It's good that we're talking remotely this evening. If we were together, in the same space, I would hurt you. I would attack your bones. You wouldn’t feel anything initially. See, I’m unstable. I have great power, and no conscience. And, I have a half-life of 1,620 years. I am a small cylinder of luminous radium chloride that my champion kept beside her pillow as she slept. She loved me. Still, I hurt her. I caused her death. And I have caused the deaths of countless others. I’ve also saved lives.

My heroine was born in Warsaw in 1867.  She spent her early life in Russian-ruled Poland. She dreamed of studying at the Sorbonne in Paris. Abandoned by a lover at 24, she fled heartbreak in Poland and boarded a train to Paris. She enrolled at the Faculty of Sciences at the Sorbonne and completed degrees in mathematics and physics. She was introduced to a handsome scientist, and began working in his lab. He saw her as collaborator, muse, and guide. They fell in love and married in July 1895. Two years later, their daughter Irene was born.

For her doctoral thesis, my heroine advanced the work of physicist Henri Becquerel on the fluorescence of uranium salts. She saw that rays were an atomic property of uranium. Her results raised tantalizing new questions and launched a new science. “I coined the word radioactivity,” she wrote. Realizing that radioactivity could be used to search for new elements, she tested all 80 of the known elements of the periodic table, then began to sample metals, minerals, salts, and oxides. Pitchblende, a byproduct of mining uranium, copper, and cobalt, yielded startling results. Using her husband's instruments, my heroine determined that pitchblende’s radioactivity was more powerful than any known substance. Through lots of experimentation, she found that there was a microscopic, nameless, and extraordinarily radioactive ingredient in the natural pitchblende. She and her husband identified it. My heroine named it “polonium” in honor of Poland. She and her husband discovered radium that year, too.

Chemists wanted to see and touch polonium and radium, so my heroine and her husband tried to extract measurable amounts of them from seven tons of pitchblende in a ramshackle shed at the Sorbonne. In 1902, after four years of physically taxing work, they extracted one tenth of a gram of me, radium chloride, from 400 tons of water and 40 tons of corrosive pitchblende.

Their love deepened. During 11 years, they were scarcely ever separated.

On June 25, 1903 my heroine defended her thesis “Researches on Radioactive Substances.” She was the first woman in France to receive a doctorate. That year, she, her husband, and Henri Becquerel received the Nobel Prize. My champion was too ill to accept the award, because I was corroding her bones, straining her breathing, and burning her skin. I did the same to her husband.

After a summer holiday away from their toxic lab, my heroine gave birth to a second daughter, Eve, in December 1904. In April 1906, her husband was killed when he was struck by a horse-drawn carriage in Paris. The Sorbonne offered her husband’s professorship to my champion. She was the first woman professor in the University’s 650-year history.

My heroine and the brilliant physicist Paul Langevin, became lovers in 1910. Paul was her husband's former student. It was lovely. But, there was a problem. Paul was married. Meanwhile, my heroine determined a decay series for extremely radioactive polonium. By electrolyzing me, she isolated radium in its metallic state. In November, 1911, Mme. Langevin revealed to the press that her husband and my dear scientist were having an affair. Three days later, my heroine received word that she had won a second Nobel Prize in 1911 for chemistry for her discoveries of radium and polonium. The affair ended.

In 1914, my heroine and her daughter Irene created 18 mobile hospital X-ray units and 200 stationary X-ray units to bring radiation technology to the battlefield of World War I. My champion was slipping away due to years of exposure to me and to polonium. Ever the scientist, she chronicled her deterioration as lab data. She died on July 4, 1934 from aplastic pernicious anemia, due to prolonged radiation exposure.

I live on in my champion's notebooks, which are too radioactive to handle. They are locked up in an Institute in Paris.