

## CHARACTERS

ALBERT EINSTEIN, 70

MARGARET HARDING, 47

MISS DUKAS, 53

## TIME

December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949

## PLACE

Princeton, New Jersey

## relativity

*Lights slowly up on Albert Einstein, standing on the sidewalk of Mercer Street in Princeton. It's noon on a cold winter day, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949.*

*Einstein, 70, wears a shabby coat and black knit cap. Humming, he looks up into the distance.*

*Margaret Harding, 47, enters. She is wearing a topcoat, high heels, gloves, scarf over her hair, and carrying a large handbag. She's fashionable and attractive.*

*Seeing Einstein she stops, tense. Taking a breath, she approaches.*

MARGARET. Professor?

*Church bell rings. Einstein stops humming, holds up a finger as if to say "wait," not looking at her.*

EINSTEIN. Noon. We are triangulated by three churches that ring their bells every hour.

*Second bell begins to ring.*

Second church. And now...

*Third bell.*

The third and last. They are controlled electronically. There is no possibility of human error.

*All three ring, discordant. The discord continues.*

By counting all their rings we know it will be 36 o'clock.

MARGARET. Then someone got it right. Time is relative.

EINSTEIN. If I went to church I would have discovered it sooner.

*He turns to her, pleased to see an attractive woman.*

MARGARET. Professor, I've been in Princeton three days trying to meet you. I've called your office many times and tried leaving notes at your home, but the woman who answers the door refuses to take them.

EINSTEIN. That's her job. Telling people I am out when I am in.

MARGARET. I'm Margaret Harding. I'd like to interview you for the *Jewish Daily*.

EINSTEIN. We have not met, Miss Harding. I certainly would remember.

MARGARET. I've just started and I can't imagine a more exciting first story than an interview with Albert Einstein.

EINSTEIN. Flatterer. Go on.

MARGARET. A man so treasured, almost worshipped—

EINSTEIN. I could listen all day, but unfortunately, I am expected at my office. I agreed to attend a departmental meeting, so I will be sleeping for at least two hours.

MARGARET. I'm happy to wait.

EINSTEIN. Has anyone ever said "no" to you? You are not dressed for the cold. Perhaps you would be more comfortable talking in my home, it is closer than the Institute.

MARGARET. I'd like that. Maybe I'll feel my fingers again.

EINSTEIN. Then we are off.

*He looks up and down the street.*

MARGARET. (*Indicates behind her.*) You live this way.

EINSTEIN. Ah!

MARGARET. I thought all the Absent-Minded Professor stories were apocryphal.

EINSTEIN. Sadly, no. I once had to call the dean to find out my own address.

*They start to walk.*

This sidewalk is a sheet of glass. Please take my arm.

MARGARET. I'm fine, thanks. Is it true you really don't wear socks, even when it's freezing?

EINSTEIN. It could be worse. I could have no socks and be wearing your high heels.

*They exit.*

*Sound of 1940s Hoover vacuum cleaner.*

*Lights up on Miss Helen Dukas, vacuuming Einstein's study on the second floor of 132 Mercer Street. Two walls of bookshelves. A large picture window overlooks the backyard. A desk is buried in papers.*

*A chalkboard is mounted on the wall, and three portraits hang: James Maxwell, Michael Faraday, and Mahatma Gandhi.*

*A well-worn gray chair.*

*A blackboard is prominent. On it is written HALF of the formula:*

$$|\psi\rangle = 1/\sqrt{2} [ |H\rangle_A |V\rangle_B - |V\rangle_A |H\rangle_B ]$$

*(Einstein calculation for "spooky action at a distance.")*

*In the corner of the room is a cage containing an unseen African Grey Parrot, his cage half-covered with a cloth.*

*Einstein and Margaret appear.*

EINSTEIN. (*Shouting.*) MISS DUKAS!

*Dukas looks up in surprise.*

DUKAS. Back so soon?

*Her eyes go immediately to Margaret. She turns off the vacuum, her posture grows defensive.*

You again.

MARGARET. I'm persistent. If I hadn't spotted the Professor today I might have come down the chimney.

DUKAS. And to think I almost built a fire.

*Margaret crosses to look at the portraits.*

*(Crossing to Einstein, lowers voice.)* Warum bringst du eine Kakerlake ins Haus? Sie kann doch eine von denen sein.

EINSTEIN. Miss Harding, coffee or tea?

MARGARET. This cockroach prefers coffee. (*Looks to Dukas.*) Did I get it wrong? You did say, "Why did you bring a cockroach into the house?"

EINSTEIN. (*Amused, to Dukas.*) She speaks German.

MARGARET. And French and some Italian.

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas, you must learn Mandarin. Leave the kaffees

on the hallway table. And phone the Institute. Tell them my ulcers have come calling.

DUKAS. Of course. (*Directed at Margaret.*) I hope they will soon be gone.

*Dukas picks up her vacuum and leaves. Einstein shuts the door after her.*

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas is happiest when she is unhappy.

MARGARET. Is she a relative?

EINSTEIN. No, she is my jailor. Secretary and housekeeper as well.

MARGARET. What did she mean: I might be "one of them"? Who is "them"?

EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas believes we are under surveillance: Our phones are tapped and our letters opened.

MARGARET. Do you believe her?

EINSTEIN. (*Shrugs.*) Belief is a different thing than truth. Miss Dukas still insists Dewey beat Truman.

*Margaret looks in Bibo's cage; he gives her the wolf whistle. She smiles, goes to him.*

MARGARET. Thank you.

EINSTEIN. Do not flatter yourself, he whistles at Miss Dukas too. Bibo was a birthday present from students at the Medical Institute. I do not know what I did to them. Now the bird has a cold. I give him drops in his water and tell him jokes to make him feel better.

(*Turns to Bibo.*) A Priest, a Politician, and a Scientist are led to the guillotine. The Priest puts his head on the block, the Executioner pulls the lever and the blade stops halfway down its track. The crowd shouts, "A Miracle!"

The Politician is next, he gets to his knees, lowers his head and the blade stops again. "Another Miracle!" they cry.

At last, the Scientist. He looks up at the guillotine and says to the Executioner, "You know, if you tighten that bolt the blade will work right."

*Margaret smiles, Bibo doesn't make a sound.*

MARGARET. African Greys are supposed to be bright, aren't they?

EINSTEIN. This is why he never laughs. Please sit.

*He indicates a chair. Margaret points to another chair.*

MARGARET. Would you mind?

EINSTEIN. Not at all.

MARGARET. I have to say; I'm impressed you do this so effortlessly.

EINSTEIN. Do what?

MARGARET. Play "Einstein." You stay true to this image you've created of yourself.

EINSTEIN. It is simple to stay true to the truth.

MARGARET. Said the humble genius.

EINSTEIN. Miss Harding—

MARGARET. "Margaret." Please.

EINSTEIN. Margaret. Everyone has "genius." But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree—

MARGARET. (*Finishing.*) "...it will live its whole life believing it is stupid." That's one of my favorites.

*She takes a notebook from her briefcase.*

And you are everyone's. George Bernard Shaw: "Albert Einstein [is] a...maker of the universe. We should have declared war on Germany the moment...Hitler's troopers stole [his] violin." Now, *that's* funny.

