. Sometimes the answer you receive is not what you are searching for! Then what?

MIRANDA

You don't know everything! You think that a mirror in space would only show a reflection from earth *after* the mirror had been in place. But that's not necessarily true! It's only true if you

believe it will never be possible to travel faster than the speed of light. But - if a telescope could see a mirror that is one hundred light years away and it was placed by someone who *did* travel faster than the speed of light – one could see into the past. It could happen. Someday.

OTTO

So all we need to figure out is how to move faster than the speed of light - many times over - to find the past without burning up. Is that correct?

MIRANDA

Yes. That's all.

OTTO

Well – if that's all –

MIRANDA

Don't! Maybe there will come a time when we are beamed places – like Star Trek. Maybe we'll find a way of moving through the universe that doesn't require being propelled through space - I don't know – that's not my part of the theory. My part is that when we get a mirror up there – we will see the past!

(MIRANDA moves away.)

OTTO

Miranda!

MIRANDA

Just because your theory didn't work doesn't mean mine never will!

OTTO

Stop!

MIRANDA

I'll do what I want! Just like you!

OTTO

You're going too far! That ice! It's sinking! Don't get stuck there!

MIRANDA

I'm fine! I -

(MIRANDA looks around and realizes OTTO is right.)

OTTO

Jump! **JUMP!**

OTTO!

MIRANDA

JUMP!

OTTO

(And she does. The lights change back to the apartment. Music could be heard (Twilight Time?). MIRANDA looks around and gingerly takes a step. All is fine. She goes to her purse and takes out cut-out stars and hangs them.– everywhere. She hangs a pocket mirror on a star and not having any more mirrors, she hangs a spoon or two that gives off a reflection. The lights change to a sparkling, shimmering sky as if a thousand eyes are looking at Miranda. She kneels under the stars.)

MIRANDA

All right stars, give me your eyes and show me what you see. Show me my father. Make it possible. Please.

(The lights fade to black. Music could continue and then change as we segue into the next day.)

SCENE 6

(It is the following evening at the apartment. ELSIE enters from work with her bag of take-out. MIRANDA is still under the stars.)

ELSIE

Miranda – are you all right?

MIRANDA

Yes.

ELSIE

Have a good day?

MIRANDA

I made a visual! What do you think?

ELSIE

You returned to your art!

MIRANDA

It's – the cosmos! Sort of. I'm looking for a stardust connection.

ELSIE

For?

MIRANDA

The past.

ELSIE

It's – simulated.

MIRANDA

Don't I know it. Paper stardust. How low I have fallen!

ELSIE

I brought home some dinner. It's not “twisty-fishy” but it's nourishment. Are you hungry?

MIRANDA

Haven't thought about it.

ELSIE

Have you eaten at all today?

MIRANDA

No. Well – some of your junk food.

ELSIE

Come on, then. We don't have to talk or anything. Just eat.

MIRANDA

Under the stars?

ELSIE

Under the stars.

(They set up dinner under the stars. For a moment – they just eat quietly. There is no rancor.)

MIRANDA

I have been reading a lot. About mirrors on stars. About satellites. I'm beginning to realize you can't really hang a mirror on a star. I'd like to – love the idea of having a mirror reflect the past. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Imagine what we could see?

ELSIE

That's an idea that would alter the universe.

MIRANDA

I know! But the more I read, the more unlikely it seems. For now. So I thought about satellites. How we have all these satellites travelling the skies – and then I wondered if we could hang mirrors on satellites to travel around the stars – if we could do that - could they give us a glimpse of the past? I mean – we landed on a comet! Who knows what we will be able to do!

ELSIE

It does make the future sound very exciting.

MIRANDA

Do you feel connected through stardust? Does that soothe you?

ELSIE

Wherever did you get that idea?

MIRANDA

Don't know. Maybe my Dad mentioned it.

ELSIE

It's – from long-ago. I had read something where Zeus was cared for by two constellations – Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. I used to tell your father that he was Zeus – how's that for propping up a male ego? And your grandmother was Ursa Major and I was Ursa Minor – and no matter what happened to any of us – we would always be bound together by stardust. Because we once were in the heavens together.

MIRANDA

Does that comfort you?

ELSIE

Sometimes.

MIRANDA

It hurts.

ELSIE

Yes.

MIRANDA

I want him back. I imagine a world where giant mirrors float in space. They're all at different angles and distances and when you're really hurting, you can dial up these images from the past and look at other times –

ELSIE

Won't that make you hurt more?

MIRANDA

No – because I doubt myself - my memory. Those walks in the woods – his stories. Every moment of every day, these memories move further away. But if there was a universe-memory-bank – of every memory, from every speck of stardust - I could look it up.

