



***Silent Sky* by Lauren Gunderson**

Southern Plains Productions

SOUTHERN PLAINS PRODUCTIONS was founded in Oklahoma City in 2020 with a vision for accessibility in the performing arts. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit theatre company, we're committed to serving Oklahoma City with exceptional artistic productions that enhance quality of life for our audiences and bring great credit to our craft. It is our hope that our productions spark conversations and bring people together.

SEEKING: Southern Plains Productions is seeking non-union collegiate and early-career* artists who have prior theatre experience. We require all company members to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

*Southern Plains Productions defines early-career artists as those who have yet to be substantially celebrated in the theatre industry, the media, or the public at large.

Our organization is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. We believe in accessibility in the arts and we strive to hire actors and creative team members who share these values. Southern Plains Productions considers all races and gender identities for all roles.

- **Henrietta Leavitt** - female-identifying, 20-40 years old, any ethnicity.

(seeking deaf or HOH actor that signs ASL) An iconic historical astronomer who discovered Leavitt's Law in 1912, paving the way for female and disabled scientists for years to come. She is a fiercely smart woman, curious, energetic, and in constant friction with her taught traditionalism.

TO PREPARE: Choose either Side A, Side B, Side C, please sign along if you are able.

- **Annie Cannon** - female-identifying, 20-50 years old, any ethnicity

(seeking deaf or HOH actor that signs ASL) A trailblazing female astronomer. She takes Henrietta in and whips her into the woman she becomes. She is in a secret romantic relationship with her coworker Williamina, but would never allow that to get in the way of her work. Terse, sure, a firebrand..

TO PREPARE: Choose Either Side D, Side E, or Side F, please sign along if you are able.

NON-UNION COMPENSATION & HOUSING: Actors are given \$400 weekly along with a \$100 transportation stipend and a \$7 per diem for time spent on site in Oklahoma City. Out of town actors will also be given a \$300 travel reimbursement and premium housing accommodations in Oklahoma City near shops & restaurants.



HOW TO AUDITION: Please submit a recent headshot and resume, as well as an unlisted YouTube link containing your selected side, please sign along if you are able. All submissions should be emailed to the casting office - casting@southernplainsproductions.org

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP: Director: Cameron King (*she/her*); Artistic Director & Producer: Jackson Gifford (*he/him*); Production Stage Manager: Audrey Mantia (*she/her*).

SILENT SKY DATES: Zoom dramaturgical rehearsal: July 29th, Actors arrive in OKC: July 31st, First in-person rehearsal: August 1st, Opening: August 11th, End of contract: August 14th. Rehearsals take place six days a week from 9am - 5:30pm with evening commitments for tech and performances. Due to the short duration of this rehearsal process we will have two (2) longer tech days.

PETER. No.
HENRIETTA. I don't want you to miss this because of me. So go.
And write me. And come back.
PETER. Alright. Yes. But —
HENRIETTA. Go. We go, we come back. And then we ...
PETER. Continue the great experiment of our mutual compatibility.
HENRIETTA. And weather the storm of Williamina's laughter at
our expense.
PETER. I imagine it will be thunderous.
HENRIETTA. I'm certain of it.
PETER. So. You leave for a while, and I leave for a while.
HENRIETTA. It's just space.
PETER. And time.
HENRIETTA. Which leaves us...?
PETER. Afar. But not apart.
HENRIETTA. Afar. But not apart. I like that. *(Henrietta kisses
him sweetly on the cheek. Then Peter kisses her gorgeously, passionately.
Wow. But Peter and the Harvard Observatory are swept away from
her as the Leavitt home takes its place.)*

SIDE (A)

Scene 5

*Leavitt home — no stars. Henrietta comes to a stop in front
of a waiting Margaret. A box or two of glass star plates sit next
to her.*

START HENRIETTA. Hello. Margie, I'm here.
MARGARET. Henri. Come in. Hello. Come in. Everything's a
wreck. Glad you're here.
HENRIETTA. How can I help? What can I do?
MARGARET. Everything. Nothing. It's been a mess since last Sunday.
HENRIETTA. Last Sunday?
MARGARET. We couldn't get ahold of you.
HENRIETTA. I would've come sooner. I didn't know. What
happened?
MARGARET. He just fell over. Couldn't talk. Couldn't move.

