

THE PRICE OF PEACE

by  
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THE PRICE OF PEACE charts machinist Sam Penn's journey through wartime America from California to Oak Ridge- a secret city in Tennessee responsible for the fuel of a destructive new weapon. The city's inhabitants carried on their work and lives in secret without the knowledge of what they were working on or why they toiled. Laundry was folded, bridge clubs and sporting teams were formed, and the course of human history was altered irrevocably for all time.

6 actors (4 M, 2 W) play the following:

1. Sam Penn (25)- Caucasian, Machinist, metal shop foreman
2. Agatha (Aggie) Penn (early to mid 20s)- Caucasian, Communications aptitude, Pacific Telephone, material ordering. Sam's wife.
3. Dwight Stillwell (mid to late 20s)- African-American, Machinist, Sam's co-worker in the metal shop.
4. Frank Oppenheimer (early 30s)- Caucasian. Berkeley, Oak Ridge, an every man, albeit a genius-level one.
5. Private Sedgewick (19)- Caucasian. Oak Ridge MP, bears a resemblance to Aggie's brother
6. Liz Trevor (early to mid 20s)- Mixed ethnicity. The Penns' next door neighbor in Oak Ridge. Avid photographer.

Assorted voiceovers, filled by actors from the company.

\*NOTE ON SET/SPACE.

Should be metal, malleable. Adapts to form every location and pieces of the set can be used with the scene.

\*ON THE MACHINE SHOP

All machining action should be pantomimed, with perhaps a few pieces of the set forming to evoke the idea of a machine. The tangible product should appear cleverly, through misdirection or technology. THE SPHERE (ACT 2) is fully-realized.

For Glenn and Signa Quillin, and Ella Reed and Max Rogers.

I'm grateful to Jack and Valerie Cumming for their support in bringing this story to the stage, and for Jack's passion in preserving the stories of humankind's greatest struggles.

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"... the arms are fair,  
When the intent of bearing them is just."  
-Henry IV, Part I

“Anyone who thinks must think of the next war as they  
would of suicide.”  
-Eleanor Roosevelt

ACT ONE.

PRELUDE. GRIZZLY PEAK, BERKELEY, CA. LATE MORNING. **PROJECTION:**  
**DECEMBER 7, 1941.**

A car radio CRACKLES to life. Harry James and his Big Band's "YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU" trumpets.  
Ocean sounds. The noise of a car being put into park.

Lights up on an overcast Sunday morning, and on 25 year-old SAM PENN looking out over the sea. He wears a smart suit and carries a light jacket. Glasses and fedora.

He puts a hand in his pocket and pulls out a small STEEL BALL. He walks over to the edge of a cliff. He twirls the ball in his hand as if it were a Chinese Baoding exercise ball.

The Pacific Ocean is blue and calming. Sam smiles. He checks his watch. Almost time to head back. The radio continues to play.

An ANNOUNCER breaks through the music.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by air, President Roosevelt has just announced. The attack also was made on all naval and military activities on the principal island of Oahu.

Sam freezes. He listens for a spell, firmly rooted at the overlook. He pockets the ball.

ANNOUNCER (VO) (cont'd)

This sudden and unprovoked attack reminds us to be vigilant, particularly on the American coast. Readiness exercises have been immediately instituted, and we urge our coastal citizens to prepare for full evening blackouts in the event of hostile aircraft.

Sam backs away from the edge, still looking out over the water. His gaze takes him up, searching for danger in the sky.

Without moving, he rotates onstage till he's looking US.  
We see what he sees, projected- slightly overcast, light  
clouds, and miles of ocean.

He continues to rotate and the image fades until we're in-

ONE. THE PENN RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM, BERKELEY. TWENTY MINUTES  
LATER.

Sam concludes his rotation in place as the house builds  
around him.

A small loveseat and chair, with a large bay window DS.

SAM

(quietly, at the tail end of shock)

Aggie...

He SNAPS out of it.

SAM

Aggie! Aggie are you-

AGGIE (OFF)

I'm in-

SAM

What?

He whips around, attempting to pinpoint his wife's  
voice.

AGGIE (OFF)

I'm in the shower-

He runs offstage. Light pours in through the window as  
the sun breaks through the clouds.

SAM (OFF)

We've been attacked.

I can't hear you-

AGGIE (OFF)

We've-

SAM (OFF)

Who?

AGGIE (OFF)

Us. The United States. Hold on. I'll get-

SAM (OFF)

Give me a-

AGGIE (OFF)

Hold on-

SAM (OFF)

Sam runs back onstage. He picks up the phone, dials. Waits. Hangs up, dials again. Waits.

Sam moves to the windows and holds his hand out, drawing the curtains closed.

He slams the receiver down, hard.

Dammit.

SAM (cont'd)

He moves about the room, searching without purpose.

Wearing a robe and towel over her head, AGGIE PENN briskly moves into the living room. She stops and watches Sam.

Are you all-?

AGGIE

I- locked up. Nearly drove off the side of the mountain.

SAM

AGGIE

You were up on Grizzly Peak?

He nods.

SAM

(gesturing to the phone)

Lines are gummed up. I can't get through to- you work for the damn phone company, isn't there something you-

AGGIE

Sam!

SAM

(flustered)

I'm sorry, Aggie. I just-

AGGIE

(a beat)

What do you mean we've been-

SAM

Japanese attacked us in Hawaii. Might be headed here.

AGGIE

How do you-

SAM

That's what the car radio...

AGGIE

My God.

Sam paces as Aggie slowly sits on the couch.

SAM

I was, the radio was on and there was the Golden Gate Bridge, beyond that, the sea. And I thought- what if they're on their way-



AGGIE

All right. All right. We'll-

Sam picks up the phone, dials, and slams it down again.

SAM

I can't get through to work.

AGGIE

All right. Stay calm. I'll call-

SAM

You can't call anyone, Aggie, the damn-

AGGIE

Try to-

SAM

I need to fix the radio. Get more information. I'll grab it from the garage and-

AGGIE

Wait!

SAM

What? Do you want me to stay-?

AGGIE

No, go ahead and- are you all right?

SAM

Yeah. I- yeah. Stay in the-

AGGIE

I will. I need to get changed.

He starts to exit.

AGGIE (cont'd)

Sam!

SAM

(stopping, he returns to her)

What?

AGGIE

We'll be all right.

They embrace.

SAM

I'll grab the radio and work in here.

(beat)

I don't want to be alone.

She nods.

Aggie kisses his cheek. Sam reciprocates, then exits.

Aggie dries her hair and starts to move off when the PHONE RINGS. She picks up.

AGGIE

Hello? Mother, I- Yes, I know. Sam told- Mother, hold on. Are you and Dad-? I don't- well no, I haven't had time to- Sam just- he's in the garage. The phone lines have- No, I don't think you- we're on the coast, too. I think that- uh-huh. I know. Sam's going to fix the radio so we can hear. What have you-? All right. Yes, yes, we're fine. Well, Sam was on his Sunday morning drive and- I was getting ready to- yes, he was on his drive and we were getting ready to- Mother, please. I don't have any more information than- no, I don't think you should drive anywhere. Stay in Burbank, you don't need to come up here. I- yes. I will. The phone lines have been- stay calm. I can hear him in- hi, Dad. Yes, I'm fine.

Reentering, Sam fumbles with a hefty radio under his arm, and a toolbox in the other hand. He throws them onto a side table., his makeshift workbench. Screwdriver in his mouth, he uses both hands to pry open the radio's back panel.

AGGIE (cont'd)

Hi Mother. No, I- I can't believe it either.

A beat while Aggie listens. She drops the receiver,  
registering her mother's inquiry.

AGGIE (cont'd)

(suddenly, after a beat, bringing the receiver  
back up)

No, he's not in Hawaii. They moved him to the Philippines. Yes. He- yes, that was- just  
two weeks. He sent me a letter around-

(to Sam)

Howie's letter was-

SAM

(still working)

Thanksgiving.