EINSTEIN. Shaw also says the funniest joke in the world is telling the truth.

MARGARET. Charlie Chaplin: "People cheer me because they understand me. People cheer Einstein because they—"

BOTH. "—don't understand him."

MARGARET. What about this one? The little girl down the block comes to your door for help with her homework. You tell her, "Don't worry about your problems with mathematics. I assure you, mine are much greater." Then, even cuter, you give her milk and cookies. Really?

EINSTEIN. Not true! I gave her milk and brownies.

*Margaret spots his violin on the shelf.*

MARGARET. The famous violin. Do you still play?

EINSTEIN. Only when I am alone, to spare others. I think in music. When I am lost for answers I play and the answers come. Margaret, all this has been written about many times. Let me give you some advice. If you want to write a popular story, pick a topic that is completely meaningless. Then put my name in the headline: "Einstein Loves Poodles," "Einstein Says No to Broccoli." I guarantee you will be on the front page.

MARGARET. I don't doubt it. But I do have questions of my own. I promise.

*Knock on the door.*

DUKAS. *(Offstage.)* KAFFEE!!

EINSTEIN. LEAVE IT ON THE TABLE!

*Pause. Miss Dukas, carrying a full tray, pushes the door open.*

DUKAS. The table is too small.

*Bibo gives her the wolf whistle; she accepts it as her due.*

Good bird.

*She puts the tray down on the table.*

EINSTEIN. Thank you. We can serve ourselves.

DUKAS. *(Pouring.)* Nonsense, do I help you with your formulations? *(To Margaret.)* What do you take in your coffee?

MARGARET. Nothing.

DUKAS. *(Hands cup to Margaret.)* "Nothing" for you.

*She pours Einstein's cup, adding cream.*

*Margaret looks at the portraits on the wall.*

MARGARET. Thank you. This is Gandhi, of course. *(The next.)* Michael Faraday?

EINSTEIN. Very good.

MARGARET. *(The last.)* This man is a mystery.

DUKAS. James Maxwell. He proved magnetism and electricity were the same.

EINSTEIN. Excellent! Now explain the electromagnetic field.

DUKAS. I have no time. At least one person in this house should be working.

MARGARET. *(Looking at his desk.)* No pictures of your family?

EINSTEIN. *(Gesturing to wall portraits.)* This is my Scientific Family.

MARGARET. I don't see Niels Bohr. He's a close friend, isn't he?

EINSTEIN. A colleague, yes.

MARGARET. I thought with so much attention on his new quantum theory—

EINSTEIN. "New"? I was the first to explore quantum theory thirty years ago, after my work on Relativity.

MARGARET. Really? Doesn't quantum theory make Relativity obsolete?

EINSTEIN. Not in a universe that allows for the existence of both.

DUKAS. The Professor is a private man. Not a movie star. Not a sports player. An important man who needs his privacy. Wasting my time, your time, that does not matter. Wasting the Professor's time matters.

*(To Einstein.)* Mrs. Truman's secretary called. She asked why you haven't responded to their dinner invitation.

EINSTEIN. I do not remember getting an invitation.

DUKAS. Maybe you never did. Maybe one more letter has been stolen.

EINSTEIN. Please call her back. And close the door on your way out.

DUKAS. *(Starting out.)* I will not be far away.

*Miss Dukas leaves. Einstein moves to the door, locking it from the inside.*

EINSTEIN. She can be overprotective.

MARGARET. As long as she's not armed.

EINSTEIN. I am not searching her.

*He looks at a few of the letters Miss Dukas left on his desk.*

Miss Dukas keeps all my personal letters until she has read them first. But her point is well taken. None of us has time to waste.

*Bibo shrieks, a longer cry.*

Bibo!

MARGARET. Aren't you tempted sometimes to open the window?

EINSTEIN. He would knock at the front door. But a barbecue is not

out of the question. Bibo, tell me, what did the waiter ask the table of Jewish mothers?

MARGARET. What?

EINSTEIN. "Is anything all right?"

MARGARET. (*Smiles.*) Professor, I'd like to take a different approach to this interview.

EINSTEIN. I like "different."

MARGARET. I want to write about the Einstein no one knows. Einstein the Husband and Father.

EINSTEIN. You would be handing your editor a paragraph. I married Mileva and we had two sons. My elder son has children, thus I have grandchildren. After divorcing Mileva I married Elsa. Now I am a widower and here we sit.

MARGARET. You met Mileva at Swiss Polytechnic. She was the only woman admitted, so she must have been very intelligent.

EINSTEIN. Unfortunately, not quite enough. She failed her final exams. Twice.

MARGARET. Still, she must have been a great help to you constructing your Theory of Relativity?

EINSTEIN. Mileva would be first to admit she checked my calculations. That is all she did.

MARGARET. Besides raising your two sons.

EINSTEIN. (*Pause.*) Of course.

*Einstein goes to the blackboard, staring at the formula in progress.*

MARGARET. You divorced in 1919?

EINSTEIN. I cannot remember dates. I do not memorize anything I can look up.

MARGARET. Your sons were very young. It must have been difficult for them.

*He adds two more figures to the formula.*

EINSTEIN. Divorce is difficult for everyone.

MARGARET. Of course. Especially if their father remarries only three months later.

*Einstein puts the chalk down, turns to her.*

EINSTEIN. Have you ever married, Margaret?

MARGARET. Why do you ask?

EINSTEIN. Marriage is the unsuccessful attempt to make something permanent out of an accident.

MARGARET. You did it twice. Are you accident-prone?

EINSTEIN. I must be.

MARGARET. Which is why you warned your son, Hans Albert, not to marry?

EINSTEIN. Did I?

MARGARET. And to never have children. "It makes the divorce speedier."

EINSTEIN. I do not remember saying that. You will have to ask Hans Albert.

MARGARET. I did.

EINSTEIN. (*Surprised.*) Oh?

MARGARET. He was kind enough to see me. You told him, "Here is my advice and wedding present: Call it off."

EINSTEIN. I am surprised he spoke with you at all. He is a very private person.

MARGARET. He is. But after we spent some time together, he trusted me.

EINSTEIN. I had good reason to warn him. He was marrying a woman who was a Christian Scientist with dwarfism in her family. In addition, she was nearly ten years older.

MARGARET. Wasn't Mileva older than you?

EINSTEIN. Only two years.

MARGARET. And she had a congenital hip problem.

EINSTEIN. Mileva was not a bible-beating troll.

MARGARET. Are their children healthy?

EINSTEIN. Four of them. But they had five. The youngest died of diphtheria. He would be alive today if his parents were not spiritually lobotomized to believe in the power of prayer over medicine.

MARGARET. That had to strain your relationship. Are you still close?

EINSTEIN. Geographically? Emotions are not quantifiable. Not everything that counts can be counted—

MARGARET. “—And not everything that can be counted counts.” One of your best. Were you disappointed Hans chose to be a hydraulics engineer rather than a physicist?

EINSTEIN. Every carpenter wants his son to be a carpenter.

MARGARET. He said you didn't speak for some time. What really surprised me is that he's never told anyone at his university you're his father.

EINSTEIN. *(Pause.)* Oh?