HENRIETTA. Is there anything I can — ?
MARGARET. I don't know where to start. He can't do anything.
I'm at my wits' end.
HENRIETTA. Where's Sam?
MARGARET. Trying to organize for Sunday. When the town
preacher can't preach — And with Sam hurt, his leg, he fell — it's
just so much. It'll be fine. I'll play so at least it'll sound good.
HENRIETTA. They couldn't find someone else to play on Sunday?
MARGARET. *I can play. (Pause.)*
HENRIETTA. I'm so sorry you've had to do this on your own.
MARGARET. Well. There it is. *(Margaret sits. She's exhausted. Sees
the boxes of plates.)* What's that?
HENRIETTA. Work. A little.
MARGARET. You don't think this might be the time to put the
work down.
HENRIETTA. It's important.
MARGARET. And this is not?
HENRIETTA. No. I mean Yes. I mean I'm here. I'm right here.
MARGARET. I just wonder why you exceed expectation in
everything except this family. Even so, Daddy is so proud. You think
he isn't. You think he resents your "great escape," and because you
never wrote or came home, you wouldn't know. You also wouldn't
know that I made you up for him. I wrote letters for you, "from you,"
brought them in the house every week — So happy — thrilled! —
Read them to the whole family — "Look what we got from Henrietta
today!" "Oh Daddy, she says hello, she says she loves you, thank
you." On and on. Such a comforting fiction.
HENRIETTA. You didn't have to do that.
MARGARET. I did. So that you could have a home to come back
to. *(She goes.)*
HENRIETTA. Margie, please —
MARGARET. I am so busy. He'll need to be fed, the doctor's coming
in an hour. This is suddenly a lot of work and I am quite sure you'll
be leaving any minute so I better not get comfortable.
HENRIETTA. Margie, please stop. *(Touches her. Connects with her.)*
MARGARET. *(Asking what she never asks.)* Please. Help me.
HENRIETTA. I am not leaving. However long you need me. I
will not go.
MARGARET. But your work.

HENRIETTA. Is portable. They can send more and I can stay here. I want to. I do. I do. (*Margaret stops. Breath. Then scared, letting it go.*)

MARGARET. It's been so much. Too much.

HENRIETTA. I see that and I'm so sorry.

MARGARET. He was fine and then not and now ... Everything changes. Why does *everything* change?

HENRIETTA. (*Tentatively.*) Not changes, just changes form.

MARGARET. What?

HENRIETTA. There's a new theory. A German physicist —

MARGARET. Oh God.

END

HENRIETTA. Wait, he says that mass and energy are just different forms of the same thing. They shift back and forth forever. So nothing's gone. It just shifts. (*Beat.*) Why don't you practice for Sunday. I'll find Sam, and see if I can help. (*Margaret nods. Goes to her piano.*

Plays "For the Beauty of the Earth." Annie and Will appear faraway, together looking up. A letter.) Dear Dr. Pickering, Miss Fleming, Miss Cannon ... (*Peter appears faraway, looking at Henrietta.*) Due to family needs, I must remain here. Send more sky. (*Henrietta looks out over us as time passes ... Letters ... Peter on a ship. Henri at home.*) Dear Peter, I imagine you on the sea, night brilliant with stars. Instead, I spend the nights just as I did as a child — alone in the yard, looking up, dreaming of another life. Yours,

PETER. Dear Henrietta, HENRIETTA. Henrietta. Landed in England. Eclipse was stunning. You are ... everywhere. Afar but not apart,

HENRIETTA. Peter, PETER. Peter. It's hard not to feel like I've gone backwards. But it's good that I'm here. Father's not improving and Margie is so glad to have me. But I do miss ... everything.

PETER. Henrietta, HENRIETTA. Henrietta. Met the most brilliant men at Oxford, everyone discussing relativity. Paris was great, Zurich was cold. How are things at Harvard?

