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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Radiance:
The Passion of Marie Curie

by Alan Alda

SAMUEL FRENCH

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RADIANCE: THE PASSION OF MARIE CURIE was first presented by the Geffen Playhouse, under artistic director Randall Arney and managing director Ken Novice, at the Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater in Los Angeles, California; with scenic design by Tom Lynch, lighting design by Daniel Ionazzi, sound design by Jon Gottlieb, costume design by Rita Ryack, projection design by John Boesche, and production stage management by Young Ji. The director was Daniel Sullivan. The cast was as follows:

ÉMILE . . . . . Hugo Armstrong
PIERRE . . . . . John de Lancie
PAUL . . . . . Dan Donohue
MARIE . . . . . Anna Gunn
TERBOUGIE/TORNEBLADH . . . . . Leonard Kelly-Young
MARGUERITE . . . . . Natacha Roi
JEANNE . . . . . Sarah Zimmerman

CHARACTERS

ÉMILE

PIERRE

PAUL

MARIE

TERBOUGIE/TORNEBLADH

MARGUERITE

JEANNE

TIME

For the most part, the play is set between 1898 and 1911.

SET

The actors in the company will be seated on a bare stage, taking in the action of the play. When their turn comes to play a scene, they will frankly rise, meet downstage and play it.

Images suggesting various locations are projected on the upstage wall.

The only furniture is a set of straight-backed chairs and occasionally a bed and a small table, all brought into play by the actors.

(The actors enter. Some take their seats, while some move props. **ÉMILE BOREL** *moves a chair as he speaks to us.)*

ÉMILE. In Paris, at 10 Rue Vauquelin – out back, behind some ancient buildings – you'll find a makeshift laboratory, a crumbling shed. Stifling in the summer, freezing in winter – with a few pine tables that were once used to dissect cadavers. Could there be a more ideal place for a couple to spend the happiest days of their lives? How could you not love this miserable old…

(SLIDE: MARIE AND PIERRE'S LAB)

PIERRE. *(overlapping)* …This miserable old shed. Rain blowing in through broken panes in the ceiling – the old stove belching a layer of dust onto our experiments… *(blowing dust off the table)* We hate it and we love it.

*(***MARIE** *turns to* **PIERRE**. *She speaks with a slight Polish accent.)*

MARIE. Pierre…

PIERRE. Yes?

MARIE. Don't laugh.

PIERRE. At what?

MARIE. I'm wondering…I might have a…

(She stops herself.)

PIERRE. A what?

MARIE. No. I don't know.

PIERRE. Marie, what is it?

MARIE. Why did Becquerel stop?

PIERRE. Why did he *stop?*

MARIE. He found those strange rays coming out of uranium and then he just dropped it. He didn't even measure them. I don't understand him. Isn't he curious?

PIERRE. So, what are you thinking?

MARIE. What if I did that for my thesis!? What if I measure the rays coming out of uranium. Is that valuable enough for a thesis?

PIERRE. Yes! Of course it is.

MARIE. But, is it original enough? It's just a measurement…

PIERRE. But, nobody's done it. Do it.

MARIE. I could use your electrometer. And the piezoelectric balance. I put a weight on the quartz and when it gives off a charge, I compare that charge to the charge…

PIERRE. You compare that to the charge coming off the uranium – yes. And when the charges balance, you've got it!

MARIE. What do you think?

PIERRE. Do it. It's perfect.

MARIE. It is, isn't it? *(delighted, kissing him quickly)* Every time I add a weight to the quartz, the charge goes up by a discrete amount. I'll get absolute pre…

(He kisses her, lingering on her lips. She comes up for air.)

…Precision. You're so greedy.

(She kisses him again, playfully.)

PIERRE. So are you.

MARIE. *(taking his hands in hers)* Do you know how lucky I am? To have you?

PIERRE. Not as lucky as I am.

MARIE. No. Much much *much* luckier. You give me courage. You want me to want what I want.

PIERRE. Of course I do.

MARIE. You see? You have no idea. You think *every* man would want me to want what I want?

*(***MARIE** *kisses* **PIERRE***'s hand.* **PIERRE** *offers his eyes for a kiss. She kisses them.* **PAUL** *enters and stops when he sees them.)*

PAUL. *(smiling)* I might have come at an awkward moment. Should I come back?

PIERRE. No, that's all right, most moments are like this. What are you up to? Take a chair.

PAUL. This is very exciting. I think this could work. I'm really sorry to barge in on you like this.

PIERRE. No, no. Tell us.

PAUL. I'm putting gas phase ions in a weak electric field. If I'm lucky, I'll actually be able to determine the velocities of individual ions!

PIERRE. Excellent!

PAUL. Now, *that* would be interesting, wouldn't it!

MARIE. Absolutely beautiful.

PIERRE. Excellent!!

(SLIDE: ÉMILE'S STUDY AT HOME)

ÉMILE. They're both very encouraging, aren't they?

*(***PAUL** *turns to* **ÉMILE.***)*

PAUL. They sit there with me until late at night and let me go on and on about ionizing gases. Then they come up with these penetrating questions. And she's…Marie is just…they're like one brain. They finish each others thoughts. There's something touching about that, don't you think?

*(***ÉMILE** *is writing a formula on his blackboard as they talk.)*

ÉMILE. Yes, well, I wish they would take a break from physics once a day. They talk physics while they *eat*, for God's sake.

MARGUERITE. *(entering with a dish) You're* supposed to be eating *lunch* now. He does that, he gets up in the middle of a meal and comes in here and scribbles. Can I get you some cake?

PAUL. No. I'll just watch Émile scribble for a while, then I have to get back to the lab.

MARGUERITE. *(putting down the dish)* Don't forget to eat. … Hello.

ÉMILE. What…?

MARGUERITE. Don't forget to eat.

ÉMILE. Didn't I just eat?

*(***MARGUERITE** *looks at* **PAUL** *as if to say, cheerfully, this is what I live with. She exits.)*

PAUL. *(to* **ÉMILE***)* Can I ask you a favor? Please say no, if you can't do it.

ÉMILE. Of course, what?

PAUL. If I gave you 800 francs, could you hold it for me? I want to give it to my mother, but I won't see her until the end of the month.

ÉMILE. And you'd like me to hold the money until then?

PAUL. If it's inconvenient I completely understand.

ÉMILE. No, not at all. But, why don't you just keep it in a drawer?

PAUL. At home…

ÉMILE. Yes.

PAUL. I can't do that. It wouldn't be safe. Jeanne would find it.

ÉMILE. Jeanne. *(beat)* Your wife.

PAUL. Yes.

ÉMILE. Well, of course. I'm happy to hold it for you.

*(***PAUL** *takes the money out of his hatband and counts it.)*

Why didn't you ask Pierre? They'd be glad to hold this for you. They love you.

PAUL. I can't. I couldn't stand the look in Marie's eyes if I thought she was disappointed in me. The problem is I worship her.

ÉMILE. You admire her. We all do.

PAUL. No, I worship her. Don't ever say I said that. Please. Not even to Marguerite.

*(***ÉMILE** *returns to the blackboard and hums Beethoven's* Ode to Joy.*)*

I hope I haven't made you uncomfortable.

ÉMILE. Why would you think I'm uncomfortable?

PAUL. Because when you're uncomfortable you tend to start humming Beethoven. Émile, please don't judge me.

ÉMILE. No, no…

PAUL. I can't help it. She's amazing. So infinitely curious. And *precise*. She keeps notebooks, diaries…about everything in her life…

MARIE. *(at her journal)* Irene is born. Three kilograms… One bottle of champagne to celebrate the baby: three francs. Chemist and nurse: Seventy-one, fifty.

PAUL. *Nothing* escapes her attention. *Nothing*.

MARIE. Irene now weighs 3.2 kilograms *before* nursing. 3.3 kilograms *after* nursing.

PAUL. How could you not fall in love with someone who's both obsessed and meticulous?

(SLIDE: MARIE AND PIERRE'S LAB)

*(***MARIE** *is at her apparatus. She has carefully placed a weight on the balance and read the result.)*

MARIE. *(confused, agitated)* Pierre! I need you.

PIERRE. *(entering)* What? Are you all right?

MARIE. This is giving off rays!

PIERRE. What is?

MARIE. *(rattled)* I wanted to see if anything else gives off rays. Besides uranium. I've been trying gold, silver, all kinds of things. I was just curious.

PIERRE. So?

MARIE. Why are the rays coming out of pitchblende?

PIERRE. You put pitchblende in there?

MARIE. Yes, why are rays coming out of it?

PIERRE. Well, pitchblende has uranium in it, so of course it gives off…

MARIE. No. This is from that place in Bohemia. They took all the uranium out when they mined it. This is just slag now, but it's still giving off radiation.

PIERRE. So, maybe there's a little residue of uranium in there.

MARIE. No, Pierre, listen. *(holding up a canister)* This is uranium. *(holding a small rock)* This is pitchblende, after the uranium has been taken out. It's just slag. This slag is twice as active as pure uranium.

PIERRE. No.

MARIE. It's crazy. We have to get more of this. You think they'd give us some?

PIERRE. It's just lying there on the ground. I'll ask them.

MARIE. Beg them. We have to study it. Even if they send us just a little.

(A chute opens on the back wall and slag starts to spill out. [Note: an alternative effect is to have a sliding door open on the back wall as the slag piles up, filling the doorway behind a wire mesh. Later in the play, the door can be closed.] **MARIE** *and* **PIERRE** *turn and watch the slag pour onto the floor. It keeps coming.)*

PIERRE. *(finally)* That's quite a bit.

MARIE. That's the *first* truckload. There are twenty more.

*(***MARIE** *shovels the slag into a large pot. It's heavy. [The actual pot weighed 20 kilos.] She lugs the pot to a fire and stirs it with a rod that is as long as she is tall. Steam rises from the pot.)*

PAUL. *(entering, observing her)* I came by and watched you work today – stirring pots of pitchblende. Boiling it down. Boiling down the residue, then the residue of that. I can't tell you how it moves me when sweat gleams on that pale skin that I can only steal a glance at. When concentration creases that brow that I'll never be able to kiss. It broke my heart, watching you place a weight on a bit of quartz to measure its charge. You did it with the lightest, most delicate touch – a touch I'll never be able to feel.

*(***MARIE**, *at her apparatus, carefully balances a small weight on the dish of the balance.)*

MARIE. …Pierre! Look at this! *(almost alarmed)* I precipitated it with ammonium…

PIERRE. Yes…?

MARIE. Now it's four hundred times more active than uranium! *Four hundred.*

(They are stunned, almost as though this were a catastrophe.)

PIERRE. *(in a hushed tone)* My God. If there's no uranium at all in that slag…

MARIE. …Then, what's giving off all this radiation?

PIERRE. …There could be a new element in there.

MARIE. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. There's a lot more slag to go through.

PIERRE. *(glancing at the enormous pile of slag)* Yes…yes!

MARIE. Irene now weighs 9.2 kilograms; the circumference of her head is 44.3 centimeters…

(lighting change)

The substance we have extracted from pitchblende contains an element never before known. We're calling it Polonium – after the name of the country of origin of one of us.

(lighting change)

…I took 3.6 Kilograms of fruit and the same weight in crystallized sugar. I boiled it for ten minutes and passed it through a fine sieve. I got fourteen pots of very good gooseberry jelly…

(lighting change)

This is extraordinary: We think we have a *second* new element! Pierre took it to Demarçay for spectral analysis. If the existence of this metal is confirmed we propose to call it radium.

PIERRE. Demarçay couldn't believe it. He said, "My God, what is this?" I said, "Whatever it is, it's 900 times more

radioactive than uranium." He got a clear spectral line. It doesn't correspond to any known element.

(They hug. **PAUL** *enters.)*

PAUL. It's true…You did it, didn't you?

MARIE. We found it, yes!

PAUL. *(hugging* **PIERRE***)* I heard from Becquerel.

MARIE. We've definitely got it.

PAUL. This is fantastic. You must be thrilled.

PIERRE. You can't imagine. And I can finally get back to crystals.

MARIE. Well, we still have to isolate it.

PIERRE. Actually isolate it?

MARIE. Well, yes.

PIERRE. You want to keep going?

MARIE. Why wouldn't we?

PIERRE. She's amazing. We've spent two years on this. You're exhausted.

MARIE. We can't stop now. There's a new element in there.

PIERRE. You actually want to keep going on this.

MARIE. I don't see my children from morning until night. It's painful to me, sometimes it's unbearable… but, all right, I can live with that. I can get freezing eyelids and bleeding fingers. What I *can't* do is stand by and let someone else isolate radium.

PIERRE. But, that's just about who gets the credit.

MARIE. Pierre, no…

PIERRE. Really, that's all it is… That's not worth ruining your health over. You're exhausted. What's the matter?

MARIE. Never mind. It's childish of me.

PAUL. What is?

MARIE. Never mind, forget it.

PIERRE. Marie, what is it?

MARIE. It's like going back to Szczuki.

PIERRE. It isn't.

MARIE. I can't go through that again.

PIERRE. You won't. It's not the same thing.

MARIE. It is!

PAUL. I'm sorry, what are you talking about?

MARIE. Szczuki.

PAUL. What's shookie?

PIERRE. It's a town in Poland.

MARIE. A very small, very provincial town.

PAUL. Why can't you go back there?

MARIE. No, I don't mean literally. I was eighteen. I was desperate to get an education…God, this sounds idiotic. Forget it.

PAUL. Please, tell me.

MARIE. First of all, you're a child in school and you're not allowed to learn your own language. It's Russian or nothing. Your father and mother's language doesn't exist. How does that make you feel?

PAUL. It must make you feel terrible…

MARIE. It makes you feel like *nothing*. But that's not good enough for the Russians. If you're a woman, your education stops dead at the door to the university. You can't even study in *their* language! So now, you're *less* than nothing. I had to go to *Paris* to study! And that's how I wound up in Szczuki.