MARGARET. It's true. When we walked to his office after class we had to pass between two bronze statues: Copernicus and Einstein. It must be difficult for him to do it every day.

EINSTEIN. That depends on how he feels about Copernicus.

MARGARET. *(Smiles.)* You have a wonderful sense of humor. Hans said you can turn it on and off like a faucet...

EINSTEIN. Miss Harding, Margaret, when we begin talking about plumbing we know our conversation has reached its end.

MARGARET. Just a few more questions. Brief ones.

EINSTEIN. It is my experience that reporters write what they wish was said.

MARGARET. Not if they can be sued for it. Will you look at this, first?

*Margaret pulls a paper out of her purse.*

It's an agreement that guarantees you must approve everything I write before it's published. You have the right to edit any of it, or throw it all out. I sign this with everyone I interview. If someone doesn't feel comfortable enough to speak honestly there's no point to talking at all.

*She hands the paper to him; he reads it.*

Just a few questions.

*He hesitates, signs, and sits down.*

EINSTEIN. Few. And brief.

MARGARET. I've read the letters published between you and Dr. Freud discussing ways to prevent the war.

EINSTEIN. Yes. And you see how successful we were.

MARGARET. But a few months later you wrote Roosevelt, telling him we couldn't win the war without building the bomb.

EINSTEIN. I believed Germany was already building their bomb. When we realized it was only propaganda I no longer supported it.

MARGARET. Did you write Roosevelt again to tell him to stop building it?

EINSTEIN. It was too late.

MARGARET. Dr. Freud said nothing?

EINSTEIN. Dr. Freud was dying of cancer.

MARGARET. How horrible. Were you at least able to ask his advice about your younger son?

EINSTEIN. About what?

MARGARET. Eduard's schizophrenia. Whether the Zurich sanitarium was the best place to commit him.

EINSTEIN. *(Pause.)* You have spoken with Eduard?

MARGARET. No. I hear strangers confuse him. Mileva was his only visitor.

EINSTEIN. Mileva was living nearby. It was convenient for her.

MARGARET. I'm sure it was. You're so far away. When's the last time you saw him?

EINSTEIN. Again, dates.

MARGARET. More than a year? Five? Ten?

EINSTEIN. Whenever it was. We played piano together. He is a much better musician than I ever was. It was a pleasant visit for us both.

MARGARET. It must have been. He was devastated when you left.

EINSTEIN. Oh?

MARGARET. Why else would he try to jump out of his window? When was his first breakdown?

EINSTEIN. These are family matters.

MARGARET. I'm just confirming what Hans Albert told me. He was in university. His heart was broken by a woman in his department.

EINSTEIN. Or he was undone by his studies.

MARGARET. What was he studying?

EINSTEIN. Psychiatry.

MARGARET. You don't believe in analysis?

EINSTEIN. When someone unlocks a closet door, it is usually trash that falls out, not treasure. (*Rising.*) And now—

MARGARET. Has the institution helped Eduard at all?

EINSTEIN. (*Mock surprised.*) Hans Albert did not report back?

MARGARET. They haven't corresponded recently. Have you?

EINSTEIN. I stopped writing Eduard. It did him no good, my letters only disturbed him. He was angry about my leaving him and his brother and he did not mature past that. One can be told only so many times by your own son that he hates you before you decide he made his point.

MARGARET. He has a baby picture on his bureau of you holding him.

EINSTEIN. (*Taken aback.*) Does he? I have never heard that.

*A rattling at the door.*

DUKAS. (*Offstage.*) PROFESSOR!

*Miss Dukas knocks loudly, then tries the doorknob.*

The door is locked!

EINSTEIN. I will find the key later.

*The door is suddenly pushed open, revealing Miss Dukas holding a ring of keys.*

DUKAS. If you don't lock it this wouldn't happen.

EINSTEIN. Why don't you go downtown and get another set made?

DUKAS. That would be wasteful. I can find extra keys. I will ask one of your lady friends—Mrs. Beck, Mrs. Silver. Or her daughter—

EINSTEIN. Enough.

DUKAS. (*To Margaret.*) I just read today's *Jewish Daily*. There was no story written by Margaret Harding. Your name isn't even listed under "staff."

MARGARET. This is my first assignment.

DUKAS. And they picked you to interview the Professor?

MARGARET. I proposed the idea.

DUKAS. Well, aren't you the busy beaver. (*To Einstein.*) Lunch is on the table. Noodle salad. Come. You should eat now. Don't let it get cold.

*She exits, leaving the door open.*

EINSTEIN. (*Puzzled, to Margaret.*) Isn't noodle salad always cold?

*Before Margaret can answer, Dukas is back.*

DUKAS. Mayonnaise can curdle.

*Einstein bangs the door closed. Bibo squawks angrily.*

EINSTEIN. (*Re Bibo's squawk.*) He's right.

MARGARET. What is this?

*She picks up from his shelf: the classic "Dippy Bird," Plastic with a red head and a beak, wearing a top hat and large black shoes.*

EINSTEIN. A "Dippy Bird." A friend's eight-year-old boy gave it to me. He wants to know how it works.

*He pours water in a glass, then puts the Dippy Bird beside it, lowering its top section so its beak dips into the water.*

The bird drinks. He has his fill, then rises and stands there. But he is thirsty again!

*The bird, on its own, dips again into the water then rises to a stand.*

Ingenious. I watched him for hours yesterday.

MARGARET. Have you discovered his secret?

EINSTEIN. Not yet. The Dippy Bird is cagey.

*Einstein moves the water glass away.*

*Margaret picks up the bird and puts it back on the bookshelf.*

Who told you that Eduard has my picture?

MARGARET. Mileva told her friend, Helene Savić.

EINSTEIN. (*Not anticipating that.*) Helene.

MARGARET. She's a lovely woman. I told Hans Albert I wanted to speak with Helene for this article and he put us in touch. She couldn't have been more helpful.

EINSTEIN. Margaret: Is this an "interview" or interrogation? How many more people are you cross-examining?

MARGARET. You're my last.

EINSTEIN. Then why don't you just tell me the terrible things Helene had to say about me and we can be done with it?

MARGARET. "Terrible"? No. She calls you "The Great Man." She said Mileva did, too, from the first day you met. She told me that on her deathbed Mileva blamed you for nothing.

EINSTEIN. There was nothing to blame me for. Mileva said I was an excellent ex-husband. When will I get to see what you write?

MARGARET. As soon as I finish.

EINSTEIN. We are finished. There is nothing else to talk about.

MARGARET. There's your daughter.

EINSTEIN. I have no daughter.

MARGARET. Don't you?

*Pause.*

Helene said you did. She said when Mileva was about to give birth she went to her family's home in Novi Sad so she wouldn't have the baby alone.

EINSTEIN. Ah. Now, I understand. You must realize, Helene and Mileva were very close. They trusted each other's every word. Even when Mileva's mind was failing. Mileva ached for the daughter she never had. Do not believe everything you are told.

MARGARET. "Lieserl." Her name was Lieserl.

*Silence.*

EINSTEIN. What do you want?

MARGARET. I want to know what happened to her.

EINSTEIN. Leave now.

MARGARET. I signed that contract. Nothing can be published without your permission.

EINSTEIN. I am calling campus security.

MARGARET. If I found this out, anyone else can.

EINSTEIN. With your help?

MARGARET. No. I can help you. Prove to me you're right. That there is no story.

EINSTEIN. Why should I trust you?

MARGARET. Would you rather take the chance that Helene never tells anyone else?

*Einstein stares at her, then turns and looks out the backyard window.*

EINSTEIN. Still the sparrows. They do not migrate, they depend on us to feed them. A dangerous optimism.

*Pause.*

We were unmarried. My mother thought Mileva's family was below us. My father refused his blessing. We were just out of school; we thought we could be students forever. We took a trip to Lake Como, rode sleighs through the woods, walked through storybook villages. It was a magical time. Six weeks later, more "magic." Mileva was "with the apple." We had no income. I took the only job I could find, tutoring in Schaffhausen.

MARGARET. So she went to her family in Novi Sad.

EINSTEIN. I encouraged her. The birth was difficult. I told her to stay until she was stronger. Finally, I had good news to write her: I was awarded a position at the patent office in Bern. She wrote back to tell me the baby had scarlet fever. I knew scarlet fever leaves its mark. The child could be deformed or brain damaged if she had lived. We lost her on the tenth day.

MARGARET. You haven't said her name. "The baby," "the child," never "Lieserl." Why?

EINSTEIN. That would be a question for Dr. Freud. We have a contract. This goes no further.

MARGARET. We're finished, then. I think I have all I need. (*Looks at watch.*) If I leave now I can catch the next train. They run on the hour.

EINSTEIN. Do you have a number somewhere I can reach you?

MARGARET. The *Jewish Daily* would be best. Thank you. Goodbye.

*Margaret for a moment looks at Einstein without saying a word. He does the same. She opens the door to go, stops and turns.*

EINSTEIN. Lieserl, is that you?

LIESERL. How could you give me away?



*Einstein turns from her.*

Look at me! LOOK AT ME!

EINSTEIN. Have you told Hans Albert?

LIESERL. Hans Albert? No! I can't give him another reason to hate you.

EINSTEIN. Helene Savić told you this?

LIESERL. She didn't need to. I found the letters.

EINSTEIN. What letters?

*Lieserl takes a letter out of her purse and reads it.*

LIESERL. "Dear Kind, New Mother of Lieserl,

"Be assured—I am not asking to be a part of Lieserl's life. All I beg from you are a few words. Is she well? Is she happy?

"I have had a displacement of my hip since birth. It causes me to limp. Does Lieserl have the same? I'm told that doctors now can fix this and it is better to do so when a child is young. If money is the problem we can help you.

"I need to know I did the right thing. Every day my heart breaks when I wake and remember her and breaks again when there is no word from you. You are a mother now, you know a mother's love. Please write me. I thank—"

*She stops, but quickly regains control of herself.*

"I thank God every day for my beautiful daughter, and for you. Mileva Einstein."

EINSTEIN. Ah.

LIESERL. After they died, I was going through my parents' things when I found bundles of these. Mileva sent them to Helene Savić, who forwarded them to my mother. When they adopted me, my parents made Helene promise she'd never reveal anything about them. I think they couldn't bear me knowing someone gave me up, that it would hurt me.

I couldn't accept it at first. How could my biological father be that famous man with the big white hair? But today, seeing you, I knew it was true. My parents were right. It hurts. I feel just as worthless as you think I am.

EINSTEIN. You should not feel—

LIESERL. Don't tell me how to feel.

EINSTEIN. The scarlet fever left no mark?

LIESERL. It left me deaf in this ear. *(Her left.)*

EINSTEIN. Why you switched your seat.

LIESERL. My parents took me to the best doctors for my hip. I was so young I can't remember the operation.

EINSTEIN. Did you meet Mileva?

LIESERL. She died less than a month before I found her letters. I wish I had met her. I would have told her not to hate herself. That she made the right decision.

EINSTEIN. You think so?

LIESERL. After meeting you? Yes. I'm happy I never had to live with the monster your family did.

EINSTEIN. "The Monster." How can I even begin to argue that?

LIESERL. With the truth. Tell me what really happened.

EINSTEIN. You tell me first why you came here to confront me face to face? You knew how disturbing it would be, for us both.

LIESERL. I didn't want to rely on anyone else's impressions of you. I wanted my own.

EINSTEIN. So you have met your Monster.

LIESERL. I didn't come to confront you. Just to see who you really are.

EINSTEIN. And you discovered that in so little time? So what will be next? Will you ask me for money? Or do you want me to beg forgiveness? To take you in my arms?

LIESERL. I wouldn't let you touch me.

EINSTEIN. Then why are you still here? If I am such a "Monster," what did you expect? Who do you want me to be?

LIESERL. I don't care if you're "The Great Man." I wanted you to be a Good Man.

EINSTEIN. A "Good Man."

LIESERL. That's as imaginary as the "Einstein" you created who awes the world. The "Great Man" who invented a magical equation that everyone knows but no one understands.

E=MC<sup>2</sup>. Who cares? Why does it even matter? Does it cure polio? Does it make us better people or lead to anything of real value?

EINSTEIN. The purpose of science is not to make life easier or more pleasant.

LIESERL. What is its purpose?

EINSTEIN. Knowledge! Knowledge is its own reason. It grows exponentially—Faraday inspires Maxwell, Kepler leads to Newton. How can you not be awed! The purpose of life is to solve its mysteries. We must never stop questioning; never lose our holy curiosity.

LIESERL. “Holy”? You don’t believe in God!

EINSTEIN. God, the concierge who concerns Himself with the endless whims of our little lives? No. I believe in Spinoza’s God, who reveals Himself in the splendor of nature.

LIESERL. (*Overcome.*) I hate myself for coming here. I hate myself for caring if I seem stupid to you, that what you think of me even matters. I feel sick to think you are the smallest part of me. How did you know?

EINSTEIN. When you were leaving, you looked at me with an expression so like Mileva’s.

*Pause.*

You came here to judge me by standards of your own: “Greatness,” “Goodness.” You think them related but it is like calling an orange a baseball because they are both round.

LIESERL. They’re dependent on each other. For Greatness, there must be Goodness. You think “Greatness” depends on someone’s accomplishments.

EINSTEIN. Of course it does! Lincoln was a great man because he was a great leader! Dickens was a great author!

LIESERL. Dickens wrote great books and had a social conscience. But, he also publicly humiliated his wife, tormented his children, and deserted them all for a young girl half his age. When he died his own daughter said that it didn’t matter what good he did; he was an evil man.

EINSTEIN. “Evil” is Hitler, not an adulterer. Why should we care if Dickens left his wife as long as he left his books?

LIESERL. Like Edison left us electric light and electrocuted everything from puppies to elephants to sell it? Like Ford built us cars, but wanted to run over every Jew in this country.

EINSTEIN. Lieserl, how did you get to your train today?

LIESERL. I drove.

EINSTEIN. In a car created by a Jew-hater? You had better walk home. And when you get there, do not turn on your lights! Burn Tiny Tim’s crutch instead. Utility supersedes morality. It is inevitable. There would be no progress without it. We would be waiting thousands of years for nuns to invent the wheel!

LIESERL. You defend them to defend yourself.

