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SF PERUSALS

PIERRE AND MARIE

Adapted by Ron Clark

Based on the French play
Les Palmes de M. Schultz
by Jean Noël Fenwick

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
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PIERRE AND MARIE *(100%)*

Adapted by
Ron Clark *(not less than 50%)*

Based on the play, *Les Palmes de M. Shutz*
Jean-Noël Fenwick *(not less than 25%)*

ACT 1

Scene 1

AT RISE: We are in a science laboratory in the late 1800's, in Paris. Stage left has several wooden tables on which sit a number of scientific apparati. Bunsen burners, beakers, test tubes, etc., etc. Stage right, has a coal-burning stove with a pipe that leads up into the ceiling, a smaller table, not far from the stove, a blackboard with chalk and an eraser, and a pencil sharpener. There is also an armoire against one of the walls and a desk.

The large room faces a street. It is actually below street level, so that when entering the lab one has to step down several stairs.

Through the window we can see that it is snowing lightly. There is very little light in the laboratory. The pendulum clock on the wall indicates that it's 7:30 A.M., and whatever light there is at present is that of any early winter morning.

(The front door opens and PIERRE CURIE, thirtyish, enters. He is sporting a beard and his hair is worn in a sort of brush cut. He is all bundled up in a black, worn-out overcoat. He is obviously freezing. He is carrying a briefcase, which looks more like a student's bookbag, half torn. He puts it on the central table, then goes about shivering as he tries to warm up, smacking his arms across his body.

PIERRE is wearing mittens. He goes to the stove, opens it, looks into it, and then looks at the empty coal bin.)

PIERRE. *(All the while shivering.)* Still no coal.

(He goes to the coat rack, which is holding two white smocks. He is trying to decide whether or not to change into a smock. He removes his coat, all the while making shivering noises. He realizes

that his mittens are attached to his coat, much the way a mother would attach her four-year-old's mittens.

PIERRE starts hanging up his overcoat while grabbing the smock, and in so doing, he's getting everything mixed up. He finally gets the smock on. He's colder than ever. He flings off one of his smock sleeves and quickly gets his overcoat and puts it back on. He rubs his hands together and taps his feet.

He suddenly notices part of his smock hanging on the back of his coat. He tries reaching for it but can't. He gives up and goes to the table on which he deposited his briefcase.

PIERRE opens his briefcase/school bag, pulls out what seems to be a lot of papers, and puts them on the edge of the table. He sits down and is about to start doing his correcting, but he's cold. So, he decides to put one of his mittens back on and then realizes that he's still very cold and puts on the other mitten. He then tries to pick up his pen, which is very difficult.

He reaches into his pocket and takes out a small bottle of cognac. He takes a quick swig. It seems to warm him up for an instant. He places it next to him.

There's a knock at the door.

PIERRE immediately grabs the bottle and puts it away, at the same time causing him to knock over all the copies that he had on the table. He frantically starts picking up the copies on the floor.

There's another knock on the door.)

PIERRE. *(Shouts.)* Come in.

(The door opens and GEORGETTE enters. GEORGETTE is what people used to call a solid woman. She's a good ten years older than PIERRE. Slightly heavy and speaks rather loudly. She is somewhat straightforward. However, she is intimidated by the surroundings.)

GEORGETTE. Bonjour, Monsieur.

PIERRE. Bonjour. *(She looks at all the papers that are now on the floor. She's a little hesitant, then looks at him strangely, realizing that he is wearing his overcoat over what seems to be part of a smock.*

PIERRE manages to gather all of his papers and finally gathers his courage as well.) Yes?

GEORGETTE. I'm awfully sorry to disturb you but I'm looking for a Monsieur ... ah, I always forget his name. The students call him Carrot-face.

PIERRE. Oh, you probably mean Monsieur Gustave Bémont. He's the gentleman who shares this laboratory with me.

GEORGETTE. He's not here?

PIERRE. Oh, it shouldn't be too long.

GEORGETTE. I can wait.

(She immediately makes herself at home and sits down.)

PIERRE. I guess you can. Although, if you want to stay warm, you'd probably be better off outside.

GEORGETTE. *(Laughs,)* Yes, I agree. A person could freeze their asses in here.

PIERRE. Well, that's one way of putting it, Miss ...?

GEORGETTE. Georgette.

PIERRE. Georgette. Incidentally, I don't think you should call Mousier Bémont, Carrot-face.

GEORGETTE. Oh, I don't call him that. Everybody else does.

PIERRE. Ah, yes, well, you know how it is ... students like to give their teachers nicknames.

GEORGETTE. And what's your nickname?

PIERRE. Well, as far as I know, I don't have one. My name is Curie. Pierre Curie.

GEORGETTE. Yes, of course. We know each other.

PIERRE. We do?

GEORGETTE. I'm the waitress at Chez Georgine. You don't recognize me?

PIERRE. You own it?

GEORGETTE. No, no, no. I'm Georgette. That's Georgine.

PIERRE. I do go there occasionally.

GEORGETTE. You once dropped an entire bowl of pea soup on my legs.

PIERRE. I did? Oh, I'm so sorry. I guess I am somewhat awk-

ward that way. As a matter of fact you might say I'm the master of awkwardness.

GEORGETTE. You're not awkward you're just distracted, that's all. Like all geniuses.

PIERRE. I am not a genius, I assure you. I'm simply doing my work which is research in physics and chemistry ... just like Monsieur Bémont.

GEORGETTE. Anyway, I'm sure that when you're at your work you don't make awkward mistakes.

PIERRE. No. Luckily I do not. *(He sits down, and unfortunately doesn't quite sit properly and knocks the chair which goes flying. He grabs it, and in doing so, manages somehow to knock all his paperwork once again on the floor.)* Damnit. *(GEORGETTE immediately goes to help him, getting down on her knees.)* No, please. Leave it. I beg of you. *(She starts grabbing some of his papers.)* Please, please ... this is most embarrassing to me.

GEORGETTE. Oh, no, it's an honor for me to be helping you. You're involved in such interesting work.

PIERRE. Why thank you. Science, when it's pure, can in fact be a very noble endeavor.

GEORGETTE. Is it true what they say, that you people in here are always working with all kinds of bottles and tubes and changing things from orange to blue and making noises like bloop, bloops and gloop, gloops?

PIERRE. Well, let's just say that, occasionally, we are involved in some rather spectacular experiments.

GEORGETTE. *(Excitedly.)* Would you consider demonstrating something that jumps or explodes, even a little bit?

PIERRE. I really must ask you to excuse me but I have all these copies to correct ....

GEORGETTE. Oh, please, do something that becomes ... all red.

PIERRE. I'm afraid I'm the one who's going to become all red if you get me angry.

(The front door opens and GUSTAVE BÉMONT enters. Sure enough, he has a thick reddish beard as well as red hair. He is a contemporary of PIERRE's.)

BÉMONT. Bonjour, Pierre.

PIERRE. Oh, Gustave. Bonjour.

BÉMONT. Still no coal?

PIERRE. Oh, they said it won't be long now. Just an administrative mix-up.

GEORGETTE. Exactly.

PIERRE. Oh, there's this person who wishes to see you.

(BÉMONT, recognizing GEORGETTE, quickly goes to her.)

BÉMONT. Mademoiselle Georgette, you here?

GEORGETTE. Yes, Monsieur Carrot – fa –, I mean, Bémont. You always leave me a nice tip at the restaurant and you always have a nice word for me, and since I have such respect for geniuses ... like yourselves.... Anyway, I came here to tell you ....

(She hesitates.)

BÉMONT. What? *(GEORGETTE looks back and forth at both of them.)* WHAT?

GEORGETTE. Well, the directeur of this school is a rather large gentleman they call Chevrier?

BÉMONT. Yes, the directeur of the school of physics and chemistry is effectively Rodolphe Chevrier. And, yes, he's rather corpulent.

GEORGETTE. He has an associate by the name of Baudet ... Bolet ... Bonet?

BÉMONT. Binèt.

GEORGETTE. That's it. Binèt.

BÉMONT. Yes, Professor Binèt. The titular head of the Chair of Anatomy here at the Sorbonne, and definitely a good friend of Monsieur Chevrier.

GEORGETTE. Well, the other day Chevrier was complaining to this Binèt person about you and Monsieur Curie.

BÉMONT. I don't believe you.

GEORGETTE. I swear. He was telling him that you two are just not inventing enough ... things. And Binèt said to him, "Well, all you have to do is cut their coal supply." And Chevrier thought that was the

funniest idea he had ever heard.

PIERRE. You must be mistaken.

GEORGETTE. No, no, I'm not mistaken. In fact, he told him, "You're absolutely right. If they don't start working and getting something done, their lab is going to become the 'rendezvous of polar bears. A Pavilion for Eskimos.'"

BÉMONT. He said that?

GEORGETTE. They laughed and laughed. And I think it's just awful letting minds like yours freeze their asses off.

BÉMONT. A Pavilion for Eskimos.

PIERRE. I, I just can't believe it. I know that Chevrier is very demanding but still ....

GEORGETTE. Just like my uncle up until he married my aunt, always laughing, always having a good time. And then six months after they were married he goes and cuts off her finger because she was biting her nails.

PIERRE. Are you sure that's what you heard them say?

GEORGETTE. Word for word. *(She raises her hand and spits in it.)* I swear.

(PIERRE and BÉMONT are a little taken aback by the spitting.)

PIERRE. Yes, well, thank you very much ... and if you don't mind, we really have to get back to work now.

GEORGETTE. I beg your pardon.

PIERRE. Monsieur Bémont and I have things to talk about.

GEORGETTE. *(Realizing.)* Oh, I'm sorry. I'm going. But someday you promise to make those gloop, gloop noises for me?

PIERRE. *(A little embarrassed.)* Ah, yes, someday.

BÉMONT. Au revoir. Thank you.

PIERRE. Au revoir.

(GEORGETTE opens the door, starts to go, stops and turns.)

GEORGETTE. *(Calls out to them.)* We have pig's feet for lunch today. Should I put some aside for you?

PIERRE. No, thank you.

BÉMONT. Well, maybe a little ....

GEORGETTE. *(Muttering to herself as she goes.)* Well, maybe a little. What is that supposed to mean?

(She exits.)

PIERRE. You believe her?

BÉMONT. And you don't?

PIERRE. Well, she seems a little excitable, and besides, it's so undignified of Chevrier.

BÉMONT. Well then, where's the coal?

PIERRE. I imagine the school is short on coal these days.

BÉMONT. In that case, that would mean that everyone is freezing all over the school, correct?

PIERRE. Yes, I suppose.

BÉMONT. Well, I'm going to go find out.

(He quickly exits with determination. PIERRE remains there alone. He shrugs, goes back to his table, sits down and waits a moment. Then, to himself:)

PIERRE. The rendezvous of polar bears.

(PIERRE accidentally hits his elbow against his stack of papers and once again everything goes flying on the floor. He picks up everything, mutters to himself, puts everything back on the table and starts quickly to correct his papers. He's moving at an incredibly rapid pace, seemingly annoyed by everything that has just taken place.

All of a sudden, the door opens and BÉMONT reenters carrying a wooden chair, which has a cushion.)

BÉMONT. There is coal everywhere except here. The amphitheater, the hall, Monsieur Chevrier's office. It's warm everywhere except here. *(He goes over to the stove and inhales deeply.)* Our stove has actually been sprayed with water. Do you need any more proof?

PIERRE. I can't believe it.

BÉMONT. Now he's gone too far.

PIERRE. We don't produce enough?

BÉMONT. That man is impossible. He's just like his colleague, Binèt. All they care about is submitting our research papers to the Academy, in the hopes of landing some sort of prize or honor. Something to enhance their stature among their peers. We work, they get the credit. It's quite a system.

PIERRE. We can't invent at will. We're not magicians who pull rabbits out of their sleeves. I don't know what's the matter with people today. Everyone has this music hall mentality.

BÉMONT. Very well then, what we're going to do is heat our stove with wood. I took this from Chevrier's secretary. *(BÉMONT begins breaking apart the wooden chair. He rips the cushion apart and starts filling the stove with material and pieces of wood. He then adds to it the contents of a small pharmaceutical carafe and proceeds to fan the fire. We suddenly see some light coming from inside the stove and the two of them warm their hands over it.)* I have had it up to here with that big oaf. He had better give us some coal or else I'm going to rearrange his entire face.

PIERRE. Oh sure, have yourself dismissed. That would help a great deal.

BÉMONT. Not only do we have to work like fiends with those students, we also have to do research that produces laurels for the school, so that he can sit comfortably in his office, his feet on his desk and his fingers massaging that fat belly of his, with the hopes of someday being elected to the Academy of Sciences.

PIERRE. I'm completely in accord with you but don't overreact. If you remember correctly, he once thought of letting you go. It's not something that you should be pursuing right now.

BÉMONT. Believe me, it's just a matter of time before my inventions allow me to slam the door in his face.

PIERRE. Apropos, where are you with the uh ... the uh ...?

BÉMONT. The acoustiphone?

PIERRE. Yes, exactly, the Bémont acoustiphone. Where are you with it?

BÉMONT. The project is presently being examined. Nobody seems to question the ingenuity of the system, nor the improvement of

the very crisp sound that it produces, but the brass cork seems to be causing certain frightened businessmen to hesitate.

(He goes to an armoire and pulls out this rather bizarre contraption and looks at it proudly.)

PIERRE. Well, you're still hopeful, are you not?

BÉMONT. Of course. All I need is a little pressure from those who are in need of my invention. In other words, I have to be heard by the deaf.

PIERRE. Write to them.

BÉMONT. When I think of you and your quartz electrometer. You're sitting on gold, I tell you. You're not even finished with it and you're ready to put it into the public domain.

PIERRE. Please, let's not start.

BÉMONT. Just like you did with your aperiodique scale and your optic objective. Both of which are filling the pockets of industrialists.

PIERRE. Yes, and because of that, the apparatus is being utilized, at a very low cost, by other scientists throughout the world.

BÉMONT. To work on the same researches as you are and maybe even beat you to it.

PIERRE. Such is the challenge of science.

BÉMONT. Or the naïveté of certain dimwits. Look, we're dealing with bitter international competition ... not a gentlemen's sport. The time to give things away is over.

(He puts his apparatus carefully into the armoire.)

PIERRE. Well, in that case why waste our time inventing trivialities instead of working on more ambitious, finer discoveries?

BÉMONT. You call the acoustiphone a trivial invention?

PIERRE. Well ... I don't say that it's totally useless, but it does play a minor role compared to uh ... oh, I don't know ... let's say, the structure of matter. You know what Pasteur said, "The scientist who allows himself to be tempted by practical applications complicates his life and paralyzes in himself all hopes of discovery."

BÉMONT. Pasteur never misses an opportunity to babble, does

he? The pasteurization of milk, the vaccine against rabies, the amelioration of Brewer's yeast for beers ... are those not practical applications?

PIERRE. In any case, the very idea of gain is detrimental to science.

BÉMONT. And the extra labor, the humiliation, the lack of proper equipment ... who do they benefit?

PIERRE. I didn't say that.

BÉMONT. And our miserable salaries ... are they necessary too?

PIERRE. Poverty never bothered me.

BÉMONT. Yes, till you get married.

PIERRE. I won't get married.

BÉMONT. You mean now you're renouncing women too?

PIERRE. I've thought about it a great deal. Those charming creatures have the best reasons in the world to distract us from our work. Family, the instinct of the nest, maternity. But one has to be cautious.

BÉMONT. Cautious?

PIERRE. Women have no place in my life.

BÉMONT. Have you gone completely mad?

PIERRE. I am as sane as the next fellow.

BÉMONT. Aren't you attracted to women?

PIERRE. I simply put an "X" through that question and you should do likewise.

BÉMONT. Me? Now I know you're mad.

PIERRE. I'm telling you this for your own good. Women are disastrous to a scientific career.

BÉMONT. They're my reason for living. Renounce women? Those celestial, blissful creatures. Why, only last week during Offenbach's "La Belle Hèlenè," in the third scene, there was a creature, I'm not quite sure what muse she was ... she was dressed in at least half a pound of grapes. Ah, but what a sight! How can you not see in all women a nymph ready to moan with drunkenness. Every day in the trolley, I, I don't know how I'm able to restrain myself from, literally, ripping off their dresses between the Rue Madeleine and the Boulevard Caumartin.

PIERRE. I never go to the opera and I walk to work. One has to know how to avoid temptation.

BÉMONT. You're living like a monk. Completely out of step with the times.

PIERRE. Not at all.

BÉMONT. What are your pleasures?

PIERRE. My pleasures?

BÉMONT. Yes, your pleasures.

PIERRE. Well, there are many. Reading.

BÉMONT. What have you read recently?

PIERRE. Well ... recently. Uh, recently?

BÉMONT. Or seen? Or done?

PIERRE. Well, it's true that recently ....

BÉMONT. You don't know anything that's going on, do you? What if I mentioned Toulouse Lautrec?

PIERRE. A new train line?

BÉMONT. Alright, how about uh ... who is the President of the Republic right now?

PIERRE. Please, let's not be ridiculous.

BÉMONT. Go ahead, tell me his name.

PIERRE. Well, uh, let's see ... Carnot?

BÉMONT. Yes. Correct.

PIERRE. Henri Carnot. Even more correct.

BÉMONT. Henri? Henri Carnot? Sadi Carnot, you blockhead.

PIERRE. Well, I was close.

BÉMONT. Admit it. You are only interested in science. The rest of it, you couldn't care less.

PIERRE. Well ... I guess you're not completely wrong.

BÉMONT. Then fight for your rights so that they will, at least, respect you. Here you are given no consideration, without materials with which to experiment. Me? I'm ready to revolt. I'm nowhere as good as you are, but I'm trying to find a way to finance my own researches. You, you're going to remain under the thumb of that fat tyrannical swine .... *(CHEVRIER enters. He's wearing an impressive long coat. He's about fifty.)* That Herr ... Chevrier.

CHEVRIER. *(Dryly.)* Bonjour, Bémont. Bonjour, Curie.

PIERRE. Bonjour, Herr ... Monsieur Chevrier.

CHEVRIER. So the work ... it's progressing?

BÉMONT. Every day.

CHEVRIER. We can expect some sort of written communiqué?

BÉMONT. I am almost at the point of discovery.

CHEVRIER. And you, Curie. Your famous quartz electrometer?

PIERRE. I'm afraid I've reached an impasse, Monsieur Chevrier.

CHEVRIER. Impasse? What do you mean by impasse?

PIERRE. It seems to function perfectly with all metals except for one.

CHEVRIER. Which one?

PIERRE. Uranium. With uranium, my electrometer goes completely out of kilter.

CHEVRIER. Out of kilter? Really?

PIERRE. It seems to measure more current than it is fed.

CHEVRIER. Which of course is impossible.

PIERRE. Exactly.

CHEVRIER. And what do you attribute this to?

PIERRE. I would say to a hidden snag in my apparatus.

CHEVRIER. Which one?

PIERRE. Precisely. That's what I'm looking for.

CHEVRIER. Well then, find it. The state pays you to find not to look.

PIERRE. I'm afraid teaching is monopolizing most of my time.

CHEVRIER. Yes, that's why it's called "teaching." As for your apparatus ... either you resolve the problem and write your research paper or you give up and submit the problem to the Academy. You have spun your wheels long enough.

PIERRE. I don't need any help, Monsieur Chevrier. I will find the problem.

CHEVRIER. Very well, then let us move on to something else. You, Bémont, can I see your experimental notes on the spectros copier?

BÉMONT. My notes? Well, uh ... I don't think you'll learn anything from them. And may I respectfully remind you that I have the greatest need for a more perfected interferometer.

CHEVRIER, Materials. Always materials. It's the same story over and over again.

BÉMONT. One cannot envision grand discoveries without proper materials.

CHEVRIER. Oh, really? What about Copernicus? And Galileo? And Newton? A simple apple and boom, Universal Gravitation! Two centuries later we're still talking about it. Now, if you want apples or pears, I can have them deliver you crates full.

BÉMONT. Some coal would be appreciated. Haven't you noticed the temperature in this laboratory?

CHEVRIER. Yes. I would say it's ideal.

BÉMONT. The cold air is affecting our apparati.

CHEVRIER. Maybe, but it invigorates the brain.

PIERRE. Monsieur Chevrier, I'm afraid that what you say is a physiological counter-truth. Under a certain temperature the cold actually causes sleep.

CHEVRIER. How bizarre. And I was just starting to warm up.

BÉMONT. I wouldn't want to be the one to spread malicious gossip ... but it would appear that you are cutting our coal supply.

CHEVRIER. Absolutely! I *am* cutting your coal supply because you are sabotaging my efforts to elevate this school in the eyes of the Academy. You seem to forget, this is France!

PIERRE. Sabotaging?