HENRIETTA. Peter, PETER. Peter. I haven't yet returned. But once I help Margie I intend to make my way back to my perfectly creaky desk. And your "rounds."

PETER. Henrietta, HENRIETTA. Henrietta. I just arrived in Cambridge and I have so much to tell you. When will you return?

HENRIETTA. Peter, PETER. Peter. I promise I'm coming as soon as I can.

PETER. But when will that be? We need you here.

HENRIETTA. Please send more plates.

PETER. I don't care about the plates. Where are you?

HENRIETTA. The same place: Afar but ... (*Perhaps she expects him to complete her sentence ...*) not apart? (*No response from Peter. An offering.*)

Peter? (*No response from Peter.*) Father's funeral was brief but full of friends. Which was good for the family. (*No response from Peter.*) It's been so long since I've heard from you. I fear my letters have gotten lost. Or you have.

PETER. Miss Leavitt, HENRIETTA. Henrietta.

I am very sorry to hear of your father's passing. (*Different, formal now.*) Harvard's very busy. Dr. Pickering is sending more plates for analysis. If you can manage.

HENRIETTA. Of course I can manage. And I'll be coming back soon.

PETER. (*Not a letter, a crack into his heart, which doesn't know what to say ...*) Of course you will. I just wish ... (*Lights dim, transition to ...*)

Scene 6

Henrietta sits at a table trying to look at the star plates, but there's not enough light, she doesn't have the equipment ... Margaret plays ...

MARGARET. (*Sings.*)

For the wonder of each hour

Of the day and of the night

Hill and vale and tree and flower

(*While working Henrietta sings, almost unconsciously, with Margaret on the last verse ...*)

MARGARET and HENRIETTA.

Sun and moon and stars of light ...

(*Beat. Margaret stops playing, approaches.*)

MARGARET. I think it's time we built you a study for all these boxes.

HENRIETTA. I'm sorry.

MARGARET. Or a ranch.

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

SIDE (B)

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

ANNIE. My gloves. *(Small pause.)*

HENRIETTA. Please don't think I sit here all night crying.

ANNIE. May I see what you sit here all night doing?

HENRIETTA. *(Hands Annie her notebook. Annie reads. Nothing.)*
The Cepheids. Of course.

ANNIE. You certainly have a knack for finding them.

HENRIETTA. But I'm finding that *finding* them isn't really worth much if they don't mean anything. And right now they don't.

ANNIE. They might.

HENRIETTA. I'm going on two thousand of them. And I'm starting to think it's like counting grass. You can count it, but why?

ANNIE. I *do* know the feeling. Show me what you've found.

HENRIETTA. *(Showing the ledger. Annie keeps reading. Nothing.)* The left side is a list of Cepheids arranged by fastest period of brightness. The middle column is their spectral class but I think I need to change it to luminosity because I'm not coming up with anything. There's no pattern.

ANNIE. No there's not.

HENRIETTA. I've wasted so much time on this.

ANNIE. Miss Leavitt —

HENRIETTA. I really thought I could sense something in the numbers. Really feel there was something important we weren't connecting, but no —

ANNIE. Miss Leavitt.

HENRIETTA. *Twelve* notebooks packed, staring at me, loose ends all loose and nothing to show and no meaning and nothing, *nothing* makes any damn sense.

ANNIE. Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. Excuse my language.

ANNIE. You're close. Keep working. Think about how you're thinking. It's in there.

HENRIETTA. Should I ask Dr. Pickering?

ANNIE. No.

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw.

ANNIE. Oh no. This one's yours.

HENRIETTA. Thank you.

ANNIE. Miss Leavitt, I think you're in the middle of it.

HENRIETTA. Of what?

ANNIE. That chance. *(She pulls out gloves from her coat pocket and puts them on. Annie leaves. Henrietta smiles, breathes. She takes out a spanker and does some kind of celebratory dance thing. Peter enters.)*

START

SIDE (C)

HENRIETTA. Oh my God.

PETER. Oh my God. Not to worry.

