

**WOLLONGONG  
WORKSHOP  
THEATRE**



**Audition Pack**

**About the show**

When Henrietta Leavitt begins work at the Harvard Observatory in the early 1900s, she isn't allowed to touch a telescope or express an original idea. Instead, she joins a group of women "computers," charting the stars for a renowned astronomer who calculates projects in "girl hours" and has no time for the women's probing theories. As Henrietta, in her free time, attempts to measure the light and distance of stars, she must also take measure of her life on Earth, trying to balance her dedication to science with family obligations and the possibility of love.

The true story of a 19th-century astronomer, *Silent Sky* explores a woman's place in society during a time of immense scientific discoveries, when women's ideas were dismissed until men claimed credit for them. Social progress, like scientific progress, can be hard to see when one is trapped among earthly complications; Henrietta Leavitt and her female peers believe in both, and their dedication changed the way we understand both the heavens and Earth.

**Production team**

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Director</b> | Belinda Balhatchet |
| <b>Producer</b> | Michael Cremona    |

## Season dates

June 20 – July 5, 2025

## Audition dates

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March, 6:45pm – 8:45pm

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2:00pm – 4:00pm

## Audition venue

Wollongong Workshop Theatre, 190 Gipps Rd Gwynneville

## Rehearsals

Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with potentially a few Sundays closer to opening pending cast availability.

## Audition information

There are five roles available in *Silent Sky*. Except as noted, roles are open to actors of all backgrounds and identities, and no roles assume the presence or absence of disability.

Actors who are hard of hearing are especially encouraged to audition.

**Henrietta Leavitt:** Late 20s-30s, female-presenting. Described as a ‘star fiend’ by a contemporary colleague, Henrietta is fiercely smart, funny, determined and curious. She is fascinated by astronomy and the stars, and is frustrated by the limitations placed on her and her female colleagues in Harvard’s astronomy department. She is often torn between her career aspirations and her family. She began experiencing progressive hearing loss as a teenager and wears a period hearing aid. *American accent required.*

**Margaret Leavitt:** 20s-30s, female-presenting. Henrietta’s sister. Margaret is a homebody who is dedicated to God and her family. She does her best to support Henrietta in her pursuit of the stars, even when that means not seeing her sister for extended periods of time. She is a talented singer and composer. *The performer cast in this role must be comfortable singing on stage. Piano skills a bonus but not required. American accent required.*

**Peter Shaw:** 20s - 30s, male-presenting. Peter is apprentice to the head astronomer at Harvard, Dr. Edward Pickering. Peter often visits Henrietta, Annie, and Williamina to “oversee” their work and spend time with Henrietta. He is highly intelligent but also somewhat awkward. *American accent required.*

**Annie Cannon:** 40s, female-presenting. Annie is the supervisor of the ‘computers’ at Harvard and made several important contributions to the field of astronomy during her career. She is a strong and sure leader who grows into a passionate advocate over the course of the play. *American accent required.*

**Williamina Fleming:** 50s, female-presenting. Williamina is Henrietta’s coworker and was the first of Dr. Pickering’s ‘harem’, working as a human computer. Often cracking jokes and making light-hearted fun of Peter, Williamina brings humour and levity to the play. She is known for her discovery of the Horsehead Nebula. *Scottish accent required.*

### **Audition format**

Auditions will be held in fifteen-minute slots. Auditionees will be asked to perform a pre-prepared reading for their chosen character(s). The readings for each character are available on the [Wollongong Workshop Theatre website](#).

Direction and suggestions for varying your performance may be given during the audition. This is not a reflection on your audition or skill, but a way for the audition panel to see different aspects of what you can bring to a role.

### **Booking your audition**

All auditionees must book an audition slot in advance. Audition readings and the booking link are available on the [Wollongong Workshop Theatre website](#).

If you have any specific accessibility needs that you would like to discuss in advance of your audition, please contact the production team via email on [wollongongworkshoptheatre@gmail.com](mailto:wollongongworkshoptheatre@gmail.com).

### **Show requirements**

- All cast members are required to become ordinary members of Wollongong Workshop Theatre. Ordinary membership costs \$5 and can be purchased via the WWT website: <https://www.wollongongworkshoptheatre.com.au/membership>. Membership is not required to audition.
- All cast members are expected to attend all rehearsals required of them, barring sickness and emergencies. Please let us know at the time of audition if you will be away during the rehearsal period or otherwise unavailable for any planned rehearsals.
- By accepting a role in the show, you agree that your image may be featured in promotional material for the show on the Wollongong Workshop Theatre

website and social media channels. If you have any concerns about this, please contact the production team.

- Cast members may be asked to assist with other aspects of the production, including (but not limited to) set construction, publicity, and costume-making.

WILLIAMINA. Just so we're all clear: *He fancies you.*

HENRIETTA. I don't care. I barely know him. I *don't* know him. We just — we work. He comes around.