CHEVRIER. Yes, you, Curie. You waste your time with sterile inventions ... maybe ingenious, but for which the world, outside of a few laboratory rats, couldn't care less. As for you, Bémont, you must take me for an imbecile.

BÉMONT. Pardon?

CHEVRIER. You spend hours on clandestine laboratory research for personal profit ...

BÉMONT. Who told you such nonsense?

CHEVRIER. Who? My dear Bémont, not a week goes by without some industrialist writing me, demanding to know how some professor, who goes around demonstrating some acoustic gadget, is capable of finding time to teach physics and chemistry to our young elite. It's scandalous enough that you fleece the school ... but to discredit it as well.

BÉMONT. With your permission I'd like to make a point.

CHEVRIER. No! I didn't come here to have a discussion with you, I came here to tell you two things. Primo: you have exactly one month and one bucket of coal to turn over, both of you, a research pa-

per destined for the Academy, clearly outlining your work. Secundo: I am bringing in some reinforcements.

BÉMONT. Reinforcements?

CHEVRIER. Precisely. Since both of you are not up to the task ... this morning I am awaiting a young Polish student whose name is ... *(He looks at his piece of paper.)* Sklo ... Dow ... Ska. Who apparently doesn't speak our language, which, of course, renders her unqualified to teach. However, she is ladened with diplomas, relentless they say, and anxious to work in a laboratory. I expect a great deal from this young person. It's unbelievable to me having to import strangers to work in France doing the work that the French no longer wish to do.

BÉMONT. Three? We are going to be three in here?

CHEVRIER. Yes, and within a few moments. Which should give you just enough time to assure me, that given her sex, you're not going to involve her in any of those stupid university hazings. If so ... start packing.

PIERRE. Yes, that's really our style.

CHEVRIER. You, I don't know. *(He looks at BÉMONT.)* But *him*, just look at him. I don't want to take a chance.

PIERRE. But three people working on the same apparati, don't we risk to be even *less* productive?

CHEVRIER. Maybe. In which case we'll soon find out which of the three is superfluous. In the meantime, I'll see about the coal.

(CHEVRIER exits.)

BÉMONT. And there we are, once again humiliated, disparaged, and diminished.

PIERRE. I have to be honest, I almost lost my temper.

BÉMONT. You notice, I'm always the one to get into trouble. I had to be the one to bring up the coal. You ... not a word.

PIERRE. Well, you have to admit it doesn't look good. Your collaborating with industry, that's what's giving him an ulcer. You shouldn't be mixing school with business.

BÉMONT. How else am I supposed to get proper credit for my inventions?

PIERRE. Not only are we going to be more cramped in here ... but with a woman, to boot.

BÉMONT. Well, maybe she's ... delectable.

PIERRE. That's enough. *(There's a knock at the door. PIERRE indicates the chair to BÉMONT.)* Sit down. Sit. *(BÉMONT sits. PIERRE calls out.)* Come in. *(MARIE SKLODOWSKA, early twenties, carrying a bucket of coal, enters. She's wearing a black dress, black hat, black coat. Her hair is pulled back in a bun. She wears glasses. She is the absolute image of austerity. A moment passes. BÉMONT is still seated. PIERRE goes to her, takes the bucket of coal, passes it to BÉMONT and begins speaking to her in a rather loud and deliberate tone. BÉMONT takes the coal and puts a few pieces in the stove.)* Come in. You are Mademoiselle ...?

MARIE. *(She speaks with a slight East European accent.)* Sklodowska.

PIERRE. Mademoiselle Sklo ... dowska. When Professeur Chevrier told us about your arrival we were at first, I hasten to say, a little bit hostile. Maybe he told you about it. However, upon reflection, scientific solidarity obliges us to make of a misfortune, good fortune. So that even if the installations here are modest and even if your arrival poses certain difficulties, may I welcome you to the laboratory. My name is Pierre Curie and this is Monsieur Gustave Bémont.

MARIE. Please ... to speak ... more ... slow?

PIERRE. Do you speak Spanish?

MARIE. No ... speak ... no.

PIERRE. Sprechen sie Deutsch?

MARIE. Jawohl!

PIERRE. Yes, well I don't. *(To BÉMONT.)* Do you?

BÉMONT. No.

(MARIE looks through her small portable dictionary.)

MARIE. *(With deliberation.)* I am good happiness to make acquaintances.

PIERRE. And we are too, Mademoiselle.

MARIE. *(Her nose in the dictionary, indicating the table.)* At what hour is the next explosion? *(PIERRE and BÉMONT look at each*

other, suppress a laugh. She indicates the table.) It is permitted to camp here?

PIERRE. But of course.

(He quickly pushes things aside on the table, taking over more of BÉMONT's area than his own. BÉMONT, seeing this, tries to rearrange things to his advantage. PIERRE attempts to make it more equitable. He manages to drop several things on the floor, which, of course, he retrieves awkwardly.
In the meantime, MARIE is quickly going through her dictionary looking to utter her next phrase.)

MARIE. *(Indicating the coat rack.)* Possibility for student Sklodowska to hanging coat on your thing?

(BÉMONT starts to laugh. PIERRE has a lot of difficulty holding back his laughter.)

PIERRE. Yes, but we call it a coat rack.

MARIE. Oh. Coat rack. Yes, better than your thing.

BÉMONT. Better, but not as funny.

MARIE. Coat hanger. Thank you. Student Sklodowska will remember.