PAUL. I'm sorry, I don't think I follow that.

PIERRE. You don't have to follow it, this is really directed at me.

MARIE. *(to* **PIERRE***)* It *is*. I had no money. I couldn't *afford* to move to Paris. So, I go to that pitiful little town – Szczuki – to work as a governess.

PIERRE. …Marie, I know.

MARIE. *(to both* **PAUL** *and* **PIERRE***)* I have to be constantly available to this petty, pretentious family for everything, even when they need a fourth for bridge, which is extremely boring. Then, one day the family's son comes home from a trip and we fall in love. And the

family goes crazy. Don't be ridiculous, you can't love a *governess*. She's nothing. And they put me on a train. That did it. As the train pulled out of town, I promised myself…I *promised* myself, Pierre…I will not disappear into nothingness. And I won't. I can't. So, that's my sad story. Maybe it's weak of me, but, Pierre, please, please understand.

PIERRE. No, I do understand. *(beat)* I'll put crystals aside for a while…

MARIE. I'm not asking you to do that…

PIERRE. …I'll get back to them later.

MARIE. I don't expect you to stop working on…

PIERRE. You can't do this alone. There's too much of that stuff to sift through.

PAUL. How much radium is *in* all that slag? Do you actually know?

PIERRE. No idea. Maybe only one part in a hundred.

PAUL. That could take months.

PIERRE. I guess it could.

PAUL. *(seeing* **PIERRE** *struggle to get out of his chair)* You know, you're more exhausted than Marie. Look at you.

PIERRE. No, no, no. That's just a little arthritis. *(to* **MARIE***)* Come on, we'll have some fun. We'll hold hands and jump in there together. We'll stuff our nostrils with foul chemicals until we choke. We'll cover ourselves with the muddy slime of ten tons of slag.

MARIE. *(touched)* That's the most beautiful thing any man has ever said to a woman.

*(***PAUL** *exits.)*

PIERRE. *(to the audience)* But it isn't one part in a hundred. It's one in a million. It doesn't take months, it takes *years* of digging, boiling, testing.

(SLIDE: SAME LAB – A DIFFERENT CORNER OF IT)

MARIE. Are you in pain?

PIERRE. No. Not even if I press right where I put the radium.

*(***PAUL** *enters.)*

PAUL. Am I too late?

MARIE. No, we're just taking the bandage off.

PIERRE. *(rolling up his sleeve)* You want to see? Come here. I put a tiny bit of radium on my skin for ten hours 21 days ago. Look.

*(***PIERRE** *shows them his arm.)*

MARIE. *(delighted)* It's a burn! It's a definite burn! Look at the *size* of it – six square centimeters!

PIERRE. At first it was just kind of red, and now *this.*

MARIE. It's a real wound! Look, it's oozing! Isn't that amazing?

PAUL. *(trying call up some enthusiasm)* Yes. Very nice.

MARIE. Deep mortification. Fantastic! Pierre, this is thrilling.

(SLIDE: MARIE AND PIERRE'S GARDEN)

*(***MARGUERITE** *enters with a tray of drinks, along with* **PAUL, JEANNE, MARGUERITE** *and* **ÉMILE**.*)*

JEANNE. Marie, are you crazy? You can't be serious with this.

PIERRE. Jeanne, the radiation destroys tissue.

MARIE. It can probably kill cancer cells.

(taking the tray from **MARGUERITE***)*

Thank you.

MARGUERITE. You actually put it on your skin? What happened?

PAUL. Suppurating sores.

PIERRE. It's beautiful.

ÉMILE. You know, I hate to say it, but this sounds dangerous.

MARIE. Émile, be honest. If you could prove a mathematical theorem by burning your skin with it, you wouldn't do it?

ÉMILE. Didn't Pierre put mice in a closed space with radium?

MARIE. Yes.

ÉMILE. And what happened?

MARIE. They died. What point are you trying to make?

ÉMILE. You handle it, you suck it up into pipettes – I've seen you do that! Why are you fooling with radiation?

MARIE. Why are we *fooling* with it?! Because when uranium gives off enough radiation, it turns into *a whole other element!* There's something going on inside the atom. It's giving up something and changing into something else. The atom may not be the smallest thing in the universe! My God, Émile, we walk around, surrounded by this mysterious fog of the unknown. And all we have to do is step into the mystery. Isn't that worth a little risk?

JEANNE. Well, it's nice to know those things but, my God, it sounds like you're playing with fire.

PAUL. Jeanne. This is science. It's not "nice" to know these things. It's monumental. I'll explain it to you when we get home.

JEANNE. Oh please, she's wearing herself out. Look at those circles under her eyes. She's starting to look haggard!

PAUL. Jeanne!

JEANNE. Well, look at her. No wonder she gets morose.

PIERRE. She doesn't get morose.

JEANNE. Let's be frank. We love Marie – but you can't go around dressed in black, smelling poison gases all day and not get a little *morose*. Am I right? Aren't those fumes poisonous?

PIERRE. Well, if you were to inhale them directly. So, we always try to work outside, but then it snows, and we have to move back inside. It smells awful.

JEANNE. But, you have to use really toxic chemicals, don't you?

PIERRE. Yes, because the radium is all bound up with barium and we have to separate it out with fractional crystallization.

JEANNE. *(totally mystified)* Fractional *what?*

PAUL. That's a little technical for Jeanne. *(to* **JEANNE**, *casually condescending)* But, intuitively, you hit on something. Good for you!

JEANNE. *(resenting his tone)* Yes. Thank you… Anyway, it's making you morose. I'll bet any amount of money the last time you wore something other than black was on your wedding day.

PIERRE. *(lighting his pipe)* You're right. She wore navy. She was lovely, too.

MARIE. Dark colors are practical. I spend my whole day cooking up pots of mud.

JEANNE. That's what I wear an apron for.

PAUL. *(lightly, joking)* Cooking up pots of mud?

JEANNE. *Meaning?*

PAUL. *(innocently, playfully)* Meaning?

JEANNE. I don't understand that remark. If you want Châteaubriand, Professor, then bring home something monetary I can take to the butcher.

PAUL. Jeanne, I was teasing.

JEANNE. There might be more interesting things on your plate if you didn't spend your time researching things that don't exist.

PAUL. Mathematical objects do exist.

JEANNE. There. "Mathematical objects." How in the name of God can an idea be an object? It defies common sense. I know you all think I'm a philistine, but why do scientists have to be so obsessed? Walking around with their head in the clouds… *(to* **PAUL**, *with some malice)* Here's an idea: Try coming home with a few francs in your pocket. That might bring you down to where the rest of us are.

PAUL. A few minutes ago there was a woman in your chair who was only slightly acidic. Where did she go, I wonder?

JEANNE. Where did *you* go? That's the question.

(The air in the garden is getting very heavy. **ÉMILE** *eases the tension by breaking into a few bars of Beethoven's* Ode to Joy.*)*

(Light change: Evening in the garden.)

(The friends move off. **MARIE** *cleans up.* **PIERRE** *takes out a letter.)*

MARIE. Jeanne was outrageous today.

PIERRE. *(after a slight beat, nodding)* She's insulting.

MARIE. She has that streak of anger in her.

(when **PIERRE** *doesn't answer)*

You know? Are you all right?

PIERRE. *(holding up a letter)* I couldn't tell you while they were all here. This came in the mail from Mittag-Leffler. They've decided to award the Nobel Prize for our work on radiation.

MARIE. Pierre! I thought something terrible had happened. *(beat, realizing)* It has, hasn't it?

PIERRE. First of all, the prize will be just for the work on *radiation*. Not for the discovery of radium. They won't believe we have a new element until they can see it.

MARIE. I thought so. It's not good enough that we got it down to a salt. I knew it.

PIERRE. They want the pure metal. Pure radium in a dish.

MARIE. Of course.

PIERRE. There's sort of a vague hint that there might be a prize some day for whoever comes up with that. But they'll have to be able to *see* it.

MARIE. All right. So, it's just for radiation. That's better than nothing.

PIERRE. Marie – they want to present it to me and to Becquerel. But not to you.

MARIE. *(after a beat)* Well, that's a surprise, isn't it.

PIERRE. It's infuriating. Why would they do this?

MARIE. They're afraid of giving the prize to a governess. *(beat)* How did this happen? Do you know?

PIERRE. The French Academy sent a nomination to Stockholm. It completely ignored what you did.

MARIE. We should talk to Lippmann. And Poincaré.

PIERRE. Why?

MARIE. Because they were my mentors. We can ask them to object to the nomination.

PIERRE. Lippmann and Poincaré both put their names to it.

MARIE. *(stung)* Very nice. Something lacking in them as mentors, wouldn't you say?

PIERRE. They just can't conceive that a woman could have done this. They can't conceive of it.

MARIE. They can. They just won't. Well, damn them. They can go to hell!

PIERRE. I can't accept this without you. I'll write to them. Maybe I can sway them.

MARIE. But, what will you say?

PIERRE. I don't know, I can't tell them they're bigots.

MARIE. So, then…?

PIERRE. Well – we did this together – they should give it to both of us…because…

MARIE. Yes…?

PIERRE. …Because it's more aesthetically pleasing that way. It's symmetrical.

MARIE. That seems to lack a certain amount of…actual meaning.

PIERRE. Yes, but it's hard to argue with, isn't it?

(SLIDE: ON THE TRAIN, SWEDISH COUNTRY-SIDE WHIZZING BY)

(Sound: the rumble of a train)

*(***MARIE***, sitting next to* **PIERRE***, is writing on a postcard. She reads it to* **PIERRE***.)*

MARIE. My Darling Irene. So much excitement! We're on our way to Stockholm. Two whole days on the train. You'd love it. We hate it.

(smiling at **PIERRE***, who doesn't respond)*

I'm very proud of your daddy. He wrote a brilliant letter to the Nobel Committee and they had to give in. *(to* **PIERRE***)* Why do you suppose they gave in? I thought that letter you wrote was very peculiar. Pierre, speak. You haven't said anything since Belgium.

*(***PIERRE** *looks at her unhappily.)*

What is it now?

PIERRE. I couldn't get the rest of it.

MARIE. What rest of it?

PIERRE. That you would actually get up and accept the award. They want me to accept for both of us.

MARIE. I'm supposed to sit in the audience and *watch?* Like an assistant?

PIERRE. I called Dr. Törnebladh. I couldn't budge him.

*(***MARIE** *rises, agitated.)*

MARIE. *(to the audience)* Is this astonishing? They'll give me the prize, but they won't let me up on the stage to accept it.

*(***TÖRNEBLADH** *goes to* **MARIE** *downstage.)*

(SLIDE: NOBEL HALL)

And of course I have to be gracious to the president of the academy. Törnebladh. So smooth, so effortlessly insulting…oily and slippery, like a raw herring…*(turning suddenly to* **TÖRNEBLADH***)* Dr. Törnebladh! I'm so sorry we couldn't have been here in December.

TÖRNEBLADH. Not at all.

MARIE. I wasn't feeling well. And we had teaching commitments. I was very sorry to miss the official ceremony.

TÖRNEBLADH. His majesty understood. He was very gracious. I do think you would have liked the little talk I gave about you and Pierre.

MARIE. I'm sure I would have.

TÖRNEBLADH. I said your work with Professor Curie was the best illustration of the old proverb, "coninucta valent." Union is strength.

MARIE. *(graciously)* Ah. Very nice.

TÖRNEBLADH. And then I said – you'll enjoy this – "This makes us look at God's word in an entirely new light: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an helpmeet for him.'"

MARIE. Helpmeet.

TÖRNEBLADH. I was really delighted when I came up with that. I think it handles a delicate situation very well, don't you? Excuse me. I think we're ready for the lecture.

*(***TÖRNEBLADH** *holds out a chair for* **MARIE** *and pats it, pointedly seating her in the audience. She gives the chair a sour look and sits.* **TÖRNEBLADH***, his back to us, addresses the Nobel Hall.)*

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor to present Professor Pierre Curie.

MARIE. *(to the audience)* Is there something wrong with this man?

(Sound: applause)

*(***PIERRE***, at the lectern with his back to us, mimes speaking to the hall.)*

I don't understand, does being a woman require invisibility? The tiniest speck of radium can glow in the dark, but a full-grown woman? No. Please get back in the slag. Your presence is becoming unsettlingly obvious. Please be invisible…I'm sorry, but I exist.

(Sound: Applause.)

*(***PIERRE** *hands* **MARIE** *her Nobel award and, none too happily, they pose for a photograph.)*

(SLIDE: THE FRONT PAGE OF A NEWSPAPER, showing **MARIE** *and* **PIERRE** *posing solemnly)*

(SLIDE: MARIE AND PIERRE'S LIVING ROOM)

PIERRE. I hate this. I truly hate it.

MARIE. I hate it, too, but we can be civil.

PIERRE. We can't get our work done. What's the point of all this?

MARIE. Well, I hope the point is it will help us fund the work. Maybe we'll get an actual lab.

PIERRE. But, what have these absurd interviews actually produced? Nothing. Well, not nothing – requests for my scintillating presence, for autographs. For loans. *(taking out an envelope)* Here, how about this?…A letter from a total stranger asking if I would mind sending him a thousand francs by return mail. If I had a thousand francs I would buy a pistol and shoot the next journalist who comes through the door.

MARIE. Pierre, please. You're making yourself upset.

PIERRE. The imbecile who asked me about chickens. He was serious.

MARIE. Chickens…

PIERRE. Did I agree with the idea that radium could be used to make chickens lay hard-boiled eggs. You don't think he should have been taken out and shot? *(touching his chest)* A column of bile is rising in my esophagus like mercury in a thermometer.

(Sound: a knock at the door)

MARIE. Please. Try to smile.

*(***MARIE** *brings* **TERBOUGIE** *into the room.)*

Pierre, this is Mr. Terbougie.

PIERRE. Yes. I'm sure it is.

TERBOUGIE. Mr. Curie, it's a great pleasure to see you again. A pleasure and an honor.

PIERRE. I'm sorry, we've met?

TERBOUGIE. Years ago. I doubt if you'd remember. We were on a committee to save Dreyfus. What a travesty that whole affair was. But you were brilliant.

PIERRE. I see.

MARIE. How can we help you with your article, Mr. Terbougie?

*(***PIERRE** *looks at his pocket watch.)*

PIERRE. We can give you seven minutes.

TERBOUGIE. Yes, well, I suppose the technical bits are a little beyond most readers, but I wonder if we could talk about the personal side of your discoveries.

PIERRE. The personal side of radiation?

TERBOUGIE. Well, of you and Madame Curie.

PIERRE. We're married.

TERBOUGIE. Yes…

PIERRE. To each other.

TERBOUGIE. Yes.

PIERRE. *(astonished he might want to know more)* I believe that covers it.

TERBOUGIE. Well, of course, it's unusual for a husband and wife to share a love not only for each other, but for science as well. What is that like? Is it the romantic idyll in a scientific lab we've read about?

(He smiles, sharing the joke.)

PIERRE. *Romantic idyll?*

MARIE. *(jumping in)* Pierre and I feel that it's the science that matters, not the person.

TERBOUGIE. Yes, of course. But, I remember how eloquent you were during the Dreyfus days. I wonder if you have an anecdote about your work on radium.

PIERRE. An anecdote.

TERBOUGIE. Does anything come to mind?

PIERRE. I'm pleased to tell you my mind is a total and complete blank.

*(***PIERRE** *pointedly winds his pocket watch.)*

TERBOUGIE. Well, I don't want to take too much of your time, but…

PIERRE. *(jumping to his feet and shaking* **TERBOUGIE***'s hand)* Thank you. Can't tell you how much I appreciate that. We have an enormous amount of work to do. Pleasure meeting you. Meeting you again. A real pleasure. Right this way.

*(***PIERRE** *leads him to the door.)*

MARIE. I hope you got what you needed.

TERBOUGIE. Yes, I'll be fine. Thank you. Mrs. Curie, it was a pleasure to have…

PIERRE. Don't forget your umbrella.

*(***PIERRE** *presses his umbrella to him.* **PIERRE** *and* **TERBOUGIE** *freeze in place.)*

MARIE. No, wait. "…Don't forget your umbrella." That was the day. "Don't forget your umbrella."

(MARIE *turns back to the living room.* **PIERRE** *and* **TERBOUGIE** *return to their places from just before* **TERBOUGIE***'s exit.)*

TERBOUGIE. Mrs. Curie, it was a pleasure to have…

PIERRE. Don't forget your umbrella.

*(***TERBOUGIE** *is gone.)*

MARIE. Well, I wonder what that interview will look like.

PIERRE. Exactly like the others. They make it all up. Let's pull ourselves together and go to the lab.

MARIE. Now?

PIERRE. We haven't put any time in today on our "romantic idyll".

MARIE. I can't yet. I have to take care of the children first.

PIERRE. What do you have to do?

MARIE. I have to feed them.

PIERRE. Can't someone else do that?

MARIE. Once I go to the lab, I won't see them for the rest of the day. They need a few minutes with me.

PIERRE. *I* need you. I need to work. We've spent the whole morning making ourselves stupid.

MARIE. After I feed the children.

*(***MARIE** *heads for another room.)*

PIERRE. How long will you be?

MARIE. I don't know.

PIERRE. Are you coming at all?

MARIE. I don't *know*. Don't torment me!

*(***MARIE** *exits.)*

(Sound: a crack of thunder)

(SLIDE: A PARIS STREET. RAIN FALLING)

(Sound: the roar of an approaching wagon and another clap of thunder)

(With the exception of **MARIE***, the* **CAST** *is onstage, holding open umbrellas.)*

ÉMILE. Pierre steps into the Rue Dauphine, near the Pont Neuf, just as a huge wagon, thirty-feet long is coming fast in the other direction. In the driving rain, under his umbrella, Pierre doesn't see it.

*(***PIERRE** *is handed an umbrella.)*

PIERRE. As he tries to hurry across the street, on legs weakened from years of exposure to radiation. He steps out from behind a carriage, and there, suddenly, the wagon is bearing down on him. As one of the horses brushes him, he grabs the animal's harness, trying not to fall. But the horse shies and Pierre falls to the pavement. The driver pulls the wagon sharply to the side and the front wheels just miss Pierre. People watching from the sidewalk expel a sigh of relief. But the driver can't pull the wagon far enough away from him, and the rear wheel crushes Pierre's skull.

(The moment is punctuated as they close their umbrellas. **PIERRE** *exits.* **ÉMILE** *and* **PAUL** *enter. They look ashen.* **MARIE** *is in a chair.)*

(SLIDE: MARIE AND PIERRE'S LIVING ROOM)

MARIE. What is it? What happened?

PAUL. Pierre…

ÉMILE. He was crossing the street. By the Pont Neuf… *(He can't go on.)*

MARIE. What? He's not hurt…?

ÉMILE. There was a huge wagon…

MARIE. How bad is it?

*(***ÉMILE** *and* **PAUL** *find it hard to speak.)*

Pierre is dead? Dead? Absolutely dead?

ÉMILE. Maybe he was holding the umbrella so that he couldn't see the wagon.

PAUL. Or…maybe his legs gave out.

MARIE. Where is he?

ÉMILE. They're bringing him here. You should take the children and wait at my house.

MARIE. No, I'm not leaving. Can the children stay with you for a day or two?

ÉMILE. Yes, of course. But shouldn't you be…?

MARIE. I'm waiting here for Pierre.

*(***PAUL** *and* **ÉMILE** *withdraw.)*

I wait for four hours. When they bring you in, they tell me to leave so they can remove your clothes. I'm stunned and I obey. How could I be so crazy? It was my job to take off your bloody rags. After they leave, I throw the shreds into a huge fire – with clotted blood and the debris of your brain still on them. In the horror of the moment, I kiss what is left of you in all that. Your lips, that I used to call greedy, are pale and discolored. I kiss those eyelids you closed so often so that I could touch them with my lips. Pierre… I had to take care of the children. I told you not to torment me, and those were the last words I spoke to you. But, I had to take care of the children.

(SLIDE: WE SEE SPRING THROUGH MARGUERITE'S WINDOW.)

MARGUERITE. *(writing in her journal)* Finally, spring. Periwinkles and hyacinth! And little blue buds on the rosemary plants. At last, this dismal year has melted away and now – just watch us come alive again.

(Depressed, **MARIE** *slowly covers her lab equipment with a cloth. She goes to her desk and opens her journal.)*

(SLIDE: MARIE'S LAB)

MARIE. Pierre, I woke up this morning a little calmer, but then within a quarter of an hour I was howling like a wild animal. I walk down the street as if hypnotized. I don't really care about anything. I won't kill myself. I don't even have the desire for that. But I think sometimes, why can't a wagon come by and take me the way it took my beloved.

JEANNE. *(entering)* Marie, please, you have to pull yourself out of it. That diary of grief you're keeping just makes it worse. Look at it this way: At least you had someone who loved you all these years. You should realize how lucky you are.

MARIE. Lucky?

JEANNE. That may sound cold, but it's the truth. Some of us drew an unlucky hand.

MARIE. You don't mean Paul. He's devoted to you.

JEANNE. Really? Devoted? This morning, he called me "insolent." Twice. *Insolent.* You don't know how harsh he is with me. And he does nothing to better our lives. He could have taken a position this year with a large company. We could be enjoying our lives instead of squeezing by. You're lucky. You should be grateful.

MARIE. Jeanne, this is not the best time to get into this – but how can you ask Paul to do industrial work? If he were designing dynamos someplace, how could he have done his paper on Brownian motion?

JEANNE. Oh my God, I went to his lecture on that. What was all *that* about?

MARIE. You have no idea how brilliant he is, do you?

JEANNE. Help me to understand this. Seriously. Why can't he work in an industrial lab? He'd still be doing science. And he'd be doing something useful. Not just theory.

MARIE. Maybe he doesn't have a choice. Theory can be intoxicating.

JEANNE. That's what I mean. He's drunk on it. Why does he put his own pleasure ahead of his family?

MARIE. It's not always pleasure. Sometimes it's torture. But, the drive to – I don't know, to see into the dark. It's so powerful it can make you helpless. It's irresistible. Very few people are capable of knowing something that was never known before, by anyone. And Paul is one of them. He's one of the few people alive who is capable of that.

JEANNE. Yes, I know. He's very clever.

MARIE. *(frustrated)* No – Jeanne – brilliant. He explained Brownian motion more simply than Einstein did – in a completely original way. Paul created a whole new kind of mathematics…

JEANNE. Yes, it's very exciting. But it doesn't give him the right to call me insolent. Well, I shouldn't be surprised. I always feel a little bit of contempt from Paul because I'm not smart enough. You don't know how awful I feel sometimes when all you smart ones are talking. What am I supposed to do? All I wanted was to make a home for him – to raise our children. But he'd rather talk shop with strangers than spend a few simple minutes with me. I can't talk about ordinary things with the man, about my day. I can't. I get nervous. My palms sweat. The loneliness is unbearable.

MARIE. I had no idea…

JEANNE. *(looking away)* I can't help it if I'm not brilliant. I try to keep up with all of you, but I can't. Yes, all

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