WILLIAMINA. Like a hungry cat.

HENRIETTA. Who's the cat? Am I the cat?

ANNIE. *You're* not the cat.

HENRIETTA. I better not be. I mean, my goodness, I wouldn't even know where to begin.

WILLIAMINA. He'd be happy to help you with that.

ANNIE. Work, ladies.

WILLIAMINA. I don't know, I kinda like him. He wouldn't be bad to marry.

HENRIETTA. Then *you* marry him.

WILLIAMINA. *(To Annie.)* Oh, he's not my type.

HENRIETTA. Whomever's type he is, I couldn't work if I were married, and that is not an option, so my husband would have to be quite the advanced creature to handle that and I'm not sure our Mr. Shaw fits that bill.

ANNIE. Agreed.

HENRIETTA. *(Lost in her thoughts.)* Although I do admire his persistence. And gait. He has a nice gait.

WILLIAMINA. Meow meow.

ANNIE. *(To Will.)* *Would you heel.*

HENRIETTA. *(Snapping out of it.)* The point is that, like you, my work is my life. And that's just fine with me. And excuse me for saying this Miss Cannon, but — these Mr. Shaws, they all come around, they need this work, they need *you*. Why don't you demand a faculty position?

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.  
HENRIETTA. I want a model. 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.*)

Henrietta - Reading 2

Scene 2

*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.



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.

HENRIETTA. I can move them. I know it's a lot. They've been sending more and more. Which is good, I want to work, I *need* to work.

MARGARET. And now that things are calm. You should think about going back. (*Henrietta looks up — thrilled.*) Don't look so excited — I'm not being nice — I just can't stand all these boxes in my house. And Daddy would've wanted you to go.

HENRIETTA. Why are you so good to me?

MARGARET. Because I'm a saint, and you're easy to pity.

HENRIETTA. I accept that. Can I take your son with me — he knows three whole constellations.

MARGARET. Yes, boys and glassware is a good idea. (*Picks up a star plate.*) It amazes me that the entire sky fits on these little windowpanes. And how shockingly full it all is. It doesn't look that full from the back yard. But every one of them is just bursting with stars.

HENRIETTA. And nebulae. (*Showing her on a plate.*) There and ... there.

MARGARET. My goodness. It's a whole other world up there.

HENRIETTA. Or worlds. You know they call me a *fiend*.

MARGARET. Who calls you a fiend?

HENRIETTA. "A star-finding fiend." One of the most prominent astronomers at Princeton said that about me.

MARGARET. You're important to them?

HENRIETTA. I am actually.

MARGARET. They're not taking advantage of you?

HENRIETTA. Oh they're surely are. But it's a compliment.

MARGARET. A love letter is a compliment.

HENRIETTA. We've talked about this.

MARGARET. Sitting at Harvard and you can't find a gentleman?

HENRIETTA. My department is all women.

MARGARET. Well, get out.

HENRIETTA. It's complicated.

MARGARET. Wouldn't be romance without. Is it?

HENRIETTA. What?

MARGARET. Romance?

HENRIETTA. *No*. Not ... yet.

MARGARET. And who is this "not yet"?

HENRIETTA. What about your music?

MARGARET. What about your secret fancy?

HENRIETTA. Margie. It's nothing. It's a boring story with a boring ending.

MARGARET. Why?

HENRIETTA. Because it ended. Or ... didn't really start. It's unclear.

MARGARET. I'm sorry.

HENRIETTA. That was never in my plan anyway.

MARGARET. Maybe it's your plan that's boring.

HENRIETTA. Oh just play something would you.

MARGARET. You can't distract me with my own music.

HENRIETTA. It's not a distraction, it's a celebration.

MARGARET. That you're leaving me? Again?

HENRIETTA. I've been hearing bits and pieces for months now. I want to hear the whole of it before I go.

MARGARET. Well. I have been working on something — tiny — just a sketch.

HENRIETTA. A hymn?

MARGARET. Concerto.

HENRIETTA. Really?

MARGARET. I'm working on a symphony.

HENRIETTA. My goodness. I guess I thought — to write a whole symphony I thought you had to be —

MARGARET. Male.

HENRIETTA. European and angry.

MARGARET. Upsetting tradition might just run in the family. (*Pause.*)

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.*

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.

Scene 2

*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.

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 blurting.

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.

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. OBAFGKM.  
 HENRIETTA. 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.

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. I need the consistent, not the creative.

WILLIAMINA. She can do it, Annie. She understands.

ANNIE. Good. Please show Miss Leavitt to her station.

WILLIAMINA. Will do, Mr. President.

ANNIE. You make me crazy and you know you make me crazy.

WILLIAMINA. Balance of power, darling. (*Annie exits.*) Alright, you. More questions?

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.

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.)*