EINSTEIN. Would you dismiss Da Vinci’s art because he invented the machine gun? Burn the Bill of Rights because Jefferson owned hundreds of slaves?

LIESERL. What’s the last Wagner concert you went to? Wagner’s a Great composer, isn’t he? The Reich’s favorite. Have you listened to him once since Hitler took power?

EINSTEIN. (*Reluctantly.*) No.

LIESERL. Why not? His music hasn’t changed a note. He’s still a genius, isn’t he? A Great Man. You just made that judgment yourself. You can’t look at one person as two. We judge them as one.

EINSTEIN. Why do you “judge” them at all? Does it make you feel morally superior?

LIESERL. Not at all. It helps me to believe there’s some kind of moral order. That there is a distinction between the concepts of good and the “evil” you just discounted. It matters.

EINSTEIN. Even if these concepts are the scars of childhood discipline?

LIESERL. They’re not. We’re born knowing there’s a difference between them.

EINSTEIN. An acquired social code. That’s religion’s purpose. Pretending there is a referee God who rewards good behavior and punishes bad. God the “Father,” who also kills innocent children, drowns the world and drives nails through the flesh of his son to hang him up to die? We outgrow father figures.

LIESERL. Then why was it so important to get your father's blessing to marry Mileva?

EINSTEIN. It was tradition.

LIESERL. Of course. You're so traditional. You were upset when he didn't approve. You said it was why you couldn't marry. Or did you hope he wouldn't bless you so you'd have an excuse not to marry?

EINSTEIN. What do you wish happened instead?

LIESERL. What do you mean?

EINSTEIN. Do you wish you weren't born?

LIESERL. No!

EINSTEIN. That you were never adopted?

LIESERL. Of course not.

EINSTEIN. Did your father do an adequate job of it?

LIESERL. More than that. I loved him and my mother. I couldn't have had better parents.

EINSTEIN. So being raised by them was a good thing.

LIESERL. Stop. You're not serious. You want me to thank you for throwing me away?

EINSTEIN. I want you to understand it was for the best. There were reasons we did what we did.

LIESERL. What were they?

EINSTEIN. You know much of it.

LIESERL. I know the lie you've told me. But here I am, dead of scarlet fever.

*Einstein decides his next words.*

EINSTEIN. You recovered from the fever. Mileva wrote, telling me she was coming back with you. [I told her she should wait.] I could not introduce my colleagues to the unwed mother of my child. Helene volunteered to care for you in Belgrade until we married and sent for you.

LIESERL. So why didn't you?

EINSTEIN. Your mother was pregnant but had a miscarriage. She was inconsolable.

LIESERL. Helene didn't tell me this.

EINSTEIN. It was Helene who suggested adoption. She knew a couple from America, respected people, who wanted a child—

LIESERL. So you said, "Take Mine!"

EINSTEIN. I went to meet them. I had to be certain you would be raised by people who could give you more than we could. Mileva knew nothing until later; you can imagine her grief. From what you have said, I was not wrong. The Americans were "Good People."

LIESERL. My father was a Good Man. He loved us, provided for us, we lacked nothing. And he wasn't just a Good Man, he was also a Great Artist.

EINSTEIN. Would I know his work?

LIESERL. I doubt it.

EINSTEIN. But he was "Great" in your eyes.

LIESERL. Not just in mine. His contemporaries thought the same.

*Beat.*

He won a major commission. A mural in a building people traveled from all over the world to see. Everyone in the art world who didn't know his name suddenly did. Prices on his work doubled; he'd be free for the rest of his life to paint what he liked. But then my mother had trouble walking; she had to keep a hand on the wall for balance. They found a pinealoma. A brain tumor.

EINSTEIN. Ah.

LIESERL. The doctors said it was unlikely she'd survive the operation. If she did she'd never be the same person. She'd have no memory at all or lose her motor skills.

My father wouldn't leave her. He turned down the commission. The operation was successful, she wasn't mentally impaired, but we had to teach her to speak and walk again. That took over two years.

The day they unveiled the mural I threw out the newspaper, but they heard it on the radio. My mother stared at my father and kept trying to say something, over and over, until finally we understood. She was saying, "I'm sorry." My father took her hand; he was so excited she spoke. He said, "No! No. This is the best day of my life."

EINSTEIN. A Good Man.

LIESERL. A Great Man who never got the recognition he deserves. And he wasn't a great man just because of his art. He was a great man because he made time every day to be a father.

EINSTEIN. A Great Man and a Great Artist.

LIESERL. They exist.

EINSTEIN. What do you think would have happened if your father had painted the mural?

LIESERL. He would have gotten the acclaim the artist who replaced him did, maybe more.

EINSTEIN. Would your mother have died without your father staying?

LIESERL. I don't know.

EINSTEIN. I think you do. With the prestige of his commission he could have afforded the best care and brought you both to his work site. What you are saying is that holding your mother's hand was more important to him.

LIESERL. Yes.

EINSTEIN. How long did your mother live?

LIESERL. She died at sixty-two.

EINSTEIN. When did she have the tumor?

LIESERL. At twenty-nine.

EINSTEIN. If it wasn't your mother, would thirty-three years of a single life be worth more than a brilliant mural?

LIESERL. Of course! Anyone's life!

EINSTEIN. Who would have made the greater contribution to the world, the Caring Father or the Selfish Artist? If he had painted it, how many people would have seen and remembered it? A hundred thousand? A million, over time? A work of art can live forever. Your mother could not.

LIESERL. Isn't there anyone in your life that important to you?

EINSTEIN. Should anyone be?

LIESERL. Yes! Someone! Do you even like your family? Did you make your children sign a contract, too?

*Einstein doesn't respond.*

Mileva wrote Helene about your "contract." I couldn't believe what I read.

*(Reading from her notebook.)* "Only under the following conditions will I continue this intolerable domestic arrangement: You will see to it that I am served three meals a day *in my room*; and that my desk is not touched by anyone other than me. You will not expect any intimacy from me, nor will you reproach me in any way. You must answer me at once when I speak to you, and permit me to sleep two nights a week with whomever I choose."

This is reprehensible! Why did she stay as long as she did?

EINSTEIN. Because she wanted only one thing in her entire life. To be Mrs. Albert Einstein. Her constant pecking, her tears, her sighs, the carping, the carping. Her look of a dog before it is kicked! You have no conception of my life! Obligations and duties and expectations far beyond those of an ordinary man! So why should I be treated like one?

LIESERL. *(Incredulous, she rises.)* Hans Albert is right. I'd be ashamed to admit we're related. I'm shocked he still lets his children anywhere near you.

EINSTEIN. Why wouldn't he?

LIESERL. You threw his daughter down the stairs!

EINSTEIN. She slipped! That was an accident!

LIESERL. Your seven-year-old granddaughter!

EINSTEIN. I told her not to come in here, I tell them all. When I came in the girl was here, in my chair, moving my papers, some were even on the floor. Who knows what could have been lost? I took her by the arm and led her out.

LIESERL. Dragged her out! Then pushed her so hard she lost her balance! She could have been killed!

EINSTEIN. She slipped, she was not hurt! She barely cried!

