

HENRIETTA. Is it? I find the very notion of this work to be a thrill — a bracing excitement. And it's just something you *do*?

PETER. Well I enjoy the work, of course I do. It's interesting and reasoned and sound and my father pulled a lot of strings to — WhyDidYouSay“Passion”?

HENRIETTA. Unlike for some people, following this curiosity was not easy. I had to insist, which requires a dedicated desire unmatched by reason, which is called passion. You should try it. (*Tiny pause.*)

PETER. (*Blurting this out.*) I sing. Gilbert and Sullivan — I wanted to be an actor — Dad thought not — But — I still sing — On occasion — With enthusiasm. Does that count?

HENRIETTA. Technically. (*Slightly embarrassed, he picks up a glass star plate. Back to orienting.*)

PETER. Well. Here you go. One of the plates you'll be working with. A slice of heaven.

HENRIETTA. Beautiful. I should take one to my father.

PETER. *Excuse me.*

HENRIETTA. He's a pastor.

PETER. These never leave the premises.

HENRIETTA. You said “heaven,” I was joking.

PETER. Harvard property —

HENRIETTA. Of course —

PETER. Very expensive —

HENRIETTA. And if you don't mention the attempted larceny and I won't mention the musicals. (*She extends her hand, he takes it, shakes it.*)

PETER. You're ... curious.

HENRIETTA. In every way. (*A bustle outside — women coming back from break.*)

PETER. Oh, they're back. Watch out for Miss Fleming — Scottish stock. Swift and angry.

HENRIETTA. Oh my.

PETER. And Miss Cannon — don't get in her way, her name is Dickensian.

HENRIETTA. But I'd like to ask about —

PETER. What else can I tell you — Penmanship — key. Delicacy with the plates, they crack.

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw —

PETER. Twenty-five cents an hour.

HENRIETTA. I would love a chance to pursue —

**Start**

PETER. It's good money for women's work.

HENRIETTA. It's volunteering.

PETER. What are you asking, Miss Leavitt? (*Annie and Williamina enter, unnoticed.*)

HENRIETTA. That I might more fully engage in the ideas here?

PETER. Other than doing the work you've been hired to do?

HENRIETTA. Other than, pardon me, *do your math*. Now when may I use the telescope?

PETER. (*Flustered, not dismissive.*) Well. You can't. (*Henrietta is too shocked to answer. Annie clears her throat.*)

ANNIE. I'll take over, Mr. Shaw.

PETER. Yes — very good — Started to brief her.

WILLIAMINA. Then I'd be brief.

PETER. Yes — well — Good day, ladies. (*To Henrietta.*) I'll see you ... around. (*He leaves. They look at Henrietta.*)

WILLIAMINA. Welcome, Miss Leavitt.

HENRIETTA. Thank you. Hello. I was so excited to be here that I fear I might've scared him.

WILLIAMINA. Easy to do. Williamina Fleming. I like you.

HENRIETTA. Thank you.

ANNIE. Annie Cannon. I haven't decided.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Miss Cannon. I know that I probably shouldn't have gone on like that with him.

ANNIE. No you shouldn't.

HENRIETTA. And I'm sorry if I made a poor impression —

ANNIE. Harvard Observatory is the pinnacle of the astronomical community. The academic world looks to us.

HENRIETTA. To “bookkeep the stars,” if you talk to Mr. Shaw.

ANNIE. Which is why we try not to talk to Mr. Shaw. We are mapping the sky, Miss Leavitt. If doing what has never been done before sounds unimportant to you, uninspired? I'd leave before you are asked to. Otherwise, show some respect.

HENRIETTA. Of course. And I would never —

ANNIE. Respect is a *quiet* thing, Miss Leavitt. Practice this.

HENRIETTA. Yes, Miss Cannon.

ANNIE. Practice now. (*Henrietta nods. Pause. Will holds up one of the photographic star plates.*)

WILLIAMINA. Let me show you what we do here, Miss Leavitt. This is the latest technology. A photograph of the stars. And we chart every point of light on every one.

ANNIE. Every single one.  
 WILLIAMINA. Every scattered sneeze of them.  
 ANNIE. *Will*, don't be crude  
 WILLIAMINA. They look like ground pepper till you get the hang of it.  
 ANNIE. Williamina is our best photometer, from whom you'll learn much if she doesn't get herself fired. (*Williamina smiles, Annie glares.*)  
 WILLIAMINA. I used to be her boss.  
 ANNIE. You still *are*. We share leadership of this department —  
 WILLIAMINA. She outdid me with those letters.  
 ANNIE. I did no such thing —  
 WILLIAMINA. The star classifications were her idea.  
 ANNIE. A *collective* effort, I assure you.  
 HENRIETTA. Star classifications? That's your work?  
 WILLIAMINA. Oh yes indeed, the sky was a riot until Miss Cannon coded it. *I* wanted to give every star a number based on color — but *she* insisted on labeling stars with *letters* based on *temperature* —  
 ANNIE. Ladies —  
 WILLIAMINA. HENRIETTA.  
 OBAFGKM. OBAFGKM —  
 Yes.  
 HENRIETTA. You created a ... standard, Miss Cannon. My goodness. I'm so honored. I'm sure you'd laugh, but my professors made us memorize your letters using this ridiculous phrase —  
 WILLIAMINA. She also made up that ridiculous phrase.  
 ANNIE. But I didn't mean for it to find its way into textbooks.  
 HENRIETTA. "Oh Be A Fine Girl, Kiss Me." You did that too?  
 WILLIAMINA. She had a muse.  
 ANNIE. *Miss Fleming.*  
 WILLIAMINA. She thought it would be best for the boys. That's all they think about anyway.  
 ANNIE. Let's get back to work please.  
 WILLIAMINA. (*To Henrietta — whispering.*) Because she's the boss.  
 ANNIE. *I wouldn't have to be if you'd take this seriously, which is a ridiculous request of a woman who started the department.* (*To Henrietta.*) You know Will was the first woman to ever hold the title "curator" in astronomy? And the Draper Catalogue is *all* her work — She discovered stars, and nebulae, novae — She's the reason that I'm here, and even if she has far too much fun I am the first to admit that she is fundamental to this institution.

**End** WILLIAMINA. (*To Henrietta.*) And that, new friend, is how you introduce yourself without boasting.  
 ANNIE. I quit.  
 WILLIAMINA. (*To Annie.*) "Oh Be A Fine Grandma."  
 HENRIETTA. It's a great phrase.  
 ANNIE. We have WORK. TO DO. And Dr. Pickering is a very particular man.  
 WILLIAMINA. He calls us his *harem*.  
 ANNIE. He's joking.  
 WILLIAMINA. He's not. He measures a project in "girl hours."  
 ANNIE. He's joking.  
 WILLIAMINA. He's not. Sometimes "kilo-girl hours."  
 ANNIE. The point is, we're busy because we're essential.  
 WILLIAMINA. We're the dirt. (*Annie glares. Correcting ...*) From which mighty oaks grow.  
 HENRIETTA. And do we have a title of some sort?  
 WILLIAMINA. We do indeed. Congratulations, Miss Leavitt, you are now a computer.  
 HENRIETTA. What's a computer?  
 ANNIE. One who computes.  
 WILLIAMINA. Notate the plates, transfer the data, input the data, process, record, next star.  
 HENRIETTA. And the plates. How do I read them?  
 WILLIAMINA. Star Spanking. (*Annie reveals a wire-and-glass paddle like a small fly-swatter. Annie places the spanker over the plate.*)  
 ANNIE. Align the spanker with a star. The matching dot indicates how bright that star is. Record magnitude, position, date, and repeat until you fill up the logbook.  
 WILLIAMINA. Or go slightly crazy.  
 HENRIETTA. And what about working on our own ideas? Using the telescope for our own work?  
 ANNIE. You don't.  
 HENRIETTA. Oh. But I thought this was — ?  
 ANNIE. We collect, report, and maintain the largest stellar archive in the world. And we resist the temptation to analyze it.  
 HENRIETTA. But you just said how much you discovered here — both of you.  
 WILLIAMINA. Resisting doesn't always work.  
 ANNIE. Can you do this job, Miss Leavitt?  
 HENRIETTA. Of course I can.