HENRIETTA. This is just —

PETER. Imposition, so sorry.

HENRIETTA. This is —

PETER. My fault completely.

HENRIETTA. This is *so* exciting! She's right, I push through it, charge through it, matter of time — I know the answer is there — I just keep going. Right? Yes! Hi. *(Lovely awkward pause.)*

PETER. Hello. I just came by for my ... hat.

HENRIETTA. Oh.

PETER. My gloves — left my gloves — and I saw the light and I thought, "Well I wonder how all the spanking is going."

HENRIETTA. Might we all agree to another name for that?

PETER. I think that's for the best.

HENRIETTA. Mr. Shaw, I know I shouldn't be here this late.

PETER. Actually I'd prefer it — much prefer it if you called me by my given name. Peter. Would be — nicer, nice.

HENRIETTA. Oh. Henrietta.

PETER. Good. *(Takes his gloves out of his pocket.)* Found them. *(Starts to go but doesn't —)* Miss — Henrietta — I — I don't know anything about you really and — and that's a shame. So. Might I know something about you? Now. Would be nice.

HENRIETTA. Oh. I grew up in Lancaster, family in Wisconsin, my hearing's not great, and I used my dowry to get here, which is why I'm a bit zealous about all this.

PETER. Ah.

HENRIETTA. And I play the clarinet. Not well.

PETER. I play also. Also not well.

HENRIETTA. Then we could be terrible together! I mean — that's not what I mean. I have a habit of blurring.

PETER. And I have a Dachshund. Named Carl. Which is fun. *(He smiles, she smiles. He wants to say ... but doesn't.)* Carl awaits. *(Peter leaves, forgetting his hat. Henrietta smiles. Picks up his hat. Flips it and puts it on her head. Peter returns.)* Sorry. Hat. *(Henrietta hands him the hat. He touches her hand.)* I think that ... you might be quite ... marvelous. I think that. Often. *(Silence. He leaves.)*

HENRIETTA. Oh that is not standard. *(She smiles. Peter enters again. This is an outpouring of pent-up romantic enthusiasm in nearly one breath.)*

PETER. There's an ocean liner leaving tomorrow — You should be on

it — I'll be on it — I'm saying come with me — to Europe — For a month — or two? You don't have to decide now — but close to now because the liner leaves tomorrow — I said that — Pack warmly — cold at night — We might stop in Spain — And there's dancing and lobster and water and moonlight and bobbing around and that's romantic — or sickening — Either way there'll be an eclipse. Which is fun.

HENRIETTA. I ... oh my ... yes, that sounds ... very interesting.

PETER. Interesting?

HENRIETTA. Incredible.

PETER. Oh good.

HENRIETTA. If it weren't on a boat.

PETER. You don't like boats? I didn't think of that.

HENRIETTA. No, I just can't leave my work. I'm very close to something and —

PETER. The ladies can't manage?

HENRIETTA. Not *this* work, no. It's my findings and I've worked so hard and —

PETER. You don't have to leave it. I can pack them. You and me *and* work.

HENRIETTA. They crack.

PETER. So they'll be here when we get back.

HENRIETTA. I'm too close to leave — I'm so close.

PETER. But we could meet astronomers all over Europe. Talk about your ideas. See the world!

HENRIETTA. That sounds marvelous but why don't we just go to dinner?

PETER. Because you're always up here!

HENRIETTA. Then I can't go to Europe!

PETER. Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. Peter.

PETER. This is a rather large moment for me so I just want to be clear because it took me three years to get this far. So. Your mind and spirit ... I quite adore ... those things ... about you. And I don't expect you to reciprocate immediately or at all, but I feared combusting if I didn't tell you that you've been the brightest object in my day since we met. And we work with stars. And I know I haven't been the most emotive suitor but I have been a thoughtful one, and I hope that counts for something. And I also hope I do not offend you by expressing how very deeply I ... admire you.

END

HENRIETTA. Well. I think it's an accurate statement to say that I ... approve.

PETER. You do? That's just tremendous. And a bit shocking, I thought I might have ruined it with that first impression. Or the second. Or this one.