LIESERL. She was in shock! Can't you even see it? You poison the lives of everyone around you! I would never let my child come near you!

*She stops herself.*

EINSTEIN. Ah. Your child.

*She says nothing.*

Finally. The reason you are here.

*Lieserl, overcome, walks out the door; Einstein rushes to it, roars down the stairs.*

LIESERL! KOMM ZURÜCK! SOFORT! [*Come here! Now!*]

*Pause. Lieserl comes back up the stairs, filled with loathing for him, and herself for obeying.*

Is something wrong with the child?

LIESERL. No.

EINSTEIN. Do you need a medical history?

LIESERL. I don't need anything from you.

EINSTEIN. Go, then. I have no desire to "poison" her.

LIESERL. "Him." My son.

*Beat. Miss Dukas pushes through the door triumphant.*

DUKAS. She's a liar! She does not work for the *Jewish Daily*, I just telephoned Max Fisher, he's never heard of her! You're one of them, aren't you? Why have they sent you?

LIESERL. No one "sent me." I wanted to meet him.

DUKAS. So does everyone! Why should he want to meet you?

EINSTEIN. Because she is my daughter.

*Dukas is stunned.*

DUKAS. Your daughter?

LIESERL. Yes.

DUKAS. Your daughter. No. You never—

*Einstein can't meet her eyes.*

(*To Lieserl.*) Why didn't you tell me? You could have just—

(*To Einstein.*) Do you know her? Who is her mother?

EINSTEIN. (*To Dukas.*) Go. We need to talk. No one must know about this. Not even Hans Albert.

DUKAS. Of course not. No one. Another secret.

*Dukas exits, closing the door behind her.*

*Einstein turns back to Lieserl. She has pulled more papers from her purse, which she holds out for him to take.*

LIESERL. Look.

EINSTEIN. What are these?

LIESERL. My son left these papers on the breakfast table.

EINSTEIN. (*Going through them slowly.*) Were there books nearby?

LIESERL. No.

EINSTEIN. Had someone been with him earlier?

LIESERL. The Physics Faerie? Do you see that stain? It's milk. It was him, these papers, and a bowl of cereal.

EINSTEIN. There are people with photographic memories. Savants. They retain all they read. It does not mean they comprehend it.

LIESERL. Anyone with an IQ above 160 is considered a genius. Yours is estimated at 175. His is 190.

EINSTEIN. Do you know why mine is only estimated? Because I will not be tested. The masterminds who create them couldn't pass their own tests.

LIESERL. He talked in full sentences at eight months. By two years old he could play any piece of music on the piano he heard once.

EINSTEIN. (*Dismissive.*) A prodigy is not a genius.

LIESERL. By five he beat our whole building at chess. He'd rather be given a geometry quiz than a candy bar. When he got to the point he was solving equations we couldn't understand we brought in mathematicians from the high school, then the college. They couldn't keep up with him. He started school at a sixth-grade level but lost interest after the third day, when he had read through all his textbooks.

Before I knew about you, I gave him your *Evolution of Physics*. He was insulted. He said it's dumbed down for the general public.

EINSTEIN. He is right.

LIESERL. He spends half his life in the library. Nothing makes him happier than finding a concept he can't understand.

EINSTEIN. What does your husband think?

LIESERL. He died in the war. D-Day.

EINSTEIN. Ah...

LIESERL. He didn't make it to the beach. His boat was shelled. My son keeps asking me, "What happened? Did the bomb kill him, did he drown?" Who else can he ask? I'm the only one he has and I don't know how to help him.

EINSTEIN. What if he is a genius? Why is that a bad thing?

LIESERL. He concentrates on everything around him but people. When his schoolmates want to play baseball he sits by himself and charts asteroids. They told me to skip him past high school. When I told him we can still have a graduation party he said, "Why, Mom? I don't have friends." He's been offered full scholarships to every major university. I'm afraid for him.

EINSTEIN. Some advice? Take his schoolbooks away and give him fairytales.

LIESERL. He's fourteen.

EINSTEIN. No matter. Imagination is everything. Bringing an idea to life right in front of you.

When I was sixteen I imagined I was chasing a beam of light. What would happen if I caught up to it, would it be frozen beside me? But it couldn't be or it wouldn't be light. It needed speed, a speed that never changes. So what had to change is time. This was my earliest thought about relativity.

LIESERL. He's become obsessed with quantum physics.

EINSTEIN. If he *was* a genius he would realize it's beyond him. I've spent most of my life trying to reconcile quantum physics with relativity.

LIESERL. He says the conventional formulas are lazy.

EINSTEIN. Then so is his logic. I'll prove it to you.

First: In order for us to measure an object's momentum or velocity we need something to measure it against. Yes?

LIESERL. Yes.

EINSTEIN. Next, nothing can be faster than the speed of light, which is always the same. This, means, of course, there is a link between space and time.

LIESERL. All right.

EINSTEIN. Example.

*He picks up two cookies from the platter.*

Two "proton" tea biscuits of the same size, same weight, are dropped from the moon down to our roof. Both travel at the speed of light, that's constant, and hit the roof at the same time.

*He drops them to the carpet.*

Same time?

LIESERL. Yes.

*Einstein takes two more cookies.*

EINSTEIN. But if one cookie was dropped from the moon earlier than the other it would hit our roof earlier.

*He drops one, which hits the rug, then the second.*

Did you see that?

LIESERL. I did.

EINSTEIN. Now, even though the cookies were dropped at different times, they will always be equidistant to each other and travel at the same speed.

Both their paths can be measured accurately because both cookies are bound by the absolute laws of physics and relativity. You follow?

LIESERL. Yes, I follow.

EINSTEIN. Congratulations. You know *Reader's Digest* relativity. Now, quantum theory. Can you give me that cup, please.

Same moon, same roof, two proton cups falling at the same moment. The two begin by falling parallel—

*He lowers them a few inches, but holds on.*

But, suddenly, the second flies off in another direction.

*He drops one, then tosses the other to the side. They fall on the carpet.*

An unexpected, unpredictable path, ignoring all laws of physics, and relativity. What I call "Spooky Action." It's like throwing milk and flour and sugar in the air and hoping a cake fall. I need to prove there's a principle that allows both quantum theory and relativity to exist in the same universe. Your son does not have the experience to prove that.

LIESERL. He doesn't want to. He wants to prove you're wrong.  
EINSTEIN. I'm wrong?  
LIESERL. You say the speed of light is constant, that nothing can travel faster.  
EINSTEIN. That is fact.  
LIESERL. No, it's contemporary, accepted belief. What if nothing is constant?  
EINSTEIN. Impossible. But go on.  
*Lieserl picks up two saucers, hands one to Einstein.*  
LIESERL. We drop on three. Ready? One, two...  
*Einstein drops his saucer to the carpet as Lieserl throws hers over her shoulder, hard, hitting the wall or bookcase. It shatters. Hopefully.*  
Which hit first?  
EINSTEIN. Yours, of course! I dropped mine, you threw yours! Two different forces, gravitation and velocity!  
LIESERL. Or a demonstration that there's another speed beside the speed of light. The chaos theory, which makes our current principles as antiquated as a flat earth.  
EINSTEIN. (*Dismissing.*) Everyone can speculate. Few can prove. Your boy is wasting time. He needs to be guided. You say all the best schools want him. That must include here.  
LIESERL. (*Hesitates.*) Princeton offered him a full scholarship, room, board, and "living expenses," the same as the others. What's different is their new program for advanced students to intern with the Institute. The Director wants to sit down with him to discuss it.  
EINSTEIN. Sit down with Oppenheimer?  
LIESERL. Yes.  
EINSTEIN. I've never heard of him doing that with any student. When are they meeting?  
LIESERL. They're not. I haven't shown my son the letter.  
EINSTEIN. Why not?

