

schoolhouse. I have questions, I have fundamental problems with the state of human knowledge! Who are we, why are we — where are we!

MARGARET. Wisconsin.

HENRIETTA. In the universe!

MARGARET. Still Wisconsin.

HENRIETTA. *Margie*, I am not just curious I am charged and poised and you *know* that I'll just get more and more annoying until I go — You know this — You know this. (*Margie knows this. Pause.*)

MARGARET. One day there will be a word for you. Just — for me, for our father, who will only after much snorting approve of this — when you go? Take a Bible.

HENRIETTA. I think Harvard has those.

MARGARET. You know what I mean. We look in the same direction — (*Points up.*) but our understanding is ... distinct.

HENRIETTA. I love you. It's too cold for God.

MARGARET. That's why we keep Him inside.

HENRIETTA. *Margie*, come with me.

MARGARET. *I can't.*

HENRIETTA. Why not?

MARGARET. Because Father counts on me, and if you leave I can't leave, and I don't want to leave and ... Samuel proposed. (*Moment.*)

HENRIETTA. What.

MARGARET. To marry.

HENRIETTA. Who?

MARGARET. Henri.

HENRIETTA. I mean, "when."

MARGARET. This morning, thank you for noticing.

HENRIETTA. Aha, jumpy.

MARGARET. Yes. Other people's lives are also in progress.

HENRIETTA. Is he...?

MARGARET. Inside looking very attentive until the service ends. And I answer.

HENRIETTA. What's your answer?

MARGARET. Of course I will.

HENRIETTA. To Samuel?

MARGARET. Well I wanted to talk to you first.

HENRIETTA. You'd leave me for Samuel?

MARGARET. You just said you're leaving me!

HENRIETTA. Not for Samuel!

MARGARET. He is very good and ... (*Small pause.*)

HENRIETTA. Yes. He is.

MARGARET. He is. And I'm happy.

HENRIETTA. Then ... I am too. (*They hug — marriage! Yay!*)  
Come with me.

MARGARET. Just ... come back. (*Squeezes Henri's hand and runs inside.*)

HENRIETTA. And so. I go. (*Preps herself as ... The Harvard Observatory falls into place around her ... We hear Margaret singing "For the Beauty of the Earth."*)

MARGARET.  
*For the beauty of the Earth,  
For the glory of the skies;  
For the love which from our birth,  
Over and around us lies;*

*Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This, our hymn of grateful praise.*  
(*Margaret fades away. Transition ...*)

Start      Scene 2

*Henrietta stands in the vacant room of the Harvard Observatory — A small wooden room like an attic — desks, file drawers, and boxes fill the room.*

*Peter — unintentionally handsome, a bit bumbling — enters briskly, a pencil behind his ear, charts, papers.*

HENRIETTA. Excuse me, is this the Observatory office?

PETER. Oh — yes — Hello. You must be my ten o'clock. Miss Leavitt. You are Miss Leavitt?

HENRIETTA. I am. Henrietta Leavitt and I'm thrilled to —

PETER. Good. We'll make this quick. It's not that complicated.

HENRIETTA. May I just say how pleased I am to meet you, Dr. Pickering. I am so honored —

PETER. No.

HENRIETTA. I'm not?

PETER. *I'm not.*

HENRIETTA. You're not Dr. Pickering?

PETER. I am.

HENRIETTA. You *are* Dr. Pickering?

PETER. So sorry. My name is Peter Shaw. I work for Pickering.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Lovely. Mr. Shaw. Nice to meet you. Colleagues then. (*Peter snorts.*)

PETER. You actually work *for* me. And I work for him. So.

HENRIETTA. So we're still colleagues it would seem.

PETER. Technically yes but —

HENRIETTA. And here I thought Harvard was such a technical place.

PETER. No, I just mean that — I mean of course it is it's just — You see I'm Dr. Pickering's apprentice — Junior Fellow in Astronomical Research, summa cum laude, Mathematics *and* Physics.

HENRIETTA. And if you spot me I'll swoon.

PETER. What?

HENRIETTA. It's a technical term. Now, Mr. Shaw I've come a long way and I'm quite anxious to get started. (*He's staring a bit too long at her.*) May I?

PETER. Hm?

HENRIETTA. Get started. Or just point me to the telescope and I'll be fine.

PETER. The telescope?

HENRIETTA. (*Looking out a window.*) Is that it? The Great Refractor.

PETER. Yes, but —

HENRIETTA. One of the largest in the world.

PETER. I am very aware. Quite a point of pride for us. But. *This* is the workroom for you girls ... to work. In here.

HENRIETTA. A short orientation then.

PETER. We bring the Girls' Department photographic plates from the telescope — latest technology.

HENRIETTA. Yes. Good. Question. Why all women?

PETER. Oh. This is great. Pickering got fed up with the boys he was sent and said — really said this — that his housekeeper could do better, so he hired her. And she did better. Now it's quite a women's ... world ... up here.

HENRIETTA. I was expecting the usual world.

PETER. Oh I make regular rounds.

HENRIETTA. Rounds?

PETER. I come around.

HENRIETTA. To what end?

PETER. (*Snort-laugh.*) Evaluation. Of course.

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw, I also graduated summa cum laude, from Radcliffe, which is basically Harvard in skirts and lucky for us the universe doesn't much care what you wear, so my expertise and yours might just complement each other's if we can get past this encroachingly unpleasant first impression. (*Re: her hearing-aid.*) Or I could take this out, and you could keep ... orienting.

PETER. Well. You'll fit right in the harem.

HENRIETTA. The WHAT?

PETER. Oh — no — nono — it's just a name — a joke — "Pickering's harem." It's a compliment.

HENRIETTA. If you're a concubine.

PETER. He picks the best is what we mean. We could just call you that — "Pickering's Best." "Pickering's Picks" — That's got a ring. (*Glances quickly at her hand —*) You don't. (*Henrietta looks too, hides her hand. Pause. Awkward.*)

HENRIETTA. I was supposed to meet Dr. Pickering at ten.

PETER. Yes. Yes. And he sends his warmest welcome through me. He was detained. More important — not "important," *pressing*. More pressing matters. I'll show you around.

HENRIETTA. I'll come back.

PETER. There's no need for that.

HENRIETTA. I'd prefer to speak directly to the Head of the Department.

PETER. Miss Leavitt —

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw. I don't mean to be brisk — maybe a little if that would drive home the point that I'm *finally* here. After a long time not being anywhere. And I'd really like to get started, and all you've thus far conveyed is that I'm in some kind of *math harem* waiting to be *picked* — and that doesn't sound right at *all*.

PETER. I am so sorry. And Dr. Pickering is thrilled to have you here. And I'd get in a lot of trouble with him if I ran you off on your first day. So. Please stay. We'd very much like you to stay. (*Pause.*)

HENRIETTA. You don't sound very excited about all this work.

PETER. Well, it is *work*.

HENRIETTA. It's not your — how best to make you uncomfortable — *passion*?

PETER. That's a bit excessive for physics.

End