ELSIE

Sounds like science fiction.

MIRANDA

For now. Physics is starting to look like a bunch of sci-fi theories that people dreamed up and then set out to prove. Maybe you do need to dream the dream first. I mean the theory that everything went wacko over thirteen billion years ago and just expanded at a huge rate is pretty accepted now. But someone dreamed it first. And then worked their whole lives to prove it. That could be me – dreaming of a universal stardust-memory-bank and working my whole life to make it come true!

ELSIE

It's not a bad way to spend one's life.

MIRANDA

It could wind up being one of those discarded theories. I could work my whole life on something that never works. It seems people do that.

ELSIE

Which means you have to love the process.

MIRANDA

Even if the process comes to nothing?

ELSIE

I think – it must always come to “something.” Even wrong answers lead to correct ones.

MIRANDA

You sound like a scientist.

ELSIE

Maybe I picked up some of the jargon by osmosis after working all these years in a museum.

MIRANDA

Maybe. Or maybe – there's a scientist hidden away inside of you trying to come out.

ELSIE

That's what I think about you! I believe there's this budding scientist inside of you that comes out now and then and you stop it – you tell her “Leave me alone! Not now!” Go away!”

MIRANDA

Is that what I sound like?

ELSIE

Sometimes.

MIRANDA

Guess I've been riding the negativity highway for so long, I don't notice.

ELSIE

I hope you let that “science voice” out one of these days. Helga did – it didn't work out but she had the science gene.

MIRANDA

Grandma Helga as a scientist? Does not compute.

ELSIE

Your grandmother scored a near-perfect on the grad school entrance exam. She applied but ultimately was rejected because she was a woman.

MIRANDA

Seriously?

ELSIE

“You have the gift, Helga Schmidt. But you are very pretty. You will ultimately get married and have children and any education we provide for you will be squandered.” Helga fumed for at least a decade when she told that story.

MIRANDA

That's – too horrible.

ELSIE

I know! But times change and if you have Helga's gene – it would be a shame to squander it.

MIRANDA

I – don't know if I want the science or just a path back to my father. A true path – you know? Not a crystal ball-fortune-cookie-path but one that's for real. I've been investigating. I saw something today on your museum's website – it looked really cool – a talk about the cosmos and the “hidden reality.” But it's sold out and I wondered ...

ELSIE

If I had connections?

MIRANDA

Do you? Do you? I'd be eternally and cosmically grateful!

ELSIE

I think I could pull a few strings. It could help give you a true perspective on the nature of the universe.

MIRANDA

Do you think there are others who look for a cosmic memory-bank? I can't be the only person who wants to go back and see people they've – lost.

ELSIE

No. You're not. I think that dream is embedded in our DNA.

(Pause.)

Miranda – would you mind cleaning up? I'm – exhausted.

(ELSIE gets up and touches her photos, reaches for a paper bag and retreats into her room. MIRANDA watches. She put away the food and goes into the living room and holds a photo of her father up to her mirrors.)

MIRANDA

I'm trying to find a way back to you, Daddy. You know that, don't you? I'm sorry. So sorry.

(OTTO appears in the background. MIRANDA sees OTTO in the mirror.)

Not you, Otto! I don't need you. I need my father.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 7

AT RISE it is the following evening. MIRANDA is awash in reams of paper and bubbles. She thumbs through the papers and with great delight lets some

float to the floor. She then starts to blow her bubbles. She has latched on to a new visual. She tries to make the bubbles collide without breaking them. MIRANDA is a scientist at work with a child's toy.

ELSIE enters from the front door without her bag of take-out.

ELSIE

Oh my! I seem to be in the Fun House! It looks like the talk was – inspirational.

MIRANDA

You're home! Don't you just love this? Papers touching but with no awareness that the other paper is there. Bubbles colliding! Coming close – moving away!

ELSIE

I had no idea that teens still liked to blow bubbles.

(MIRANDA twirls around ELSIE leaving bubbles in her wake.)

MIRANDA

I'm creating multiverses! I'm trying to make the bubbles collide. They don't always cooperate. Bubble universes! I love that idea! These universes might even bump into each other from time to time – but if it's a little bump – we wouldn't feel it. There's an infinite amount of possibilities.

ELSIE

I'd say the talk at the Planetarium went well!

MIRANDA

It did! They said that some scientists think that when the big bang happened – there could have been gazillions of big bangs all inflating at different rates. Maybe some have stopped inflating like us and planets formed – just like us – there could be another earth out there! Exactly like us! Not that I'm an expert. Only found out about it today.