AGGIE

(back to the phone)

Thanksgiving. He was- that's what he said. I know, I realize the Philippines are close to-  
let's not worry about things we can't control. I don't know, Mother. I love you, too.

SAM

Please give them my -

AGGIE

(on phone)

Sam loves you too. I'll call you later today after Sam and I- yes. We'll be safe. You too.  
Good-bye.

She hangs up, a bit shaken. Confused.

SAM

They all right?

She nods.

SAM (cont'd)

Should've fixed this thing when it first broke.

AGGIE

(a cloud settling in)

We liked the quiet.

Aggie looks up in anticipation of the ceiling caving in.  
Shock sets in.

AGGIE (cont'd)

(gesturing above)

Oh God, Sam. They could be up there right now, ready to- Why is this happening? Why is it happening here?

SAM

It's not- it's not happening here.

AGGIE

San Francisco is-

SAM

I know.

AGGIE

(rising)

I have to- I'm going to get dressed.

SAM

All right. I'll keep-

AGGIE

All right.

Aggie exits, and Sam resumes work on the radio. It's quiet. With the back panel off, Sam works the soldering iron around inside.

SAM

(whispered)

Dammit.

He keeps at it, straining harder, skirting the line between too much pressure and not enough. Takes a break. Looks at it. Moves a wire inside, and tries it again.

Shakes his head and slams the radio down. Then he bangs the table.

SAM (cont'd)

Dammit!

AGGIE (OFF)

Sam-?

She runs back on, buttoning a sweater. Hair tucked into a headscarf, she could be a precursor to Rosie the Riveter.

SAM

I can't fix this damn thing.

AGGIE

You can fix anything.

SAM

Not this God-forsaken contraption, apparently. Damn it all.

AGGIE

(hands up)

All right.

He moves to sit, Aggie looks at the radio.

AGGIE (cont'd)

I'm sure you can-

SAM

I- I can't.

AGGIE

All right. Let's breathe. What do you-?

SAM

Aggie, my head is-

AGGIE

What do you want to do?

SAM

Something. Anything.

AGGIE

I do too. I'm going to work, see if I can-

SAM

No, don't-

AGGIE

Sam, I'll be all right.

SAM

If another attack comes, I want us to be-

AGGIE

All right, I'll stay.

She sits next to him, takes his hand.

SAM

I've never felt like this. My hands, my... fingers aren't working.

AGGIE

Fix the radio. Then tomorrow you can go into work and keep doing what you do. The lab has to be on alert after something like this.

SAM

All right.

(kisses her hand)

You go ahead. Please don't be gone too long.

AGGIE

I won't. I might be able to help out with the telephone lines. Coordinate a-

SAM

I'm sure you can.

She rises, but Sam has a hard time letting go of her hand.

AGGIE

You'll get your turn tomorrow. But for now, fixing the radio is what you can do to help.

SAM

Yeah.

He pats her hand and lets go. Starts chuckling.

AGGIE

What is it?

SAM

I'm sorry, I just-

(another laugh)

I just had a flash of when we went to the Curran to see Porgy and Bess.

AGGIE

And we never saw it?

SAM

No, because I wanted to propose to you.

AGGIE

I thought you wanted to end it.

SAM

And then before I could propose, I noticed the lighting was far too dim and I thought-

AGGIE

You offered to help with the wiring.

(she allows a smile)

Then you proposed.

SAM

After I convinced you I wasn't ending things, I proposed.

AGGIE

And it took so long, we missed the show. Why did I marry you, again?

Sam shrugs. Allows himself another small laugh.

SAM

That just popped into my head. We shouldn't laugh. Not now.

AGGIE

It's all right.

Aggie at the door, turns and smiles.

AGGIE (cont'd)

I love you, Sam.

SAM

Love you too, Aggie. I'll- I'll see you soon.

And with that, she's off.

Sam shifts his attention to the radio.

SAM (cont'd)

Just you and me, you son of a bitch. And I'm gonna win.

He dives into his toolbox, produces a thin screwdriver, grips the soldering iron, and with uncanny speed GLIDES through the radio's wiring.

In fairly short order, the radio SPITS to life. Sam reacts in victory, wipes his brow, and puts his tools away as he listens.



It's simply another song. He listens for a spell, absent-minded. He picks up the soldering iron and scorches his hand. Reacts more in disgust than pain.

SAM (cont'd)

Stupid...

He picks up the bulky radio and stares it down, willing it to reveal more information about the attack. It fails to comply, continuing the stream of music.

TWO. AGGIE'S PAC-TEL OFFICE AND UC BERKELEY. EXPERIMENTAL DIVISION, METAL SHOP. EARLY AFTERNOON, **PROJECTION: A YEAR AND A HALF LATER (SUMMER 1943).**

Aggie sits at a desk, answering phones and signing off on paperwork throughout the scene. She never stops working throughout Scene Two, and we can't hear what she's saying until the end of scene.

The metal shop is laid out sparsely, with various machines represented by metal framework. A main WORKBENCH, chest-high with chairs. Two TOOLBOXES, open.

Sam sits at a SHAPER, working on a curved piece of metal.

DWIGHT STILLWELL walks into the shop from the offstage LAB. He wears coveralls with pockets, all filled with tools.

DWIGHT

Dr. Lawrence says the lab radio is broken again.

SAM

I'll do what I can after we finish up here.

DWIGHT

He's nervous about having it back in time for tonight.

SAM

Something special going on?

DWIGHT

You're kidding, right? I know you don't follow baseball but-

SAM

World Series.

DWIGHT

(a laugh)

No! All-Star game!

SAM

Life goes on, even with a war.

DWIGHT

Baseball will always go on, Sam.

Dwight sits and fishes out a file from his pocket.

DWIGHT (cont'd)

Want me to polish this up?

He holds up a bin of parts.

DWIGHT (cont'd)

(inspecting)

Pieces of the pump?

SAM

Yeah. I already gave it a once over, but go ahead and check my work. Then you can get on this shaper after I'm done.

DWIGHT

You still on the vacuum chamber plating?

SAM

What do you mean "still"?

DWIGHT

(smiling)

Hey, if it were me, it'd take twice as long.

SAM

And have far better craftsmanship.

DWIGHT

I didn't say that.

SAM

Didn't have to. A fact's a fact. I'm fast; you're precise.

He turns off the machine and produces a piece of curved metal. He brings it over to the workbench.

SAM (cont'd)

What do you think?

DWIGHT

Looks good. No need to file.

SAM

There's always a need.

He grabs some sanding sheets from his toolbox and starts finessing the chamber plating.

SAM (cont'd)

You have the prints for the coil order?

DWIGHT

Somewhere here.

He fishes around the table.

SAM

What's the good word in there?

DWIGHT

Dr. Lawrence said the experiment seems to be working.

SAM

He tell you what the experiment was?

DWIGHT

More cyclotron experiments. Some lights and things. Who knows?

SAM

Hm.

DWIGHT

They all seemed to think we're getting closer to winning the war.

SAM

That's all that matters.

DWIGHT

Damn right. Though how we're gonna do that with lights is beyond me. Here are the prints.

He pulls them out.

DWIGHT (cont'd)

(pointing)

You think a seven-eighths here?

SAM

No, I thought it was five-

(looking)

Huh. They messed up. You're absolutely right.

Dwight smiles.

DWIGHT

I think Dr. Lawrence and Dr. Oppenheimer both had a go at this, but dashed it off too quick.

SAM

Fix it up and check for any other oddities.

Dwight nods and takes a pencil to the blueprint, making small corrections.

SAM (cont'd)

That's not like them. Especially with Frank in there keeping them on track.

DWIGHT

Yep. They're talking about a trip together soon.

SAM

Frank, Bob, and Dr. Lawrence?

DWIGHT

Sounds like it.

SAM

Hm. Where are they headed?

DWIGHT

No idea.

SAM

Hm.

(working, then:)

You all right? I mean, here?

DWIGHT

Better than unloading ships at Hunter's Point. Least I'm making a bigger impact here. I think.

(tapping his pencil on the print)

I think this is finished up.

Dwight rolls the prints and takes them and a metal parts bin over to the shaper.

DWIGHT (cont'd)

Aggie still happy at PacTel?

In her office, Aggie stands and passes off files to a figure. She's heated, and points offstage. The figure nods and exits. Aggie picks up a phone and writes as she speaks.

SAM

She's overjoyed. She's spread thin over four departments, so that's a bit difficult, but-

DWIGHT

What are you talking about?

SAM

Oh. Another promotion.

DWIGHT

My dear heaven. She's gonna run the world.

SAM

Sooner or later. She was promoted a few months after the Pearl Harbor attack, then last summer they bumped her up again. And she just added oversight over the whole West Coast last month.

DWIGHT

Every time I pick up the telephone, I tell the person on the other end that it's Agatha Penn making the call possible.

SAM

You do, huh?

DWIGHT

Well, I think it.

SAM

She likes it.

(beat)

With Howie still out there, it's good for both of us to have our workloads. We still find time for us, but in the end, it's all about working.

DWIGHT

You're helping bring him home.

Sam nods.

At a loss for more words, Dwight focuses on machining.

Sam looks at prints and uses calipers to measure a piece of metal.

A tall scientist, FRANK OPPENHEIMER, enters from the lab. He's finishing the nub of the cigarette and will immediately light another upon its conclusion. He wears a dress shirt and suspenders, looking more like a professor than a high-ranking scientist.

FRANK

Still working on the vacuum chamber, Sam?

SAM

Still?

He looks to Dwight who smiles and keeps working.

DWIGHT

We're almost finished, Dr. Oppenheimer.

FRANK

Over a year in, you still can't call me Frank?

DWIGHT

(laughing)

I call your brother Dr. Oppenheimer too. It's habit.

FRANK

You can get in the habit of Frank. Especially in front of Bob. He likes the "Dr. Oppenheimer" title all to himself.

SAM

Dwight's starting the coil order before he goes. I'll stay and finish it after I wrap up the plating order.

FRANK

Thanks Sam.

SAM

You're welcome. I'll also get Dr. Lawrence's radio fixed up before his game.

FRANK

We'll be in there listening for a spell, if you'd like to come in after your coil work.

SAM

I don't care for baseball.

DWIGHT

It boggles my mind too, Dr...Frank. Dr. Lawrence favoring any one?

FRANK

Well, Ernest is upset. Most of his favorite players are off to war.

DWIGHT

You like the Tigers, right Frank?

FRANK

Well, I follow players more than teams. I do like Hank Greenberg.

DWIGHT

I like him. I like Satchel Paige more.

FRANK

How's Paige doing this year?

DWIGHT

Best pitcher in baseball.

Frank laughs.

DWIGHT (cont'd)

Negro Leagues or anywhere else.



Sam grabs the bin of parts and places the vacuum chamber plating on top.

SAM

Here you go, Frank. Pump and valve parts on the bottom. I can come in and assemble them when I bring you the coil. Dwight's about to head out.

FRANK

(taking the bin)

Looks good.

DWIGHT

He's the best bench machinist you'll find.

FRANK

I know. That's why we put him in charge of the shop.

DWIGHT

A fact's a fact-

(to Sam)

-as you say.

FRANK

So it is. Good work, both of you. Good night, Dwight.

DWIGHT

Good night, Dr... Frank. Frank. I'll get it.

Frank smiles.

FRANK

Hey, you have any more oranges in the kitchen?

DWIGHT

I don't know. Dr. Lawrence keeps taking them.

SAM

The man loves oranges.

FRANK

Well, he loves peeling them.

(off their looks)

He doesn't eat 'em. Just figures out new ways to peel them, and leaves the insides in that terra-cotta pot in the lab.

(again, off their looks)

We throw them away at the end of the night. He's working through some ideas, some things that might help us on the next phase of our... work.

SAM

There might be one or two oranges left, on top of the stove next to the coffee.

FRANK

I'll check, thanks.

Frank exits into the kitchen.

Dwight brings the coil bin over to Sam.

DWIGHT

Here you go.

SAM

Seven-eighths.

DWIGHT

Seven-eighths.

SAM

You headin-?

DWIGHT

Of course.

SAM

Be careful.

DWIGHT

It's a card game.

SAM

More like a boxing match.

DWIGHT

One time.

SAM

Yeah, the time you dragged me with you.

They share a laugh.

DWIGHT

Hey, it's San Francisco, not the South.

Dwight exits and Sam works on the coil order. After a bit, Frank returns, a single orange resting on top of the parts bin he carries.

SAM

Good. You found one.

FRANK

Yeah, Ernest'll have to take his time with this one.

SAM

I'm sure we can get more by tomorrow.

FRANK

Yep.

Frank comes over to the work bench and sets the bucket down.

SAM

(looking up)

Everything all right with that?

FRANK

Looks good.

(he looks around)

Listen, Sam, I need to, ah, Dwight's out of the building, yes?

SAM

I think so, yes. What's-?

FRANK

We need your help, Sam.

SAM

That's why I'm here. What can I do for you?

FRANK

We need you to keep doing what you're doing, only do it somewhere else.

SAM

A different shop?

FRANK

Yes.

He pulls out a pen from his shirt pocket and jots down an address on some shop paper.

SAM

This shop is in Tennessee.

FRANK

Yes.

SAM

You want me to go to Tennessee.

FRANK

Yes.

SAM

I don't- ah, let me talk it over with Aggie. Why do you need me in-?

FRANK

That's where we're all going. Me, Bob, Ernest, and others. That's the next phase of our work.

SAM

Next phase has to be done in Tennessee?

FRANK

Yes.

SAM

Frank, this is- well, surely there's another guy in Tennessee who can- my wife just got promoted. She's not going to like this.

Aggie finally finishes work. Puts on her overcoat and hat, and enters a soft freeze.

FRANK

She can stay or she can come with you. But we don't know how long you'll be out there.

Sam rises and looks at the paper shaking his head.

FRANK (cont'd)

It's for the war effort, Sam. That's all I can tell you. You have until tomorrow to decide. I need a good machinist, someone trustworthy. Someone we all like, and believe me, it's rare when my brother and I agree. We're picking you.

SAM

(after a beat)

Well, let me finish the coil, fix your radio, then I'll go home and talk to Aggie. All right?

FRANK

All right. Thank you, Sam. I know it's a bit-

SAM

Out of the blue.

FRANK (cont'd)

Out of left field.

SAM

(shaking his head)

Baseball.

FRANK

(a weary smile)

We're leaving the day after tomorrow. You'll pack up here and be along after that.

SAM

What'll I be working on?

FRANK

I can't tell you that. Not now.

He offers his hand. Sam takes it.

FRANK (cont'd)

We need your help and your answer soon.

He picks up the bin and exits.

### INTERLUDE.

Sam and Aggie move to a bench and sit, together, but in differing time/space. Frank stands in another area, jotting down notes and looking at blueprints, occasionally lifting his head to speak to Sam.

Aggie speaks to her boss, a figure seen only in silhouette. She's holding a green metal banker's box- the remnants of her cleared office.

All action is stylized for clarity.

SAM

All right. We're in.

FRANK

All right. Your wife is-?

AGGIE

It's abrupt. But I have to leave. I want to end the war and so does my husband. We're willing to do whatever it takes to make it so.

SAM

What happens next?

Images of the cross-country trip from Berkeley to Oak Ridge, TN. The journey through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas.

FRANK

You'll drive straight through to Clinton, Tennessee. Stop where you must, but call the number I gave you at every stop. Inform them where you are, then telephone them again when you leave.

AGGIE

I don't do this lightly. I feel- thank you. I do feel like I've made a difference here. I feel like Pac-Tel is my... my home, in some ways.