(BÉMONT grabs a piece of paper off the desk and goes over to PIERRE, pointing to it and pretending to be talking about something.)

BÉMONT. Well, she's not exactly one of the can-can dancers at the Moulin Rouge ... but I have the feeling we might be able to have a few laughs with her. Especially if she doesn't speak the language. Look at her. Some fashion plate. She looks like one of those widows in Brittany off to dig for mussels.

PIERRE. *(Not having the nerve to speak in front of MARIE, whether she understands or not.)* Yes, these elements are isotopes, beryllium, fluorescences, aluminum.

(In the meantime MARIE has hung up her coat, sharpened her pencil,

taken a few things out of her bag.)

MARIE. Student Sklodowska possibility use potentiometer for work asked by the Chevrier professeur?

PIERRE. Certainly.

BÉMONT. How long? I'm actually going to need the potentiometer. May I see your research papers?

MARIE. Please to speak much more slow.

(BÉMONT takes the paper from her and reads:)

BÉMONT. "Spectroanalysis and study of the atomic structure of non-steel metals." But ... Chevrier gave her the same assignment he gave me. He doesn't trust me?

(BÉMONT shows the paper to PIERRE.)

PIERRE. Let me see. Oh, you're correct. Unquestionably.

BÉMONT. Well now, my friend, he has gone too far. I don't give a damn anymore. If he wants to just sit on my discoveries that's up to him. I'm going to find him. It's her or me. Chevrier will have to make the decision.

PIERRE. No, wait. I'll intercede. I'll tell Chevrier to find her another research project.

BÉMONT. Too late. Anyway we'd only be at each other's throats. Grabbing each other's apparatus. No. I've made up my mind. It's either *her* or *me.*

(BÉMONT rushes towards the door. MARIE suddenly moves like lightning and rushes to the door before him and stands there defiantly, menacing, to rip her blouse.)

MARIE. *(Suddenly able to speak the language perfectly but with her slight East European accent.)* You listen to me and listen well, you simpleton. I drudged in Poland for ten years as a nanny, just to pay for my studies. I wheeled and schemed like an animal so that I could continue those studies in France. I worked myself to the bones

to get this job. So, I'm certainly not going to take a chance, having just gotten here, and allow a psychopathic runt like you, stir up shit with the headmaster. *(PIERRE and BÉMONT can't believe their ears. She continues.)* If either of you makes one move towards me, I rip my blouse, I scratch myself, and I scream rape. This is not a joke. I can cry on cue. I will accuse both of you ... and they'll believe me. I once did it in Poland to a Russian officer. He's presently in Siberia, laying down rail tracks without gloves.

(BÉMONT makes a slight move. MARIE immediately starts ripping her collar. He stops himself.)

BÉMONT. *(To PIERRE.)* She has me. I once had a problem with the police. I had a scuffle in a closet with a husband.

PIERRE. But we can't give in to blackmail.

MARIE. All I am asking is to stay. I'll make it easy for everybody. Chevrier will give me the same research as you. If you want, I find nothing. If you want, I help you and you sign your names to the research papers. I'll work fastidiously. I'll do the cleaning, everything. On the condition that I am accepted here.

BÉMONT. *(Making a step towards her.)* But first ...

MARIE. *(Screaming.)* Rape!

(BÉMONT immediately backs off and then, a moment later, continues.)

BÉMONT. Why were you pretending not to speak the language before?

MARIE. So that you could speak freely, which of course is what you did. Thank you very much for the Brittany widow digging for mussels.

BÉMONT. Yes, and hanging your coat on our "thing," that's real distinguished.

MARIE. Well, it served a purpose. I could see you were starting to make a list of all my mistakes. It gave me a certain je ne sais quoi.

PIERRE. What duplicity!

MARIE. "It is the results that matter." To quote Lucrecia Borgia.

I wish to stay!

(The door opens and CHEVRIER enters.)

CHEVRIER. Is this where the cry of rape came from? Well, Bémont? Is it?

BÉMONT. I, I didn't hear anything, Monsieur Le Directeur.

CHEVRIER. Everything is going well?

BÉMONT. Just uh ... marvelous.

CHEVRIER. *(To MARIE.)* And you? Is everything the way you wish it?

MARIE. *(Smiling timidly.)* Please to speak more slow.

CHEVRIER. Yes, well, it must be those idiot students again.

(He rushes out. A moment passes and then BÉMONT begins to laugh softly.)

BÉMONT. Well, I've been had. You have unquestionably left me speechless. *(He laughs a little more.)* All in all I must admit that I prefer you like this. And the disguise, is that part of the sleight of hand also?

MARIE. Obviously. I'm not here to seduce a bunch of medical students with frills and petticoats. In order to cross the ocean of obscenity that exists in this masculine science, occasionally one has to wear the equivalent of a diving suit.

PIERRE. I can't believe what I'm hearing.

BÉMONT. Well, you can't reproach her for being realistic.

PIERRE. You mean super cynical.

MARIE. I swear I can be of some use to you.

BÉMONT. As a matter of fact, you can. It so happens ... do you see those calculations over there? They really need to be verified while I go write up a patent.

MARIE. Gladly. A patent for what, if I may be so indiscreet?

BÉMONT. Well, actually, it's not for the school.

MARIE. That's quite alright.

BÉMONT. It's a patent for an acoustic apparatus for the deaf. I've been asked to develop this project.