ELSIE

So you're testing the theory with bubbles?

MIRANDA

Nah – just like the visual. But the thing is – it's a totally nutso theory. And it's not one of Miranda's crazy theories – it's a "scientist's" theory. If you ask me, it kind of makes my Stardust-Memory Bank not so farfetched. But the really cool thing is – *we don't know*

anything! There could be bubble universes! There could be parallel universes on top of each other – like with these papers

(And she'll thumb threw the papers.)

– and *we don't have any idea that the others exist!* Look – this paper here is right on top of this paper and neither of them know they're there! How cool is that? There could be other Elsie's out there – other Miranda's – other ... Steven's – making different choices – leading different lives! This is all just awesome!

ELSIE

The theories are fun, I'll grant you that. Even if they are a bit far-fetched. Some of this sounds suspiciously like pseudo-science!

MIRANDA

Not “pseudo science” – “possible science.” We don't know the truth of it – yet. Remember - the earth used to be flat, the sun revolved around the earth – all that stuff was believed. A round earth! *Whoa! Pretty “far fetched” to some people!* I don't know what's true. And neither do you. But oh man – learning about all these possibilities is totally rad!

ELSIE

I'm glad it excites you.

MIRANDA

What do you think? Here are two pieces of paper. This paper is us – today. And on this paper – maybe it's me and Dad visiting you. And Mom, of course. Maybe we're all on some New York City vacation together. It's possible! IT'S POSSIBLE! I wonder what I'm like on this piece of paper. Maybe Grandma's still with us. Maybe – she's a scientist! Or - maybe – we're all getting ready to go to the North Pole! There's so many possibilities and the truth is – we just don't know! *We don't know anything!*

ELSIE

And you like that?

MIRANDA

I love that! And I need to ask you something.

ELSIE

Of course. We could have a great, long chat over dinner. There's a new sushi place down the block. Shall we go out? Would you like that?

MIRANDA

Sounds great. But first – may I ask you a favor?

ELSIE

Yes.

MIRANDA

I need to stay here. Just for two more weeks – to hear the rest of the talks about the multiverses at the Planetarium. There are so many things I need to understand. I've gone about everything sort of – backwards. Making up theories without understanding anything - without knowing any other theories. But I can make a start here. I'll – even call my mother and make nice and ask her – if you think it is okay.

ELSIE

My dear, I wish that were possible.

MIRANDA

I can help you. Get things in order here – cook for you! I can be nice. I used to be. Just for two weeks. It will help me. Figure out everything.

ELSIE

What “everything?”

MIRANDA

Multiverses. Stardust. Memory Banks.

ELSIE

There are – things – you don't know –

MIRANDA

I know! That's why I want to stay! I can learn!

ELSIE

About me! There are things you don't know about me!

MIRANDA

I know I haven't been a pleasure to be around -

ELSIE

It has nothing to do with you -

MIRANDA

You don't have to love me or anything. I think I can learn things here – things that can help me. Please – *I need this!*

ELSIE

You need to go forward.

MIRANDA

I'm trying! Can't I have a little more time to try for something I need?

ELSIE

Suppose what you think you need is not true.

MIRANDA

I need to find out if somewhere in my future there's hope. That I didn't kill my father.

ELSIE

Oh no sweetie, you didn't –

MIRANDA

He died 'cause of me –

ELSIE

Miranda – it was the truck –

MIRANDA

It was me!

ELSIE

No – I know what happened –

MIRANDA

You don't! You don't know about the choice I made that morning. You don't know about Robert. His stories. I've kept it inside me – but *I know* -

ELSIE

What do you know?

MIRANDA

Dad was supposed to drive me to school! I said "no." I was going to walk with Robert. If he drove me – he wouldn't be dead!

ELSIE

Miranda – listen!

MIRANDA

I'm done listening! I need to do!

(She goes into the living room and grabs a star.)

I need to find my own way! Who's left? My mother – should I be like my mother?

(She grabs another star.)

Terrified of being alone after my father died?

(She throws it or smashes it.)

Always filling space with idle chit-chat? Or you? Should I model myself after you?

(She grabs another star.)

Hiding in a shrine to my father, to Otto, to Grandma –

(And she grabs another star and another.)

I need to figure out stuff!

(She grabs the mirror.)

Somewhere out there is another point in time – somewhere – *he could be there! And if he's there – I could discover a way to see him one more time ... one last time...*

ELSIE

Miranda – stop -

MIRANDA

NO!

(She recklessly throws the stars and mirror perhaps even at ELSIE. SHE stops and picks one up.)

I'm going to find my father!