More images, this time of Tennessee lakes and roads, giving way to mountains the closer the Penns come to the Great Smoky Mountains. Images of Clinton to accompany Frank's dialogue.

FRANK

Pull up to a storefront building. You'll see a sign marked "Clinton Engineer Works." That's CEW. That's what we call the area. When you enter the building, they'll know who you are. Clearance personnel will take you back for a quick interview and orientation. Your wife will be vetted as well. You tell her nothing about your conversation in there.

AGGIE

(a bit exasperated)

You'll be fine. I trained him. He's a good man, he knows the position.

(beat)

Of course I realize that. I don't expect the position to be open when I return.

The low rumble of THUNDER. LIGHTNING CRACKLES overhead.

FRANK

Pack your rain boots.

Various posters for the war effort are projected, perhaps:  
100% ON WAR BONDS and an image of ROSIE THE  
RIVETER with the words “DO THE JOB HE LEFT  
BEHIND- APPLY NOW!”

FRANK (cont'd)

Please thank your wife for us. I- my wife has stood by me, at a moment's notice, with little information.

SAM

She's the strongest person I know. She and her little brother.

FRANK

After your interview, an MP will drive you into the area. The town inside is designated “Oak Ridge.” Don't look for it on a map, you won't find it. It doesn't exist. I'll see you there, Sam.

SAM

All right.

AGGIE

(whispered)

Howie...

THREE. DRIVE THROUGH OAK RIDGE AND Y-2 AREA, EXPERIMENTAL METAL SHOP. AUGUST, 1943. **PROJECTION: OAK RIDGE. DAYS ONE AND TWO.**

A light reveals MP ESCORT, PRIVATE SEDGEWICK, in the front seat of a “jeep”, Sam and Aggie's bench having turned into the back seat. Sedgewick is young, clean-cut.

SEDGEWICK

Ma'am?

AGGIE

Sorry, um... you were- you were saying, Private Sedgewick ?



SEDGEWICK

Sure. We're heading to your residence, which is fairly close to your work, Mr. Penn. Your car will be brought up for you once it clears inspection. Please wear your resident badges at all times when within the CEW fences. Townsite of Oak Ridge has a separate resident badge.

The Penns look down on their lapels at their matching oval RESIDENT BADGES.

Projections of buildings and environment accompany Sedgewick's shpiel, starting with the "WHAT YOU SEE HERE" sign.

AGGIE

(reading)

"What you see here, what you do here, what you hear here, when you leave here..."

SEDGEWICK

"Let it stay here." We take that to heart.

A beat of silence. Then:

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

(gesturing)

That's Elza Gate up ahead. Below you can see the Clinch River, which runs around quite a bit of CEW. If you're looking to head out, you can reach Knoxville via the Solway Gate down south or try Edgemoor Bridge up to 25 and then over to Knoxville.

Images fly by. A stark silence.

AGGIE

(quietly attempting conversation)

Are you, uh, are you from around here, Private Sedgewick?

SEDGEWICK

No ma'am. I've only been here about a month. I'm from Wyoming. It's very different there.

A few more beats of silence.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

For all the activity, it's pretty calm here. My brother's out in the Pacific. He writes that he'd switch places with me in a... in a heartbeat.

AGGIE

I understand. My brother... he's fighting, too.

SEDGEWICK

Seems everybody has somebody over there.

(looking in the rear view)

You all right back there, sir?

Sam nods. Catches a look at Sedgewick, shrugs it off. He could be Howie and it rattles Sam.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

(shifting, flashes his pass, waves to the gate)

Any time through these gates, when unaccompanied by a military escort, you'll be stopped, questioned, and your vehicle searched. Careful driving up through here- all dirt inside the CEW fences.

AGGIE

I don't see any sidewalks.

PVT SEDGEWICK

Mostly boards on the ground. I'd keep an extra pair of shoes if I were you, ma'am. After a downpour the yellow mud around here swallows 'em right up. There's this young woman who works at the canteen, sorta auburn hair, she's lost more pairs than I can count. She had a beautiful little pair of red and white saddle shoes...

SAM

We'll keep an eye out. So these are... the residences, or-?

Sedgewick indicates the various structures and  
PHOTOGRAPHS FLASH across stage to mimic the  
motion of the car.

SEDGEWICK

No, sir. This is the town, proper. You got your grocery store there. Post office 'round the corner. Dance hall, meeting rooms. Hardware store.

(does a double-take)

Uh, no that's.. I'm not sure what that is, actually. That's new since this morning.

Images of mountains, scattered housing at the base.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

Most of the homes are finally up for those working in... uh, around your facility.

AGGIE

That big building?

SEDGEWICK

That's Y-12. I can't tell you much about that one.

AGGIE

That's fine.

SEDGEWICK

You'll be operating out of the space next to it, Mr. Penn. The Y-2 area. And that building there is all apartment residences. The Guest House, or so they tell me. Never been up there. I'm to drop you off here, Mr. Penn. You'll meet Dr. Oppenheimer inside Y-2. They'll direct you at each checkpoint as you exchange clearance badges. Mrs. Penn, I'm to take you to your home around the corner.

Sam grabs his METAL TOOLBOX and steps out of the car, looks up at the sky, and pulls his hat down tightly. He walks around to Sedgewick.

SAM

Thank you...

SEDGEWICK

Private Sedgewick.

SAM

I know. I remember. Good luck to you.

SEDGEWICK

Thank you, sir. To you too.

Sam moves to Aggie's side.

AGGIE

Be safe.

Sam nods and kisses her cheek. The jeep pulls away and Sam gives a final wave. Lights remain up on AGGIE and SEDGEWICK in the jeep.

The Tennessee sun sets and the lights FLASH OFF AND ON in a stylized lightning storm.

Focus shifts. Shuddering, Sam makes his way across stage. Shadowy figures (or perhaps the same figure) inhabit checkpoint stations, where Sam exchanges his badge for another.

He finally makes his way into the Y-2 AREA, EXPERIMENTAL METAL SHOP.

He FLICKS a heavy switch and the grim lights click on.

Almost identical to the Berkeley facility, but much more open.

Sam moves a bench, places his toolbox on it, and opens it up. Inspects everything. Pulls out and puts on his shopcoat. He reaches into his pocket, rolls the STEEL BALL in his palms for a bit, then puts it back. He ambles through a haze, trying to acclimate.

His lights dim but never completely fade. We focus back on THE JEEP.

AGGIE (cont'd)

Do you miss Wyoming? You're all cowboys there, aren't you?

SEDGEWICK

(smiling)

That's how the story goes. Truth is, I never was much of a cowboy. My younger brother, well, whole family are all cowboys. Mom too. I do miss it. Where are you from, ma'am?

AGGIE

California. Born and raised.

SEDGEWICK

Hm. I've been there, as a kid. Up through Northern California. Yosemite, mostly. I loved it.

AGGIE

I was born in Los Angeles, parents live in Burbank. Sam and I are up in the Bay Area now. My brother... well, he's... out there fighting.

SEDGEWICK

Where at?

AGGIE

We're- we're not sure, right now.

Sedgewick nods and returns focus to the road.

AGGIE (cont'd)

(Howie on her mind)

Your brother's, ah... he's in the Pacific, you said?

SEDGEWICK

Yes ma'am. He writes pretty regular how he watches the planes take off, and- he's an aircraft maintenance technician- he says he swells with pride looking up at the bellies of 'em as they fly off on missions. Then I write back how I drive folks through checkpoints. Exciting stuff.

Aggie doesn't respond. Perhaps a building catches her eye, or a road. Sedgewick re-engages.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

Isn't Yosemite great?

AGGIE

Never been.

SEDGEWICK

Ma'am, if I may say, that's a crime. My favorite spot, late spring/early summer, is this sort of canyon. You got a bluff up on your left, a jagged stepladder of mountains to your right. In the middle there, it's these slender pine trees packed in tight together, shoulder to shoulder like folks waiting in the post office here to send their parcels. Now in front of that, is this lake, well, more a pond, really. It's like a mirror. A path of stones across it. My brother and I took turns doing handstands, holding each other's ankles, so we could look at it right side up, reflected in the water. Couldn't tell the difference between the reflection and the real thing.

They share a smile. Sedgewick continues the drive.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

I'm not really supposed to talk much.

AGGIE

Well, I don't mind it, Private Sedgewick. I don't imagine I'll be seeing my husband any time soon.

SEDGEWICK

You might be surprised. Folks work hard here, there's a lot of secrecy, but everyone's trying to go about their lives as normally as possible.

Sedgewick looks at a clipboard.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

All right, you're just around the corner here...

He turns the wheel and pulls into a cul-de-sac sparsely populated with houses. As before, projected images aid our sense of location.

Sedgewick goes to open the door for Aggie, but she steps out, bags under her arms.

AGGIE

I'm fine, thank you.

SEDGEWICK

Help with your bags?

AGGIE

I can manage, thanks.

(checking her shoes)

Not too muddy.

SEDGEWICK

Wait'll the rain comes back.

On cue, the lights FLASH OFF AND ON in a stylized lightning storm.

SEDGEWICK (cont'd)

Welcome home. You'll find a New Resident Welcome Guide inside your living room.

Projected image of a prefabricated house. Plain, basic. The PENN HOUSE for the foreseeable future.

AGGIE

Store within walking distance?

SEDGEWICK

It's a bit of a walk, but not too far. If you see me in town I'm always happy to give you a ride back up here to your house.

AGGIE

Well... all right.

SEDGEWICK

Pleasure to meet you, ma'am.

AGGIE

You too.

Sedgewick gets back in the jeep. Aggie looks at her new home, and starts inside. Lights fade out on her.

Lights back up in THE SHOP. At the opposite end a door swings open, and FRANK OPPENHEIMER steps into the shop.

FRANK

You made it in here without getting shot.

SAM

Is that something I need to worry about?

The two men shake hands.

FRANK

(points to the door)

You can't come into the lab on your own any more. Not here. You wait for an escort. You march into the D Building, past security, and you'll be shot. No questions.

SAM

(the fatigue, and Frank, getting to him)

It's me, Frank. It's me, for God's sake. I've had Q clearance since Rock Island.

FRANK

Stop it. You WILL BE SHOT.

A beat. Sam nods.

FRANK (cont'd)

This is very different, that's what I'm trying to get you to understand.

Shakes his head and walks away, looking around the shop.

FRANK (cont'd)

You're here by yourself. You start now. You will comply. That's it.

SAM

This isn't you.

FRANK

We're all under... pressure, there's quite a lot of pressure, now.



Wipes his brow.

FRANK (cont'd)

I'm sorry, Sam. It's good to have you here.

SAM

Good to be here, I guess.

FRANK

So the MP-

SAM

Private Sedgewick.

FRANK

Sedgewick walked you through the security process? Exchange badges at each checkpoint, get your radiation dosimeter at Y-2 Area checkpoint...

Sam reaches in his shopcoat pocket, pulls out the DOSIMETER. It's a rectangular badge that attaches to Sam's lapel. Frank wears one on his shirt.

SAM

Haven't attached it yet, but-

FRANK

At all times in the shop. Watch the paper for a color change. If the color changes-

SAM

Too much radiation. I stop work. Understood.

FRANK

You'll be working with materials unlike anything you've used before. They will be hot.

SAM

I'll stop if it gets too much.

FRANK

(gesturing to the door from which he entered)

That one leads directly to the lab.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

There's a security checkpoint down the hall before you go in. One of us with a 4 or 5 badge will escort you in there.

(points to his '5' badge)

Most of the under-physicists are 4, but you can listen to them. Bert's the regular MP. He's stoic but ask him about the local moonshine and he'll ease up.

Sam lifts up his badge bearing a '3' on it.

SAM

3s don't rate, huh?

FRANK

In this shop, they do. Only you and the foreman of the Tennessee Eastman Group next door have a 3. Everyone else is 2 or below.

(off Sam's look)

Tennessee Eastman are working on other aspects of the Project.

Sam looks around, past Frank. Numbness sets in.

FRANK (cont'd)

I need you here. Are you here?

SAM

I'm here. I'm here.

Frank reaches into his pocket, produces hastily drawn papers, wadded up.

SAM (cont'd)

What's this?

FRANK

Your prints. We don't have time to make 'em clean. Not here. I told you, it's different than Berkeley. I need these in no longer than twenty minutes. Machine 'em, take 'em to the checkpoint.

SAM

You have a parts bin?

FRANK

You can machine one, eh?

SAM

Sure.

Frank nods and moves to the door. We don't see him exit; his light simply BUMPS OUT.

The next section moves like a blur- a 31-hour blur.

SAM (cont'd)

(in the prints)

This is a push part or-?

He looks up. He's alone.

SAM (cont'd)

Hm.

Shakes his head and looks at the prints.

SAM (cont'd)

No reference, no context. Looks like a push part.

Sam sets up at the metal frame of a SHAPER, but will move to a DRILL PRESS and LATHE. He works quickly, miming the work equipment. He bounces back and forth between each machine.

MACHINING SOUNDS fill the air, providing an undercurrent of buzz.

TIME PASSES as he machines, through clever lighting shifts and/or odd SOUNDS. Sam doesn't stop working, however.

After a bit, Frank walks through the pools of light.

SAM (cont'd)

(still engrossed in work)

I've made three or four of these things. Push part?

FRANK

Push part.

SAM

There were different lengths on these blueprints but they're hard to read.

(squinting, holds up a small, jagged,  
rectangular PUSH PART)

Slides material into... a slot?

Frank nods.

SAM (cont'd)

(reaching under the workbench, he produces a  
metal PARTS BIN)

Here's the bin. Not one of my cleanest jobs, but-

FRANK

Ugly. Thanks.

Takes the bin of parts, and gives Sam an unwieldy set of  
prints.

FRANK (cont'd)

Here. In case this doesn't work.

He's on his way out as Sam calls out-

SAM

This looks like the vacuum chamber plating from one of Lawrence's cyclotrons. The 37  
inch, probably. Slightly bigger, maybe. Going with aluminum for this?

FRANK

Yeah. You'll figure it out. I have to get back in there.

He moves surgically from machine to machine, working quickly to “machine” the plating. TIME PASSES through our convention.

Lights also come up on AGGIE at HOME. Unpacking, reading the New Resident Guide. A bit numb as well. Her action should parallel Sam’s.

Frank brings back the empty bin and more prints. Sam drops the plating into it.

SAM

This is fast. You’re keeping up. Good. That’s good.

FRANK

You can go faster.

Frank exits in a rush.

Sam gets a good look at the prints. They’re indecipherable. He shakes his head.

SAM

(to himself, more)

I can’t- this doesn’t make any sense.

Looks up at the “clock.”

SAM (cont’d)

I’ve been working for... no, that’s not right.

Checks his watch. Shakes his head. Rubs his eyes. TIME PASSES, and this time it’s bench work for Sam.

At home Aggie pours herself some coffee. In the shop, Frank enters with a cup of coffee and gives it to Sam. Sam nods, Frank inspects the prints, makes quick changes in pencil.

SAM (cont'd)

Shouldn't it be more like-?

He grabs a pencil and makes quick adjustments.

FRANK

That's- hell, that would work.

(in shock)

Where did you come up with that?

SAM

Just seemed logical.

FRANK

Do you know what it is?

SAM

No. A cylinder obviously. Odd design though.

(off Frank's look)

I'm not criticizing. Don't know what it is.

FRANK

All right.

SAM

I'm a little beat from the drive. Thanks for the uh, for the coffee.

FRANK

You gonna be all right to-?

SAM

I'm fine. I can keep going as long as we need.

Frank offers a brief nod and smile, then exits with another bin.

Sam takes out calipers, measuring the cylinder and moves to the lathe to machine the threading.

He machines the cylinder, wipes his brow. TIME PASSES.

At the end of our time passage, time slows then resumes and Sam slumps onto a stool. He places several parts into a bin. Folds his arms across his chest. Shrugs off sleep, then succumbs.

Aggie slumps into a chair. Fades off into sleep. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

Odd machine sounds, occasional rain tapping on the metal roof.

IN BLACK we hear Frank, faintly .

FRANK

Sam.

(a beat, then louder)

Sam!

Lights BUMP UP. Frank hovers, cigarette dangling from his mouth. He carries hand drawn papers, crumpled a bit.

FRANK (cont'd)

Sorry, Sam. We need these now.

SAM

(groggy but recovering quickly)

All right. I'll get it. How long have I been out?

FRANK

An hour or so.

(starts to exit, then turns back)

You think you could whip up, say, five 8 and 3/4 inch silver plates, and a slide mechanism about-

(demonstrates with his fingers)

Yea big?

Sam reaches into his pocket for his trusty calipers. Measures the distance.

SAM

Hmm. What's it going into?

Frank indicates a slot about "yea big" and Sam measures that as well.

SAM (cont'd)

I'll give you a few options for variance. How'd the last push part work for you?

FRANK

It didn't.

(off Sam's look)

Not your fault. We're trying... well, everything. But we're failing.

SAM

I'll get to work.

In our final TIME PASSAGE, Sam does the following actions. Frank appears periodically, almost sped up, out of time.

#1- Large silver sheets of metal fed through a SHAPER.

#2- Uses every machine in the place. Places finished parts in the bin.

#3- Checks the prints, makes notes on them, then continues machining.

SAM (cont'd)

So tired, Howie.

FRANK appears. Perhaps he's been there for some time.

FRANK

What's that? Howie?

Sam shakes his head. Maybe he's not aware.



FRANK (cont'd)

How's it coming?

SAM

Finished. Parts are in the bin.

Frank inspects them.

FRANK

You added a curve, huh?

SAM

Seemed like what you wanted.

FRANK

That was Ernest's sketch, so we'll see.

SAM

Dr. Lawrence is here?

Frank nods- he's said too much. Perhaps. He wipes his brow with his hand. Sam grabs a clean rag from one of his shopcoat pockets, hands it to Frank who wipes his brow.

FRANK

Thanks, Sam.

He pockets the rag and lights up another cigarette.

FRANK (cont'd)

We've now been at it for, what-?

(checks his watch, Sam looks up at the clock)

-31 hours? And nothing's working.

Sam reacts in dismay. Frank waves him off, hopefully.

FRANK (cont'd)

There's still a chance. We have a few more tricks in the bag. Go home for a few hours, get some sleep, acclimate to the town as much as you can.

SAM

No, I'll stay and-

FRANK

We won't need you until-

SAM

It's important we keep going-

FRANK

Sam- we're stumped. There's nothing more you can do right now. The Eastman Company folks can help if we get going again.

Sam acquiesces. Moving over to him, Frank shakes his hand.

FRANK (cont'd)

Not bad for your first day. We're all impressed. It's good to have you here, Sam. I hope it's not for long.

SAM

Well, that's the hope. Hey Frank, I'd like an assistant. This is a lot for one-

FRANK

(sighing)

It'll be tricky. It has to be someone who has enough clearance, enough-

SAM

Dwight.

FRANK

Dwight Stillwell? No, he-

SAM

He's damn good. We work well together. I'll work myself to death without an assistant.

FRANK

I agree, but we... well, we need someone more qualified to-

SAM

You and I both know Dwight's the guy. If you're comfortable enough with getting me an assistant, Dwight's the obvious-

FRANK

Dwight's a negro, Sam.

SAM

I've noticed.

FRANK

That's not- we're in Tennessee, Sam. You know that.

SAM

I know that.

FRANK

All right. You can manage. Can he?

SAM

I'm sure of it.

FRANK

I'm not.

(shakes his head)

But you're right, he makes sense. However this isn't Berkeley, Sam. And tension is tighter than a two dollar tie. We have to be careful.

SAM

This is for the good of our country, Frank.

FRANK

Oh hell, I don't disagree. It's absurd you feel the need to-

(beat)

I'll ask Dwight.

SAM

He could say no.

FRANK

He could say no.

SAM

He won't.

FRANK

No, I don't figure he will.

(shaking his head)

His only job is to machine. You're not to divulge any original prints to him, or any completed sections we're working on. You'll work opposite hours, where we can swing it, but there'll be a lot of overlap. You finesse at the bench. Leave him notes on any unfinished work orders. Got it?

Sam nods. Frank grabs his hat and heads off.

FRANK (cont'd)

Things aren't the same. Here or now. You need to remember that.

SAM

I know what's at stake. You may see it in the macro, but I see the micro.

A beat. Frank, about to retort, turns and exits.

Sam cracks his neck, looks down at the dosimeter. Too tired to read the damn thing. He packs up his tools.

The rain PELTS Sam's hat as he makes his way home through the mud. The rain shudders, then subsides.

**FOUR. LIVING ROOM OF THE PENN HOUSE, OAK RIDGE. PROJECTION:  
OAK RIDGE. DAY THREE.**

The living room contains a couch, coffee table, armchair, attached dining room with table and chairs, and kitchen behind that. A door leads into the bedroom with a small full-size bed. All stylized.

Outside, the sound of light rainfall and occasional thunder in the distance.

Aggie rummages through her green metal bankers box, searching for something.

A KNOCK at the door.

She stays focused on the box, gently moving aside papers. She breathes a sigh of relief, and pulls out a manila folder.

The KNOCK.

Aggie topples over the box, spilling a stack of papers, letters.

The KNOCK again.

AGGIE

Just a moment, please!

She does her best to pick up the papers, handling them with care.

Sam enters the room wearing a bathroom. He looks like hell.

SAM

Aggie, what's-?

AGGIE

Sorry Sam, I wanted to let you sleep and-

The KNOCK again. More insistent.

SAM

Just a-

AGGIE

Just a moment. Coming.

(to Sam)

You must be beat.

SAM

I am.

AGGIE

You've never worked that long in one go. How was it?

He shrugs. She finishes picking up the papers and closes the lid on the banker's box.

SAM

(re: the folder in her hand)

What's that?

AGGIE

Resume.

SAM

(groggy)

Ah. Not sure it works like that here.

AGGIE

(a bit rankled by his comment)

Sit. I'll get you some coffee.

With a grunt of acknowledgement, Sam slumps onto the couch.

A final KNOCK, just as Aggie opens the door.

LIZ TREVOR stands smiling, holding a small strawberry cake. A Kodak Brownie box camera slung loosely at her side. She's vivacious.

LIZ

Thanks! This cake is heavy. I saw them lower your house onto the concrete slab from my window. Now two days later, you're in it. My husband and I- oh, may I come in?

AGGIE

Of- of course. Please.

LIZ

I wondered how long this slab was going to be unoccupied. I figured, I kept telling Roger, honey, I bet by the end of the week and sure enough! Well, here you are. Where would you like this?

SAM

Uh, how about over there on the-

AGGIE

-dining room table.

LIZ

Lovely.

Liz excitedly looks around.

LIZ (cont'd)

All of these prefabricated homes look the same don't they? Inside and out. Of course you'll personalize yours, in your way. Roger and I have-

She puts the cake down a bit too hard. Nearly tripping she puts her hand through the cake.

LIZ (cont'd)

Whoops! Oh my.

(licks some frosting off)

It still tastes delicious. Do you have a towel or-?

Sam taps Aggie, who stands staring at this stranger. Aggie shakes her head back to the present, looks around the kitchen.

LIZ (cont'd)

I see it.

She helps herself to the kitchen, grabs a dishtowel, and wipes her hand.

LIZ (cont'd)

(returning to the living room)

There we go. All better. Oh dear! I'm Liz. Liz Trevor.

AGGIE

Aggie. Aggie Penn. This is Sam.

SAM

A pleasure.

(beat)

Next-door neighbor?

LIZ

You bet!

SAM

You said your husband was-

LIZ

Oh he's at work. He's a security officer. I'm really not sure what he does beyond that. He should be home soon if you'd care to stop by this afternoon.

SAM

Thank you, but I have to head into work.

AGGIE

Your coffee.

SAM

Thanks.

AGGIE

Any coffee for you, ah-

LIZ

Liz. No thank you. I smell the stuff and I turn green.

(off their looks)

But you go right ahead. It's your home.



SAM

All right.

AGGIE

Have a seat.

LIZ

Thank you!

Liz sits down on the couch and launches into her version of the shpiel.

LIZ (cont'd)

You'll discover that despite the secrecy inside the gates, we carry on as normally as possible. We have dances, we call our relatives, and we sling gossip at the parlour. You probably haven't been down to the grocery store yet, have you?

SAM

I've been at work for a couple days.

LIZ

They're open late.

SAM

A couple days straight.

LIZ

Oh. Oh my.

(beat)

Well, get to the store early and be prepared to stand in a loooooong line! I'll give you more tips as I think of them. We've only been here for about month, but I'm figuring it out. Everyone here is pretty much a new resident, actually.

SAM

Thank you for the-

Liz starts coughing.

AGGIE

(from the kitchen)

Are you all right?

SAM

(standing)

Would you like a glass of water, or-?

LIZ

I'll be- I'll be fine.

(wrinkling her nose)

Coffee smell.

(beat)

I should go.

AGGIE

(returning)

Ah, very nice to meet you, Liz. I'm sure we'll be seeing you soon.

LIZ

(coughing)

And often! I hope! Oh, just a- do you mind?

(holds up her camera)

I like to document the newbies for my scrapbook.

Sam and Aggie look questioningly at one another, waiting for the other one to take the lead.

LIZ (cont'd)

Personal photography. It's within the New Resident Guide's regulations. I run a photography club, officially endorsed by Ed Westcott. He's the official area photographer. He likes our work, he even- we have two members. I'm hoping for more, but-

SAM/AGGIE

Sure.

SAM

I'll go change.

LIZ

No, it's all right. It actually ... enhances the composition of the shot. If you don't mind.

SAM

Er.... no?

Sam and Aggie strike an awkward pose, showcasing the house's interior.

LIZ

Say "journey proud."

SAM

What?

SNAP! The photo is taken and Liz's light immediately bumps out. Select lights remain up on the couple in a sort of black and white capture. Then a slow fade, which crosses to-

LIZ outside, happily shooting the surroundings. We see her photographs: the hills of Oak Ridge, various houses, and bizarre factories. These photos are then blacked out, as if censored.

FIVE. THE PENN RESIDENCE, OAK RIDGE. BACK YARD. EARLY EVENING, CHRISTMAS 1943. **PROJECTION: OAK RIDGE. DAY 123.**

Aggie stoops at the base of a BLACKBERRY BUSH. A projection of the same overhead. The bushes are wild. Aggie uses shears to prune. She wears a light jacket and shucks off the cold with determination.

AGGIE

Sam, weren't you going to come (help)-?

Finishing up.

SAM (OFF)

AGGIE

(to herself)

It was easier when you had a garage.

What?

SAM (OFF)

AGGIE

Still pruning. A few weeds.

Rice?

SAM (OFF)

AGGIE

No! Weeds!

Almost finished!

SAM (OFF)

Aggie returns to the bushes. Shudders.

AGGIE

Me too.

She wipes her hands and inspects the bushes. Picks up the Kodak Brownie BOX CAMERA at her feet and snaps some pictures.

Sam comes out and presents a small WOODEN WREATH.

SAM

Not my best, but I cleaned up after myself, so that should count extra.

(handing her a coat)

Here. It's freezing out.

AGGIE

Thanks. I wasn't planning on taking as long as I did.

She lets him put the jacket over her shoulders.

SAM

How are the blackberries?

AGGIE

Pruned. The bushes seem healthy, but at the same time look like they could wilt any second.

(noticing the wreath)

That's perfect for our first and last Christmas in Oak Ridge. Hold it up so I can get a picture.

He does.

SAM

Wait! Look at this.

He pulls out the middle of the wreath, creating a 3-D effect.

SAM (cont'd)

It telescopes.

AGGIE

Why?

SAM

Why not?

AGGIE

All right.

(eyes in the camera)

That's great Sam. Lower the- yes. Just under your chin. Hold steady.

SAM

Aggie-

AGGIE

(lowering the camera)

What?

SAM

We might be here for some time.

AGGIE

I know. But I'm hoping the war ends tomorrow.

SAM

What's tomorrow?

AGGIE

Another day.

(beat)

Lift it a little higher. Great. Smile.

He does and Aggie snaps the picture.

SAM

How's the- you know? The-

AGGIE

Photography club?

Sam nods. He's freezing.

AGGIE (cont'd)

It's fine.

SAM

Just fine?

AGGIE

Yes. Just fine.

(uncomfortable, she shifts- slightly)

Liz had us shooting the, uh, the colored, uh, hutments yesterday. She wants to document everything and everyone.

SAM

Hutments. Odd word.

AGGIE

Never heard it till we came here. That where Dwight is?

SAM

Yeah. He doesn't talk much about it.

(beat)

I'm glad you're keeping busy.

AGGIE

Yes. It's... it's hard for me.

SAM

I know.

AGGIE

No, you don't.

She gathers her things.

SAM

That's not what I meant. You're used to working, I've seen how good you are at your job, and to have that taken away in a flash is-

AGGIE

It wasn't taken away, Sam. I-

SAM

I know-

AGGIE

I made the choice. I did that.

SAM

I know. That I know. I'm only saying-

AGGIE

It's hard.

SAM

Yeah. And I'm sorry.

AGGIE

Nobody's hiring in town. I've been asking for months. I could go to the District Engineer, demand they put me-

SAM

Don't do that.

AGGIE

I won't. I'm not about to get us in trouble.

SAM

(beat)

They might not look kindly on it, but they're not going to-

AGGIE

I have the blackberries.

(sighing)

Sam, I didn't want to stay without you. That's not a marriage.

SAM

I'd go crazy if I couldn't see you every day.

She kisses him on the cheek.

AGGIE

Me too. Let me take a few more shots of these bushes, then I'll be in.

SAM

All right. Don't freeze.

(looking at the bushes)

I wasn't any help at all.

AGGIE

No. But you crafted a wreath. And you cleaned up after yourself.



SAM

That I did.

He smiles and heads back inside. Aggie stuffs her tools in an apron and holds the camera up to her face.

SAM (OFF) (cont'd)

Aggie!

Nearly dropping her camera, Aggie turns.

AGGIE

What's-

Sam runs back on.

SAM

You didn't tell me about-

AGGIE

What?

SAM

(brandishing a postcard)

You didn't see this?

AGGIE

Well, I picked up the mail from the post office after getting groceries, but I hadn't a chance to-

SAM

Look at this, Aggie. From Howie. Look.

She reaches her hand out. Pauses. Good news or bad news, either way, she struggles.

SAM (cont'd)

(insistent)

Look.

She takes it, hands Sam her camera. He reads over her shoulder.

AGGIE

(reading)

“Dearest Sis, I’m allowed to write you and let you know...”

(looking up)

He’s alive. Oh God, he’s alive.

SAM

Yes.

AGGIE

(continues)

“... let you know I’m all right. Tell Mother and Dad I’m all right. Please tell Sam I miss his baking and woodworking lessons. Your brother, Howie.”

She wipes her face. Sam holds her.

SAM

He’s all right.

AGGIE

He’s alive.

(reading)

Fukuoka #17 Camp, Japan.

SAM

He’s in a prison camp.

AGGIE

He’s alive.

Aggie hands the postcard to Sam.

AGGIE (cont'd)

(beat)

I'm cold.

SAM

Me too. Let's get inside.

AGGIE

In a minute. I'll finish up here.

Sam nods and heads inside.

LIGHTS FADE OUT. The middle of a newsreel from May 1944 showcasing "Women in Uniform" plays.

A single light up on AGGIE, who digs and scrapes in the dirt. Her face and clothes are filthy, evocative of a soldier in the trenches: wet, cold, and tired. Her light fades out.

**SIX. Y-2 AREA, EXPERIMENTAL METAL SHOP. SPRING 1944. PROJECTION: OAK RIDGE. DAY 229.**

Machines hum in constant activity. A RADIO ADDRESS adds to the cacophony.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

When we think of Spring, we think of bunnies and daffodils. Not so for the brave men fighting a war, a war which, we hope will end soon. But there are no guarantees. We must be vigilant we must be strong. We need to bring our boys back to the bunnies and daffodils, back to the United States. Spring of 1944 brings with it a sense of hope, and with that hope we must-

The radio squeaks, then changes to period music.

Lights up as DWIGHT works at a lathe, machining threading on a pipe. Sam sits at his workbench comparing parts to a blueprint, filing and soldering where necessary, and using a BENCH GRINDER and DRILL PRESS.

Dwight finishes, springs up with the part, and zips over to Sam.

DWIGHT

All four threaded.

SAM

(inspecting)

Clean. Looks good, Dwight.

DWIGHT

Need anything else?

SAM

Not right now, I don't think. I'm staying late, so I'll finish these on my own.

DWIGHT

Then I am too.

SAM

No, no, it's just to clean this up. And Frank asked me to stay late, something about the next work order.

DWIGHT

All right. I could catalog material while you-

SAM

You've been here for thirteen hours.

DWIGHT

I'm not tired.

SAM

I am, and I've only been here for ten.

Dwight shakes his head.

DWIGHT

I can help, let me-

SAM

I think Frank wanted to speak with me alone, as soon as you left.

DWIGHT

Oh. All right.

He packs up his tools and grabs his jacket while Sam cleans parts. Dwight turns off the radio and Sam visibly relaxes.

SAM

Thanks.

DWIGHT

I know you only tolerate it for me.

A beat while Dwight clears his workspace.

SAM

This thing with Frank wanting to see me alone- it's not a trust issue.

DWIGHT

Never said it was. But he can always just tell me "Dwight- I need you to step outside." I'd rather that.

SAM

Tell him. You walking back with Wallace?

DWIGHT

Yeah, he's meeting me outside the checkpoint.

SAM

Good.

DWIGHT

It probably won't happen again. But I feel better walking back to our part of town with him.

SAM

The MPs should do their damn jobs and-

DWIGHT

Just people being... people.

SAM

If they harass you again you can-

DWIGHT

No, I can't. But I'll be all right.

SAM

If you want to wait, I can-

DWIGHT

I'll be fine, Sam. I don't need a protector.

SAM

Never said you did. I'm your friend, is all.

DWIGHT

Good night, Sam.

SAM

Night, Dwight. Good to have you here.

DWIGHT

You been sayin' that since I got here.

SAM

Fact's a fact.

He smiles. Dwight waves and exits. Sam continues working. He checks his watch.

No sooner as he lowered his head, than FRANK strides through the door.

SAM (cont'd)

Frank.

FRANK

Sam. You got time to talk?

SAM

You timed that to the minute.

(looking up)

I know Dwight doesn't have clearance, but can't you-

FRANK

No, I can't.

SAM

Just ask him to his face instead of sneakin' around.

FRANK

That's not what I'm doing.

SAM

It is. Own up to it and...

Sam shakes his head, rubs his eyes.

SAM (cont'd)

Sorry. Tired is all.

FRANK

Yeah, we could all use some sleep.

SAM

Dr. Lawrence never slept.

FRANK

(allowing a slight smile)

Seemed that way, didn't it? No time to sleep for him. He's heading back to Berkeley for a bit. Bob'll be off to New Mexico. We have something else to try over there.

SAM

Dr. Lawrence finally figure out his orange?

Frank assesses the man before him, wearily. Rubs his neck.

A beat. Time to tell him.

FRANK

No, the orange is history. This is the future.

He reaches into his pocket and holds up a small wooden  
SPHERE, the size of a racquetball.

SAM

I have one of those too.

He pulls out the STEEL BALL, tosses it to Frank.

FRANK

(inspecting the ball)

Not quite like ours. This is a little off. The ridging on it... like the lathe got out of control  
for a second. Did you machine it?

SAM

(shakes his head 'no')

What's yours for?

FRANK

(holding up the sphere)

This might be able to end the war in a blink. We're probably about halfway there.

He tosses the sphere to Sam, who SNATCHES it out of  
the air like a fly ball.

FRANK (cont'd)

Help us with the other half.

Sam holds up the sphere, inspects it.

SAM

What's this?

FRANK

The first half.



As Sam inspects it, Frank continues.

FRANK (cont'd)

We were finally successful in creating what we call the "product." Here at Oak Ridge most everyone is working on mass-producing that product for us. They don't know it, of course, can't know it. The plants are all spread out, and each method is different. The calutrons, our version of the cyclotrons, are only one component, and-

SAM

I don't need to know this, Frank. I don't want to know.

FRANK

(waving him off)

There are other things besides the product. You're responsible for the second half.

SAM

Other things...

He manipulates the sphere like the steel ball at the beginning of the play.

FRANK

Oh sure, we're exploring a wide variety of options. We have to. Right now, Sam, this very moment, Heisenberg and the Germans could be as far, if not further, than us. The Japanese might have their own version. We just don't know. We're working blind.

SAM

We're going to win. We don't have a choice.

FRANK

We have the brightest minds, Allied minds, working on it. A lot of scientists will be rotating through here rapidly now. I know you'll give 'em anything they ask for.

SAM

Of course.

FRANK

Ernest, Bob, Dr. Teller, me... feel free to speak up. We'll all be going back and forth between here, Chicago, Berkeley, Los Alamos... we can't afford contradictory notes in your shop, so you keep us all in line, all right?

SAM

Yep.

Sam nods. Frank motions for the sphere. Sam tosses it back. Frank returns Sam's ball and he pockets it.

FRANK

(gesturing to Sam's steel ball)

You should probably leave that thing at home. If it becomes irradiated, then we have a problem.

SAM

Hasn't hurt me yet.

FRANK

Hm.

A beat from both men.

SAM

Frank, are we saving lives or taking them?

A long beat.

FRANK

You worked on big 50 cal machine guns, tank augmentation, over at Rock Island. Experimental weapons. More of the same at Lockheed and Berkeley.

SAM

Berkeley was mostly non-military applications.

FRANK

Mostly. But quite a bit of our work can be applied to military needs, especially in wartime. Which is where we are.

SAM

You're all right with that?

FRANK

(considers, then:)

I believe mankind can benefit from all knowledge, and that's my job. To know. I've only ever wanted to help humanity.

SAM

So what are we doing?

Frank and Sam share a long look.

FRANK

We're helping.

Beat.

SAM

What is that?

FRANK

(pulling out the sphere)

It's just a sphere.

SAM

Nothing is "just" anything.

FRANK

Good night, Sam.

He exits. Lights dim.

Sam removes his shopcoat and hangs it up in the work area.

He gently places his hands on his workbench. A deep sigh. Looks up.

He nods, and heads to the door. Takes out his ball and studies it. He's about to turn off the lightswitch when the lights COME UP on AGGIE at home.

She's listening to the same radio broadcast that started the scene.

ANNOUNCER (VO)

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She turns the radio off. Angrily shakes her head and stands.

AGGIE

Enough. That's enough.

She grabs her coat and hat, turns out the lights, and exits furiously.

END ACT ONE.