MARIE. Fascinating. It sounds like a grand idea.

BÉMONT. *(To PIERRE.)* Are you listening?

MARIE. A residence amplification system.

BÉMONT. Exactly.

MARIE. Destined to be produced commercially?

BÉMONT. But of course.

MARIE. How much might one stand to gain financially from such an apparatus?

BÉMONT. Oh, it could be quite substantial.

MARIE. And how does one go about obtaining … a patent?

BÉMONT. You're interested?

MARIE. Oh, just to know.

BÉMONT. You have a project?

MARIE. Ah, no … not really. What exactly can one patent?

BÉMONT. Everything. An apparatus, a system, a box opener, even the formula to a perfume. That's how Louis Pivel made his fortune. Inventing a synthetic perfume.

(A beat.)

MARIE. The formula for an alcohol that leaves you without a hangover, could that be patented?

BÉMONT. *(Lighting up.)* Patented … that could be worth a fortune.

MARIE. It exists. My great, great grandfather discovered it. It's a vodka in which you steep seven different herbs in different quantities. And it's impossible to get sick.

BÉMONT. You're pulling my leg.

MARIE. No, I'm quite serious. I can actually make you some, if you'd like.

BÉMONT. Please.

PIERRE. I can't believe you two. Industry, commerce … where do you think you are?

(We hear the sound of the school alarm in the distance.)

BÉMONT. We must go teach our classes. But I'm very, very interested. We'll talk again a little later.

MARIE. So, I'm accepted?
BÉMONT. Indubitably.
PIERRE. We shall see about that.

(PIERRE and BÉMONT exit. MARIE stays alone. She approaches PIERRE's quartz electrometer on one of the tables. She looks at it with interest and starts cleaning the floor.
Lights fade.)

Scene 2

(Same day. We can see by the pendulum clock that it is now two hours later. It is no longer snowing and it is much clearer outside.
MARIE is seated at a table and is finishing correcting copies left behind by PIERRE.
PIERRE enters. He moves stiffly. He avoids MARIE's glance. He goes to the stove and rubs his hands together. He then removes his overcoat and underneath we see that the white smock is now being worn properly.)

MARIE. Your course went well, Professeur Curie?
PIERRE. *(A little cold, a little impersonal.)* Quite well. I thank you for the inquiry, Mademoiselle Sklodowska.

(After a moment or two, PIERRE comes toward the table.)

MARIE. I hope you don't mind, Professeur Curie, I took the liberty of correcting your copies ... with a pencil, of course.

(PIERRE looks through the copies.)

PIERRE. This is very good work
MARIE. Thank you.
PIERRE. However, I'm going to ask you to erase it all.
MARIE. But why?

PIERRE. Because it's not honest. My students have the right to have me be the only judge of their work, That is what I signed up for.

MARIE. But what a waste of time.

PIERRE. Integrity is never a waste of time, nor is honesty. Two cardinal qualities for the scientist, which you seem totally void of.

MARIE. I'm terribly sorry about my arrival this morning. I did wish to tell you how much I admire your work. You're quite well known in Poland.

PIERRE. Yes, sure.

MARIE. Well, it's true. My professeur, Madame Paczula, never stops talking about your work with Piezo electricity.

PIERRE. And earlier, was that the truth too? And before that? So far, three different truths in a single morning. It's a little confusing.

MARIE. *(Indicating the electrometer to PIERRE.)* May I? This apparatus apparently serves to measure the electric currents of very weak intensity that pass through different metals. Consequently, they give an indication of the conductivity of those metals. Shall I continue? *(PIERRE looks on in stunned silence.)* Very well, if you don't want to answer, I can't force you. In which case, I will try to make myself useful by washing the windows, which seem to need it very badly.

(She immediately takes a bottle of ammonia, a rag, and gets up on a chair and begins cleaning the windows. Her back is now turned to PIERRE as she starts to involuntarily wiggle her hips.
At first PIERRE doesn't notice her, his scientific mind is somewhere else. But little by little he does start to notice and finally speaks.)

PIERRE. Uh, Mademoiselle Sklodowska, I image your field of inquiry is probably different from mine ... *(MARIE continues to scrub and clean.)* After all you're a woman, I'm a man. You come from an occupied country. I live in a free society. It's quite possible that you couldn't help becoming who you are.

MARIE. *(Her back still to him, dryly.)* If you're saying that the human being is the product of society that creates him and not the opposite ... then that's what one calls an evidence or a truism.

PIERRE. It's also what we call a positivist idea.

MARIE. *(Still with her back to him — she stops.)* I am a positivist.

PIERRE. Excuse me?

MARIE. *(Turning around.)* I said, I am a positivist. Maybe you don't appreciate it but that's what I am.

PIERRE. Sacrébleu! So am I. I would never have thought. So you're a positivist.

MARIE. *(Turning around.)* Positively.

PIERRE. But you lie so much. Is this another one of your fabrications?

(MARIE comes down from her chair and gets a photograph out of her bag and hands it to PIERRE.)

MARIE. This photo was taken last year at the masked ball for the Association of Franco-Polish Positivists. You see the banner? Look to the left ... that's me.

PIERRE. Tied up in a blanket?

MARIE. That blanket is the Polish flag. I represented Poland breaking her ties.

(PIERRE hands photo back. In so doing, he lets go of it before she has grabbed it. The photo falls to the floor.)

PIERRE. Sorry. *(He retrieves it and awkwardly hands it to her.)* Tell me, what goals are you pursuing through science?

MARIE. To accelerate progress. To contribute to and to help liberate humanity of its chains and of its preconceptions.

PIERRE. What else?

MARIE. To accelerate the abolition of painful work. The advancement of industry and its techniques. The development of means of communication. The rise of medicine. The rationalization of agriculture. The availability of education to all levels of society. The elimination of superstitions. Let me see what else ....

PIERRE. Well, as I see it, contrary to the inanities that I uttered a little while ago ... your fate is definitely science. Welcome aboard. And do me a favor, please don't lie anymore. In this country it's not

necessary.

MARIE. My being able to remain here is hanging by a thread. If the reports to my embassy cease to be favorable ... I will be repatriated immediately and excluded from the scientific world.

PIERRE. Isn't there any way of cutting that thread?

MARIE. None. The only possibility is marriage, marriage of convenience, of course. But that's out of the question. My cousin did that. Her so-called husband became infatuated with her. He violated her in the coach after leaving City Hall. She couldn't even report it. And now they have all kinds of debts. No, I'm afraid that marriage of convenience is too much like playing Russian roulette.

PIERRE. I guess.

MARIE. Can we get back to science? Would you consider showing me how your electrometer functions in detail?

PIERRE. Absolutely. Right now, if you'd like. *(He walks towards the quartz.)* See this? When you turn it on, here, the current passes through this middle bulb ... *(Nothing happens.)* Oh, I forgot to plug it in. *(He goes towards the plug.)* I have to admit, not only am I clumsy ... but on top of everything else I'm terribly ... *(As he puts the plug in he gets an awful shock.)* Ahhhhhhh!

(He falls to his knees. MARIE, very concerned, goes to him.)

MARIE. Professeur Curie!

PIERRE. Dd ... dizzy.

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Several days later.

The same lighting as in Scene One. However, now outside, a light winter sun is shining. The clock indicates five minutes to eight in the morning.

BÉMONT enters wearing a different outfit, looking rather dapper and holding a package which seems fairly heavy . He hides it in a

corner. He puts a little bit of coal into the stove. He's satisfied that everything is well. He then goes to one of the tables and looks closely at a demijohn filled with a colorless liquid. He kneels down to have a closer look.

The door opens and MARIE enters, causing him to jump slightly. She is holding a two-handled basket, which also seems to be quite heavy.)

BÉMONT. *(Happy to see her.)* Bonjour, Marie.

MARIE. Bonjour, Gustave.

BÉMONT. So, the work is progressing?

MARIE. Not that well. I'm afraid I've been dragging my feet a little.

BÉMONT. I want you to know that your vodka was *fabulous.* Yesterday I drank and drank till I was dead drunk. I vaguely remember becoming involved in a tap dance contest with La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge. And this morning I woke up fresh as a daisy.

MARIE. I told you.

BÉMONT. I prepared a contract. Fifty fifty. Here, you sign here. Of course, that is if you agree .... *(He takes out a paper. MARIE reads it quickly and signs.)* Now, you have to tell me the recipe, the herbs, the proportions, everything.

MARIE. Did you bring what I asked you to bring?

(BÉMONT gets the parcel with which he entered.)

BÉMONT. Yes, but it wasn't easy. *(He puts the parcel onto the table with a bit of difficulty and starts unwrapping it.)* A bust of Pasteur was simple enough to find .... *(And sure enough it is a bust of Pasteur, made of plaster.)* However, finding one with a head that screws on and off .... *(He demonstrates.)* I had to talk to a lot of artisans. Are you going to tell me what it's for?

MARIE. It's personal. Here's the formula for the vodka.

(She gives him a piece of paper.)

BÉMONT. *(Looking over the paper.)* But all this can be found in

any store.

MARIE. Naturally.

BÉMONT. Fantastique. I have some large kegs in my basement. I'm buying everything this afternoon and starting tonight, I let it seep. And in three days ... *(Snaps fingers.)* ... into the bottles. Oh, apropos, I found a good name for it. CHEVRIKAIA. What do you think?

MARIE. It's more Russian than Polish, but why not?

BÉMONT. Now, as to our other project. Have you developed the photos?

MARIE. Yes. The plates are over there along with the proofs. Would you be so kind as to put the Pasteur next to my materials over there?

(BÉMONT immediately takes the Pasteur bust and places it on the other table.)

BÉMONT. *(While doing the above.)* Tell me, are the photographs as ooh, la, la as my uncle led me to believe?

MARIE. That's putting it rather mildly.

BÉMONT. He's quite an original, that old rascal. He spends his entire days taking photographs of living tableaus in his home. I guess he finds it stimulating.

MARIE. In any event, he pays well.

BÉMONT. Needless to say he's very grateful that he doesn't have to have these developed commercially. *(He looks at some of the proof sheets and reacts.)* Oh, my God. This is squarely pornographic.

MARIE. Yes. And you'll notice I had to adjust some of the contrasts.

BÉMONT. You're not shocked?

MARIE. The scientific eye shocks at nothing.

BÉMONT. Oh, good, because I have another series.

MARIE. Same price?

BÉMONT. Same price.

MARIE. *(Holds out her hand.)* Give.

(BÉMONT gives her some new photo plates. We hear the general sound of the school alarm.)

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