## - THE PLAY -

**SCENE ONE:**

***(The late evening sky outside her father’s rural Massachusetts church – about 1900…***

***A ruddy sun sets on HENRIETTA*** *- a fiercely smart woman, curious, energetic, spilling over her own traditionalism.*

*Dressed primly and warmly, she points to the sky above her.* )

Heaven’s up there, they say.

HENRIETTA:

“Pearly clouds, pearly gates.” they say.

They don’t know much about astronomy, I say.

(*The sun is gone and* ***the sky darkens into night*** *.)*

The science of light on high. Of all that is far off and lonely and stuck in the deepest dark of space. Dark but for billions and billions of…

*(****The first star*** *to peek out.*

***A single note*** *accompanies it.)*

Exceptions.

*(As the* ***sister stars emerge****. Another note.)*

And I insist on the exceptional.

*(****As the night sky suddenly brightens into stark day*** *– MARGARET sneaks up on Henrietta and pinches her.)*

*Ow* – *What are you doing?*

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

You know church is about to start. You know this and you’re avoiding it and you’ve been caught.

HENRIETTA:

I haven’t been caught, I’ve been attacked.

With love.

MARGARET*:*

HENRIETTA:

With pinches. What kind of world is this.

MARGARET:

You’re not wearing your hearing aid, you’re fair game. Church. Now.

I can’t right now.

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

Oh yes you can, We’reWaitingI’mfreezingComeIn.

HENRIETTA:

Margie, I’m sorry but I cannot sit still right now.

MARGARET:

The only thing you have to do in church is sit still. Now tell me what’s going on or come inside.

HENRIETTA:

I’ve been trying to tell you all week but you’re busy and you’re barking and –

*I don’t bark*.

*(*bark-like)

MARGARET:

I’m running the house, and daddy’s running the church, and *you* – what are you doing? Staying up all night? In the cold? Like a moth?

HENRIETTA:

What is wrong with you this morning, Miss Jumpy.

I’m not jumpy –

MARGARTET:

I’m not a moth –

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

Why are we still outside?!

*Because.*

They have a job for me at Harvard.

HENRIETTA:

At the Observatory. Actual astronomy.

MARGARET:

Since when were you even looking for a job.

HENRIETTA:

Since they offered. Margie, this is an extraordinary thing. They need mathematicians and they asked me specifically –

Harvard asked *you?*

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

Yes and please don’t hold back your tone of shock.

This is shocking – I am shocked.

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

And I’m… leaving. I’m taking the job and I’m leaving.

(*holding out a letter. Beat.)*

You’ve always been leaving.

MARGARET:

Next week.

HENRIETTA:

Next…?

MARGARET:

Oh Henri. Now wait. We need to discuss this as a family.

HENRIETTA:

Margie, this could be my best life and it’s right in front of me.

And I’m still freezing.

MARGARET:

(*Margaret turns to go.)*

Margie, talk to me –

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

Fine – yes – I know that we were never going to be grow-old-next-to-each-other kind of sisters, and the way you drive me crazy makes that for the best – but – Henrietta this is extreme.

Exactly. Come with me.

HENRIETTA:

(*Small pause)*

Oh, Henri, please.

MARGARET:

Both of us. Come on.

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

What are you talking about? That’s absurd.

HENRIETTA:

Only a little! You’re the only person that understands me, and you’re always up for an adventure, and I *do* want to get old and scrappy with you.

I did not say scrappy.

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

You should come with me and fire up your heart!

What are you talking about?

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

The edge of the wide world!

It’s Boston.

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

A blaze of learning!

MARGARET:

A *blaze?*

HENRIETTA:

A blaze! And Radcliff is nearby and they have a music school.

Henri. Slow down.

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

You don’t have to stay here. You can be happy, you can loose yourself -

MARGARET:

*Loose* my – ? No. Stop. Do not start wearing bloomers.

Margie.

HENRIETTA:

# Stop

MARGARET:

*Wait.* There are women these days, and they wear pants, and it's ridiculous.

Now I have to play the hymns for the service that started ten minutes ago, and thank you, sister, my fingers are numb.

HENRIETTA:

*I need you to convince Daddy to give me my dowry.*

(*This stops Margie cold.)*

# Stop

I’m serious. Very.

Please talk to him.

HENRIETTA:

*Why do I get all the yelling jobs*?

MARGARET:

You’re so good at it.

HENRIETTA:

MARGARET:

This is your future, Henrietta. You know for certain that you’ll never marry, you’ll never fall in love – people do that. Uncoordinated, unplanned emotion – Just the word “spinster”, Henrietta, please.

HENRIETTA:

I need to start my life… with daddy’s money.

MARGARET:

Next the bloomers. Whiskey with suffragettes.

I’m not a cowboy.

HENRIETTA:

You know what I’m talking about.

MARGARET:

HENRIETTA:

I’m talking about Astronomy. You keep talking about terrible pants.

*It starts with pants.*

MARGARET: