

SCENE TWO:

(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 so pleased –

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 with a .)

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.

(staring a bit too long at her)

HENRIETTA (cont0:

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 you the photographic plates from the telescope – latest technology –

HENRIETTA:

Swoon.

PETER:

What?

HENRIETTA:

Go on. The plates come to us?

PETER:

Yes. The Girls Department is a very important part of the data collection.

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?

(He snort-laugh)

PETER:

Evaluation. Of course.

HENRIETTA:

Mr. Shaw, I also graduated summa cum laude, from Radcliff, 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 compliment each other 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.

(He 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 10.

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*.

Stop

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.

Stop

(*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.

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: