

## Scene 2

*Henrietta on that ocean liner at night. She is alone. Noise of people around her though. The sounds of a ship. She is so thoroughly happy. This is real ... not a dream. She looks up. A letter to Margaret ...*

MARGARET. "Dear Margie," *(But faraway, Peter reads a letter from Henrietta as well.)*

PETER. "Dear Mr. Shaw,"

HENRIETTA. I would like to say that I wish I could send you an image of this sky tonight. But I hope we never invent pictures that perfect — that would miss the point.

PETER. "Which is what?" I think staring out to sea."

HENRIETTA. I used to think that to *be truly alive* I needed answers. I needed to *know*. But all this does not in fact *need* to be known, does it? *We do*.

PETER. "We do."

HENRIETTA. Because the real point ... is seeing something bigger. And knowing we're a small part of it, if we're lucky. In the end that is a life well-lived.

PETER. "Please tell Miss Cannon that when I come back ... I have work to do."

HENRIETTA. Because thank God there's a lot out there bigger than me. See you soon. *(Peter and the ocean liner fade into time and distance ... as Henrietta returns home on a huge ship greeted by Margaret with a huge wave ...)*

MARGARET. Henrietta!  
*(The sisters hug a long hug.)*

HENRIETTA. Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. Margie! I missed you so much. Welcome to Boston.

MARGARET. And the same to you. Welcome back. Now tell me everything.

HENRIETTA. Well Paris *is* as perfect as you'd like to think and London is just — *(Henrietta staggers, sits, then cringes as a pain sweeps over her abdomen.)*

MARGARET. Henri. Henri.

HENRIETTA. I'm fine.

MARGARET. You're not fine. What is this?

HENRIETTA. It's nothing. It passes.

MARGARET. It's not nothing. You should have come home *immediately*.

HENRIETTA. There were only a few bad days.

MARGARET. Henrietta, they've invented doctors.

HENRIETTA. I saw one in London.

MARGARET. And you're seeing another one right now.

HENRIETTA. Margie, no —

MARGARET. The luggage can wait.

HENRIETTA. I'm going straight to Harvard —

MARGARET. You're coming back to Wisconsin with me — you're resting and —

HENRIETTA. I'm going to work — I want to work —

MARGARET. I don't care. There's time for all that —

**Start** HENRIETTA. *There's not. (Pause. Her look tells Margie it's serious.)*

WILLIAMINA. Wait now, there she is! Henri!

ANNIE. Henrietta! There she is.

WILLIAMINA. That's what I said. I said that was her. Henrietta, dear!

HENRIETTA. Oh my goodness, what are you doing here?

ANNIE. What are we doing here? Your sister told us you were finally coming back.

WILLIAMINA. And you have to save us from each other.

ANNIE. You really do. Now, we have a mountain of work to get through.

WILLIAMINA. *(To Margaret.)* Hello, you, I'm Williamina.

MARGARET. I'm Margaret. Hello.

HENRIETTA. Oh, this is my sister Margie. I thought you'd met.

MARGARET. Not yet, but I've heard so much — *(Annie gives Margaret an uncharacteristically large hug.)*

ANNIE. You're the sister! We've heard of you!

MARGARET. Oh my.

WILLIAMINA. You're scaring the poor thing, Annie.

ANNIE. Unfortunately common.

WILLIAMINA. Didn't Henrietta say you have a son?

MARGARET. I do. As tall as his father, and twice the charmer.

WILLIAMINA. Oh dear.

MARGARET. Let's just say that I do not fear a lack of grandchildren.

WILLIAMINA. Send him to me, I'll straighten him out.

ANNIE. Alright, ladies. The early graphs from Princeton are in and we need your eyes on them.

HENRIETTA. I can do that.

MARGARET. Henri, wait — *(To Annie.)* She was just saying she's been a bit poorly these days.

HENRIETTA. I'm fine and I'm so looking forward to being back.

ANNIE. You're sick?

HENRIETTA. No.

MARGARET. *Yes.* She nearly fainted just now — She's not well — and I really must insist —

HENRIETTA. *I'm* insisting, Margie. My work is here. And my life, and every chance I've ever had. Is here. *(Pause.)*

MARGARET. Then so am I. You can't get rid of me.

WILLIAMINA. Me neither.

ANNIE. And you can work from home when you like, so there's not a single reason we can't all go about our business as usual.

HENRIETTA. Thank you. Lunatic women. *(She braves a small pain again. She leans on Margie.)*

WILLIAMINA. *(Helping her ...)* Here we go, darlin'.

ANNIE. I'll get the bags.

MARGARET. We've got you, Henri. We're right here. *(Helping Henrietta walk off. Transition ...)*

### Scene 3

*Annie is in the office gathering plates. Peter enters.*

PETER. Excuse me. Miss Cannon.

ANNIE. Not today, Mr. Shaw.

PETER. I heard about Henrietta — Miss Leavitt. I heard she's sick? How sick? How is she?

ANNIE. Well she's making do. Working from home just down the street. I think you know that nothing is going to keep her down for long.

PETER. Nothing short of an earthquake.

ANNIE. That sounds about right. *(Pause.)*

PETER. *(Handing her a letter.)* Would you please give her this? I took the liberty of inquiring to a family physician and he said he'd

be happy to see her. She would never ask, but ... If you would tell her to please accept his services as a favor to me.

ANNIE. *(The first time they've ever really connected.)* I will. Thank you, Mr. Shaw. That's very ... Thank you. *(She takes his hand, shakes it. They are equals, for a moment at least. Transition to ...)*

End

### Scene 4

*Years later. Around 1918. Henrietta is at her small home in Cambridge with Margaret. She sits in a chair, covered by a blanket.*

MARGARET. We got the census today. I started to fill it out but I didn't know what to put under your profession?

HENRIETTA. Astronomer is my profession.

MARGARET. Alright.

HENRIETTA. *Astronomer.*

MARGARET. With a capital "A." And how are we doing today?

HENRIETTA. You know the worst part of this? Sitting still.

MARGARET. For you, I'm sure it is. How's the pain?

HENRIETTA. Not bad today.

MARGARET. But relaxing bothers you?

HENRIETTA. You can't order someone to relax and have it be relaxing.

MARGARET. Would you like to read some news?

HENRIETTA. I can't take any more war news. Did they send another astronomy circular?

MARGARET. You'd think a world war would make the stars seem trivial.

HENRIETTA. You'd think stars would make war seem trivial. I have never felt so helpless.

MARGARET. You're not helpless.

HENRIETTA. I write all these letters and no one answers. These men, colleagues, all using my work, but they won't let me near it. Useless. Helpless.

MARGARET. You're getting upset.

HENRIETTA. *Life* is about getting appropriately upset. And all I want to know is what's true — what *else* is true. And how long is