HENRIETTA. Fortune favors the unashamed. But. My work is very important to me and if there is any resistance to that then you might reconsider your adoration promptly.

PETER. I couldn't reconsider if I tried. I know you and I know your work and ... if you can't go with me, I'll stay. Because I cannot walk away from this.

HENRIETTA. What *is* this exactly?

PETER. Well it's — it's love right?

HENRIETTA. I don't know. Is it?

PETER. It's got to be. My heart's beating like a train. That's your fault.

HENRIETTA. *My* fault?! It's *your* fault.

PETER. Yes! See? Love!

HENRIETTA. How, God, *how* do you know that?

PETER. Comparative analysis. Before you: content. After you? Passionate, confident ... idiot. Rounds? Please. An ocean liner? Just to be with you in the widest world. And finally I tell you. And finally you hear. And finally ... *(Eyes connect. Peter takes her hands ... As the Harvard Observatory falls away into ... The deck of an ocean liner — night. Stars ablaze overhead. A band plays somewhere. He spins her into a dance ... Suddenly — Margaret appears in a telegram —)*

MARGARET. Sister — stop. Come home — stop. Father stroke — stop. *(Henrietta stops. The stars go dark. The dream shatters. The Observatory — Peter and Henrietta alone.)*

HENRIETTA. Oh god. Peter, I'm sorry. I have to go.

PETER. Go? Where? What's wrong?

HENRIETTA. My family needs me. My father. Oh god.

PETER. I can help. I can come with you. Whatever you need.

HENRIETTA. My father is sick, my sister's alone.

PETER. I'm coming.

HENRIETTA. You don't need to do that.

PETER. I can help. I want to help.

HENRIETTA. Thank you and I'm sorry but I have to go home and you have to go to dinner in Europe.

PETER. No.

HENRIETTA. Go, Peter.

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 — Why Did You Say "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. *(Blurtng 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 —

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.)*

START 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. **END**

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.

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.

ANNIE. Because I don't need a title to do the work.
 HENRIETTA. But the boys need your work to keep their titles.
 And eventually one of us *has* to be a ... what was it?
 WILLIAMINA. Mighty oak.
 HENRIETTA. Mighty oak! You deserve it.
 ANNIE. Neither of you are getting a raise and that's final.
 HENRIETTA. I don't want a raise.
 WILLIAMINA. I do.

START HENRIETTA. Miss Cannon, if they won't give you what you deserve, they're never going to give it to any of us.
 ANNIE. What do you want them to give you?
 HENRIETTA. A *chance*. To show them what we can do.
 ANNIE. Which means what?
 HENRIETTA. (*Breath.*) I'm seeing things.
 ANNIE. Which *means what*?
 HENRIETTA. I'm spotting more and more of the blinking stars, the variables? I'm working on the Small Magellanic Clouds and I'm tracking these stars that pulse.
 ANNIE. Cepheid stars?
 HENRIETTA. I think so. Some of them blink once a week, some take a month.
 ANNIE. The fact that Cepheids pulse is not new.
 HENRIETTA. I know. It's the amount of them. The large amount I'm finding.
 ANNIE. Actually they're quite rare to find.
 HENRIETTA. Not if you're doing it right. (*She looks for approval.*)
 ANNIE. Continue.
 HENRIETTA. I put together a simple comparative that lets me analyze the plates *quickly*. The *same* star field at different times — and you can see that some of the stars are much brighter. And I'm seeing them in most of the plates. Now if these are true Cepheids, and if there're as many of them as I'm starting to see, it could be a big clue.
 ANNIE. To what?
 HENRIETTA. I don't know. But it's got to be important.
 ANNIE. No it doesn't.
 HENRIETTA. But my instincts are telling me that —
 ANNIE. Dr. Pickering does not pay for those instincts.
 HENRIETTA. He doesn't really pay me at all.

ANNIE. Then do the work you're assigned or don't work. (*Williamina throws a paper ball at Annie. Annie concedes, turns back to Henrietta.*)
 You may, however, stay *after* hours if you'd like, Miss Leavitt.
 HENRIETTA. What.
 ANNIE. If you're quiet.
 HENRIETTA. *Really? REALLY?!*
 ANNIE. Only rule was "quiet."
 HENRIETTA. Understood. Thank you. (*She does a little silent cheer. Annie thinks this is stupid and walks past Williamina — who grabs her and kisses her cheek. Annie exits. Williamina too. Margaret appears in a letter. Still annoyed.*) **END**

MARGARET. Henrietta, Daddy was wondering if you'd received the book. Or if you'll come home for Christmas? Write back.
 HENRIETTA. (*In a letter light.*) Dear, Margie. Sorry we fought. Here's a book for Michael from his favorite aunt. Could you send sweaters? Love, H. (*Margaret gives up, folds some sweaters during the transition ...*)
 MARGARET. (*Singing.*)
*For the joy of human love,
 Brother, sister, parent, child ...
 Friends on earth and friends above ...
 For all gentle thoughts and mild.*

*Lord of all to Thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise ...*

Scene 3

Morning. Henrietta is asleep at her desk. About 1905. Peter and Williamina enter.

PETER. Oh my. Is she — ?

WILLIAMINA. Dusting. *Aren't you Miss Leavitt? (Will pokes Henrietta awake; she grabs her hearing-aid.)*

HENRIETTA. What. Yes. Sorry. Up.

PETER. Miss Leavitt, are you ill?

HENRIETTA. Nope. Just. Here. Hello.

PETER. Is she under an influence?

HENRIETTA. Ha. That would be —

WILLIAMINA. Ridiculous.

HENRIETTA. Delightful, but no.

PETER. You slept here?

HENRIETTA. Nono — very little sleeping. These stars, the Cepheids? The pulsating ones?

PETER. I know what they are.

HENRIETTA. There's a shocking amount in the Magellanic Clouds. I've become quite intimate with the Magellanic Clouds.

PETER. I'll let the boys know we'll need to add a few to the register.

HENRIETTA. Two hundred. *(Pause.)*

PETER. Two — ?

HENRIETTA. Hundred.

PETER. Last — ?

HENRIETTA. Night. Yes.

PETER. Oh. *(Pause.)*

HENRIETTA. So. *(Peter and Henrietta are looking at each other. She breaks.)* Why don't I make a habit of this.

PETER. Why don't you.

HENRIETTA. I'm going to take a nap.

WILLIAMINA. Why don't you. *(Gives a thumbs up. Henrietta smiles, starts to exit.)*

PETER. Very good work, Miss Leavitt. It's really very good.

HENRIETTA. *(Smiles at him.)* Thank you. *(She exits one way, Peter exits another. Annie enters — Williamina preemptively shushes her.)*

START ANNIE. Where on earth is she going?

WILLIAMINA. She's taking a nap in the file room. And we'll let her.

ANNIE. She *has* an apartment?

WILLIAMINA. You'll want to hear what she's finding.

ANNIE. Then wake her up. *(Peter reenters, flustered, excited, confused.)*

PETER. *(An announcement.)* There is a lot. Going on. In the world. *(Pause.)*

WILLIAMINA. Uh-huh.

PETER. We are in an age of defiance — I mean defying and upturning it all — all the ideas we held, all the things we knew for certain. Fundamentals even. Distance, light, time —

WILLIAMINA. You read that paper, didn't you.

PETER. You've read it?

ANNIE. Relativity.

PETER. Relativity! It's impossible. Except that it isn't. Time is elastic, space is part of time. It's ridiculous.

WILLIAMINA. Doesn't make it wrong.

PETER. Nonono. The idea that there could be galaxies as big as ours? *Outside* of ours? That the universe is *that* large? No!

ANNIE. The theory seems to suggest it.

PETER. But it makes it all undone, untethered. In the history of human thought there was a steady progression of ideas —

WILLIAMINA. Unless you're Catholic.

PETER. Standing on the shoulders of giants is what I mean.

WILLIAMINA. I dunno, there's a lot of stupid giants.

PETER. But we're *modern*. The modern age — building up, building on top of other stately ideas —

WILLIAMINA. Sensible!

PETER. *Yes.*

WILLIAMINA. *(Totally kidding.)* Physics was about wrapped up!

PETER. *Yes.*

WILLIAMINA. But then that fuzzyheaded man blew up your stately foundation.

PETER. You're not supposed to do that to Isaac Newton. *(Will makes the sound of Einstein blowing up Newton.)* What do we grasp?

ANNIE. I'm not sure what you're looking to hear, Mr. Shaw.

PETER. (*Re: Henrietta.*) She found something — *is* finding — uncovering, discovering — and I ... don't know what that's like. Which makes me think I'm not very good at this. And things might just be too ... strange.

WILLIAMINA. You don't usually talk this much when you come up here.

PETER. I don't? I do. Rounds. I come around.

WILLIAMINA. Oh yes, the life affirming *rounds*.

PETER. I'm just doing my job. Trying to.

WILLIAMINA. And you know why she's got something? Because she's *not just* doing hers. Because she knows she's not getting anything handed to her except the corner of someone else's chance. Because we can't use that apparently hyper-sexed telescope you boys get to, but the mind is sexless and so is the sky — Are you made nervous by how many times I've said the word *sex*?

PETER. Somewhat.

WILLIAMINA. Oh good.

PETER. Just. I admire ... what you all do. It's ... precision.

ANNIE. Thank you. (*Peter leaves. Henrietta walks in grinning — she heard it all.*)

END

HENRIETTA. What. Was that?

WILLIAMINA. Wonder meeting competence.

ANNIE. You see why we keep him around.

WILLIAMINA. Is it wrong that I like him a wee bit more because of that? 'Cause I quite enjoyed that little fluster. Speaking of, has he proposed yet?

HENRIETTA. What? *What?*

ANNIE. Williamina.

HENRIETTA. To me? No. What? No.

WILLIAMINA. He always seems like he's going to.

ANNIE. That face he makes.

WILLIAMINA. Pinchy.

HENRIETTA. Pinchy? Who's pinchy? No. We've talked about this. Marry? You're not married. You're not married. Nobody's married. Why is this an issue.

ANNIE. It's not an issue.

WILLIAMINA. Not unless you admit it, prove me right, and live happily ever after.

HENRIETTA. Oh God.

ANNIE. (*To Henrietta.*) Our only power is ignoring her.

WILLIAMINA. I'm not laughing at you. I'm not. Love makes us all look a bit stupid.

ANNIE. Pinchy.

HENRIETTA. *Is pinchy good or bad?*

ANNIE. It's all terribly relative. (*Annie and Will burst into laughter. Henrietta gets up to go.*)

WILLIAMINA. Oh Henrietta. It's just life. Ridiculous and miraculous and often not funny at all. But better when you're laughing. Especially husbands.

ANNIE. She had one.

HENRIETTA. You did?

WILLIAMINA. I did. Abandoned me as soon as we docked in Boston. I was 21, pregnant, poor, and Scottish. So I laughed. Found my way to Dr. Pickering, worked his house as a maid, he brought me here, and here I sit. So I laugh, because that seemed to work. (*Peter enters, stops — All three ladies are staring at him. He tries to understand — starts to say something — decides it's best to just back away slowly ... Peter exits. Henrietta keeps staring.*) Time to breathe. (*Henrietta lets out a held breath. Transition ...*)

Scene 4

Henrietta is working alone at night, no hearing-aid. Annie enters quietly; Henrietta doesn't notice. Henrietta stops looking down at her pages and cries.

Annie tries to leave but bumps into a desk. Henrietta turns, scrambles for her hearing-aid.

HENRIETTA. Miss Cannon. I'm so sorry.

ANNIE. Nono. I'm sorry.

HENRIETTA. I take it out when I work.

ANNIE. Of course. Carry on. Forgot my gloves.

HENRIETTA. Oh no, I was leaving.

ANNIE. No, I'm leaving. I just came for my hat.

HENRIETTA. Your gloves.