



Presentable

The door catches the heel of Angela's spongy old-lady shoe, striking the jamb with such arrogance that the wall shakes. The set-master will have a fit, and scold George. He deserves it : always venting his feelings so everyone must breathe them. After the performance he could say, "You embarrassed me, dropping that line, Angela," but instead he risks damaging the set, risks tripping her. And adding such racket to a quiet scene! The audience will have to interpret it as Mrs. Curie's son's suppressed anger toward her. When they have just reconciled! But that's George : when he flaunts his anger, nothing else matters. Certainly not Angela.

But there's no time! She's whisked from the wings into a rudimentary dressing-area behind the curtain. There the sickly, stooped woman George chased from the

stage will transform into her younger self. Accorded a new costume, new hair and makeup, better posture, without the curium lesions, she'll become a woman at the top of her game, thriving in a flourishing, contentious circle. Not the Mrs. Curie in exhausted decline.

Not the Angela burdened with a childish opposite's disapproval.

“Four minutes! Go!” It is Jonaya, the head costumer, literally stage-whispering, for everyone must work silently to remain inaudible to the house.

Jonaya ordains that Angela stand still for these quick changes, unaiding, while the others work to set back the clock for Mrs. Curie. When Jenny removes the white wig Angela feels her mind sharpen. Leo's changing her jewelry, brushing her neck as

he releases the clasp at her throat. It is forward, but he's half her age, and it thrills her so hotly she will never forbid it. He skims her hip changing her wristwatch. Angela lets a radiant, active spirit inhabit her; it is a balm to her petty irritation.

George's monologue commences. The keenest writing in the play, and he's managed to make it pompous. Angela's glad she can scarcely hear it.

“Three minutes!”

Angela's high-waisted beige skirt pools at her feet while Taya undoes both shoes, shucks off bland socks and rolls on rose-colored stockings. A smart charcoal dress is zipped to her body in two panels, front and back. A dark wig of unruly brown folds its wings over her head, and a dignity straightens Angela's back. She doesn't notice this, but the others do : Jenny tiptoes to arrange the bobby-pins.

“Two minutes!”

The make-up artists surround her. Bill revivifies her eyes, Jarrel cures her sores with foundation, banishes creases from the astute brow. He reddens her lips. Her face openly anticipates fifty more years of life. Mrs. Curie, Angela : both hungry.

“Sixty seconds!”

Angela savors the tightness of a final ascending zipper, and a white lab-coat alights on her shoulders, which broaden and move back. Leo kneels, cupping two low heels, and she steps in, tall enough for everything.

Leo presses a thick leather dossier into one hand, and Jonaya pulls the other, stealing toward the far side of the stage.

George’s last line leaks out; everything sanguine permeating that passionate speech has fled. He’s so mad at Angela, he forgot to draw from the deep generosity the playwright steeped the words in. He strolls off stage, so far from Angela.

Awaiting the cue for Angela's re-emergence, Jonaya gently propels Angela toward the door, toward the audience sagging from George's misdirected pouting, whispering, "You will win two Nobel Prizes, Madame! Two! Nothing can stop you!"

Angela's body is poised. All that remains in her mind is, *Open the door.*

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