LIESERL. Do you know what he has pinned to his bedroom door? Your *Time* magazine cover.  
EINSTEIN. Then why shouldn't he come here?  
LIESERL. Because you're here. After today, you've made that decision for me.  
DUKAS. (*Offstage.*) Professor!  
*Dukas enters.*  
Professor! There is a man at our gate...  
*She looks at the cookies, cups, and broken saucers on the floor.*  
What is this?  
EINSTEIN. (*Pause.*) Spooky action.  
*Lieserl smiles, turns away.*  
DUKAS. This is no time for funny. He has walked past the house three times today.  
EINSTEIN. I've done that.  
DUKAS. Did you bring a camera and take pictures? He thinks he can frighten us? I will make him afraid.  
*She starts out, Einstein stops her.*  
EINSTEIN. Miss Dukas—I will speak with him. You will wait here, so he'll be safe.  
DUKAS. I will not be spied on in my own house!  
*Dukas begins to clean up the cookies.*  
LIESERL. "Your" house? Doesn't he have to die first? Then you get his house and his money and every scrap of paper he's ever written on? That's what Hans Albert says. He and his brother get nothing.  
DUKAS. What they deserve.  
LIESERL. Really? Because they don't sleep with him?  
DUKAS. Do you expect me to be shamed? If every woman who ever slept with Albert Einstein divided his money there would not be enough for a trip to the penny arcade. It is you who should feel ashamed. You, his children, and your mother, Mileva. Ashamed of your selfishness. What a terrible husband and terrible father! He is not who I want, he is not like the others! Thank God for that.

LIESERL. Should we thank him for acting as if we don't exist?

DUKAS. You have known him now how many minutes? I have worked for him over twenty years. Longer than he was married to your mother. Longer than he was married to Elsa. I cook, I clean, I answer his letters, I pay his bills. I protect him from all this, the outside. Men like your father need to be protected. He changes the world. I change his sheets. He needs me.

LIESERL. Isn't that what Mileva thought?

DUKAS. She thought she deserved more of him.

LIESERL. And you don't?

DUKAS. It is an honor to serve him.

LIESERL. How noble.

DUKAS. I am not Mileva and I am not you! I don't expect something from him he cannot give!

LIESERL. He doesn't need you and he never will. He doesn't need anyone but himself.

*Einstein enters.*

Did you find him?

EINSTEIN. Of course not. I hope I gave you enough time to question my daughter.

DUKAS. (*Scoffs.*) Mach keinen. [*Don't be silly.*] I must keep watch.

*Dukas exits with the coffee tray.*

LIESERL. Do you believe anyone is really spying on your house?

EINSTEIN. A smart man solves a problem. A wise man ignores it. I was stopped outside by a student and his parents. They sent him to Princeton because I am here. You refuse your son for the same reason.

LIESERL. I don't want him to see you as a role model. I want him to open up to life, not live it inside his head, especially at his age. (*Hesitating to get personal.*) Was your mother ever concerned about you?

EINSTEIN. No. She was proud of me even when there was nothing to be proud of. She taught me violin ruthlessly, until I loved it as much as she did.

LIESERL. You sound like you were happy.

EINSTEIN. I was content. Winning at algebra games with my father. Playing piano and singing with my mother. Ah. One day when I was sick in bed my father gave me this.

*He takes a compass down from the shelf.*

The compass' needle always pointed the same direction, no matter how I turned it. I realized it had to be acted on by something unseen. That was more than happiness. That was joy. The challenge to know. To put together the billions of pieces to find one answer. For the first time I knew I could escape.

LIESERL. From what?

EINSTEIN. The conventional, the commonplace. The life you wish for your son.

LIESERL. He'll never be ordinary. I know that.

EINSTEIN. Then why try to control his future?

LIESERL. He deserves a full life, where he's something more than what he knows.

EINSTEIN. Who are you?

LIESERL. What?

EINSTEIN. Who are you?

LIESERL. His mother.

EINSTEIN. Is that all?

LIESERL. That's my job.

EINSTEIN. So you will follow him to campus? Cook his breakfast in the cafeteria, take his tests, choose his sweethearts?

LIESERL. Of course not.

EINSTEIN. Then your job is done and you are no one.

LIESERL. That's ridiculous.

EINSTEIN. You'll send him birthday cards. Make him a nice turkey at Thanksgiving if he is in this country. If he is not lecturing in London or in Rome or accepting an award from a conference of his peers? People who do more with their lives than you do. Who give the world more than children.



LIESERL. I'm proud to be a mother. I have people in my life who love me. People who make the world better by caring for each other, not chalk on a blackboard and the billion pieces of theoretical minutia precious only to them.

I WANT MY PIECES! I WANT TO PUT ALL MY PIECES BACK TOGETHER BUT YOU WON'T GIVE THEM TO ME! Please. Please. For once, tell me the truth.

EINSTEIN. I've told you everything!

LIESERL. Then explain this.

*She takes out one last letter.*

November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1901. It's from Mileva to Helene. "Albert has never written me so often. He couldn't be more excited about being a father. He's made a list of names already, but he thinks the baby will be a girl. He wrote me. 'I love her so much already and I don't even know her.'"

*(To Einstein.)* Did you mean a word of this?

EINSTEIN. Yes.

LIESERL. *You said you loved me! (Using letter.)* Look! Right here! How could you say that and then not want me anymore?

EINSTEIN. Does it matter?

LIESERL. It matters! It's my life!

EINSTEIN. I am trying to protect you—

LIESERL. For the first time?

EINSTEIN. And if it hurts you more?

LIESERL. Do you really think you could hurt me more?

EINSTEIN. Oh yes. A woman with child goes home to her family to have a baby. She wants the father with her, but he is in Schaffhausen, teaching. They have no money so he has to stay and work. Is this the truth?

LIESERL. Yes.

EINSTEIN. The woman gives birth. The baby gets scarlet fever. Her father is frightened, he knows what the fever can do: She could be physically deformed, or worse, an idiot. The truth?

LIESERL. Yes.

EINSTEIN. The man makes a decision. He writes her, "If you wish to come home to me, you cannot bring the child."

LIESERL. *(Stunned.)* Why?

*There is no alternative now but telling her.*

EINSTEIN. The facts are not enough? In Bern I was alone. Alone with my boredom in the patent office. Every day I completed my duties in minutes. To keep sane I began to do my own work. Every night I went home to continue it. Lieserl: It was wonderful. I saw no one, spoke with no one. My time was my own.

I would sit at the kitchen table but not at the table. Somewhere not anywhere. A speck of the cosmos daring me to understand it. To become it, and use my life to see beyond it. I made a decision, then, that the only way I could be happy was to tie happiness to only my goals, not people.

LIESERL. *(Realizing the implications.)* You never went to meet my parents, did you?

EINSTEIN. No.

LIESERL. Did you ever even see me?

EINSTEIN. No.

LIESERL. How can you live with yourself?

EINSTEIN. Because I was right.

LIESERL. Right?!

EINSTEIN. The year you were born...my real life began. I worked every free moment I had for two important, critical years, getting closer, failing, starting again until I could find answers *and I did!* Do you understand now?

LIESERL. Understand what?

EINSTEIN. How they ruined me! Mileva and the boys. Their distractions. Their neediness. My great work, my only great work, was done when I was alone, no wife, no children. They took what I needed most: my time. They were tar on my shoes.

LIESERL. Why did you have more children?

EINSTEIN. She wanted them. I thought, how difficult could it be? Everyone does it, but only Einstein can be Einstein. All my life I

have struggled to rid myself of the personal. Every relationship is a chain around my neck.

LIESERL. While the world praises you as a great humanitarian.

EINSTEIN. It is easier to love mankind than man.

*Lieserl notices a commotion outside the window.*

LIESERL. There are men outside, going through your trash.

EINSTEIN. Ah! My garbage men in suits and ties. I hope they find the papers from the bottom of Bibo's cage.

LIESERL. Miss Dukas was right. Who are they?

DUKAS. The FBI.

LIESERL. What are they looking for?

EINSTEIN. Anything that will serve as an excuse to deport me. Hoover tried to stop me from coming to this country. He spread rumors I was a spy in Berlin, then the head of a Communist conspiracy to take over Hollywood. He would have been happy to hand me to Hitler.

LIESERL. Why would he do that?

EINSTEIN. I condemn racism, lynching, and war. I am clearly un-American. People see who they want to. A traitor, a Great Man, a heartless Monster.

LIESERL. You said you loved your parents. How is it possible you could never care for anyone again?

EINSTEIN. Lieserl. Do not deceive yourself. There is nothing of the sentimental left in me.

LIESERL. People can change. Times change.

EINSTEIN. Not the past.

*Through the window, we see snow begin to fall.*

LIESERL. You said there is no past. Or present. Or future. "The only reason for time is that everything doesn't happen at once."

EINSTEIN. Stop quoting me at me!

LIESERL. The world keeps changing. We can't stop it from happening. Every moment is new. Now. Now. Now.

EINSTEIN. Can you change?

LIESERL. Of course.

EINSTEIN. Then change your mind. Let me meet my grandson.

LIESERL. (*Bested.*) I can't do that.

EINSTEIN. Where is your change? Your new world? (*Snaps his fingers.*) Now. Now. Now.

LIESERL. You're not fair.

EINSTEIN. You want to punish me but he is the one who will suffer. You want him to study with professors who want nothing more than to be Einstein. You are my daughter. You are as selfish as I am.

LIESERL. No.

EINSTEIN. You sought *me!* You came to *me!*

LIESERL. As his mother, not your daughter. He meant nothing to you 'til I told you he was brilliant. If he wasn't, you'd care about him as little as you do Hans Albert or Eduard or me. You don't want a grandson, you want a mirror.

EINSTEIN. How can he be so special when you are so ordinary?

*The Dippy Bird catches her eye.*

LIESERL. There's methylene chloride in the bird's lower bulb. Its vapor rises to the top bulb, which makes it heavy enough to dip into the water. The felt on his beak gets wet, but as the fluid rises through evaporation, the bird stands back up.

I gave one to him on his last birthday. He figured it out by the time I threw out the wrapping paper.

You were born with great gifts. Gifts you never had to work for. Being good is so much harder, something you have to work at every day. Maybe only the Greatest Men are both. Goodbye.

*Lieserl exits.*

*Einstein goes to the blackboard, stares at the equation.*

*Dukas enters. From her expression we know she's heard everything.*

DUKAS. I have lemon cake. Your favorite.

*He doesn't turn to look at her.*

Albert. No child understands their parents. You have done the impossible.

*She goes to him. Touches/embraces him.*

You are a good man.

*Einstein takes Lieserl's son's papers off the table and exits.*

*Lights fade, a voice is heard.*

*Lights slowly up on Princeton station, snow still falling.*

CONDUCTOR. (*Recorded.*) Local 433 to Penn Station arriving in four minutes, on Track Two.

*Lieserl waits for her train. Hesitant, Einstein approaches, wearing the same shabby coat and worn hat. He has her son's work.*

EINSTEIN. You left his pages.

*She takes them. Silence.*

I will see Oppenheimer tomorrow—

LIESERL. No—

EINSTEIN. I will ask him to withdraw the scholarship. He will send you recommendations for two respected universities with first-rate physicists who actually like to teach.

LIESERL. Thank you.

*She starts to put her son's papers in her bag and sees one has been written on.*

This isn't his writing.

EINSTEIN. No.

*He points. She looks.*

This is his mistake, where he went wrong. Once you've passed the Yang-Mills-Dirac equations, the geometry becomes non-commutative.

LIESERL. Who can I tell him wrote this?

EINSTEIN. The Physics Faerie.

*Silence. He pulls the compass out of his pocket and holds it out to Lieserl.*

LIESERL. Your father's compass. I can't give this to him.

EINSTEIN. It is not for him. It is for you. Next month is your birthday, yes? The sixteenth?

*Sound of train coming.*

*Silence. Then Einstein turns, walks away.*

LIESERL. Abe. His name is Abe. Your grandson.

EINSTEIN. Abraham? My grandfather was also Abraham.

LIESERL. A coincidence.

EINSTEIN. Do you think so? Sometimes I wonder if a coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous. (*Looks at her.*) You may quote me.

*Sound of the train coming nearer. Louder. Louder.*

*Lights fade. Blackout.*

### End of Play

## A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

*In 1902, Albert and Mileva Einstein had a baby daughter.  
After 1904, she was never seen or spoken of again.*

Immediately after reading this I knew I'd write a play to ask, "Why?" The existence of Lieserl Einstein only became public knowledge after Einstein's death, with the discovery of letters between him and his first wife, Mileva. Their daughter was born, their daughter contracted scarlet fever, and her parents worried about what would become of her.

After that, mystery.

In her book, *Einstein's Daughter*, author and artist Michele Zackheim tried to find the definitive answer to this question without success. Instead, she found many theories Einstein scholars developed after learning of Lieserl's existence. She was adopted by the Savić family, friends of the Einsteins. She entered a convent. She lived a long life in California never knowing who her birth parents were. She died of scarlet fever.

The last possibility I discounted.

When learning from London colleagues that a young woman was introducing herself as his daughter, Einstein didn't dismiss her as he would a child who had died. Instead, he hired a private investigator. The only reason to employ the detective, I thought, had to be that Einstein was unsure if it was Lieserl—that she lived.

With that thought, I began developing my own scenario of events, which were the foundation of *relativity*, and researching the genius whose dark sides were never seen by many who held him in awe.

Is *relativity* conclusive? Only dramatically. Will we ever have a definite answer? Albert Einstein answers that in his own words:

*Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.*

But I keep in mind one more Einstein quote, even as I write this:

*Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.*

—Mark St. Germain  
2019