

MADAME CURIE

(first ten pages)

by

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FADE IN:

INT. A LABORATORY - EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In hyper-realistic QUICK TIME:

A WOMAN'S HAND turns up a dial and a bunsen burner FLARES up.

Liquid BOILS.

A MAN'S FINGERS dip a small crystal into a dish of liquid.

The crystal GROWS bigger, bigger, bigger.

The MAN's and WOMAN's HANDS work together to mount the crystal into a stand.

FROM BEHIND,

We see the FIGURES of the man and woman back away from a table, staring at it together.

BETWEEN THEM, we see the crystal on the table.

SUPER:

In 1903, Pierre and Marie Curie were awarded a joint Nobel Prize in Physics for the discovery of two new elements: polonium...

and radium.

LIGHT in the laboratory FADES as the sun sets.

The crystal GLOWS a freaky, beautiful blue.

SUPER:

A "radium craze" swept the western world. The radioactive substance was seen as a possible cure-all for a host of health issues, including cancer.

The man and the woman CLASP HANDS as they watch.

We move CLOSE towards the woman's face. What we can see of it is full of hope and satisfaction.

SUPER:

Marie Curie was the first woman to be awarded the newly created Nobel Prize in Sweden.

When we move back out, the man is no longer there.

SUPER:

Meanwhile in France, women did not have the right to vote, had no marital rights, and were barred from attending meetings of Paris' Academy of Science.

Her ARM remains outstretched as if she still held his hand.

FADE OUT:

The sound of RAIN

FADE IN:

EXT. THE CURIE LABORATORY - DAY

SUPER: April, 1906

Rain pours onto the roof of what looks like a large wooden shed.

INT. THE CURIE LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

Inside, PIERRE CURIE, 53, bearded, frumpled, with the lost stare of the absent-mindedly brilliant, stands in thoughtful silence.

A small group of STUDENTS wait impatiently for him to speak.

BEHIND HIM:

MARIE CURIE, 40, dressed in simple black, a face full of Polish determination and firing synapses, leads a small group of LAB ASSISTANTS out into the rain.

MARIE

Quickly everyone. Before it rusts.

INT. THE CURIE LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

Pierre still stands in thoughtful silence.

One of his students, PAUL LANGEVIN, 35, devilishly handsome, eyes on the future, clears his throat and speaks:

PAUL

If we can determine the rate of decay of the uranium, couldn't we...?

PIERRE

No, no. We'll need Marie. Her grasp of calculus far outranks any of ours.

One STUDENT remarks to the others.

STUDENT

Your lab assistant?

Pierre bristles. Some of the other students tense up as well: he's said the wrong thing.

EXT. THE CURIE LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

Marie pulls up a tarp to reveal several large SLABS of metal. She pulls one out.

MARIE

This one.

The lab assistants lift the heavy slab and bring it back into

INT. THE CURIE LABORATORY - CONTINUOUS

PIERRE

(to the student)

She is not my assistant. She is my wife and what's more she is my partner. And you should rather heed any advice she may offer.

As Pierre turns his back to wait for Marie, Paul whispers to the student.

PAUL

Don't you know who that is?

MARIE follows her assistants back into the room wielding a hammer.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(to the student)

That's Madame Curie, imbecile.

PIERRE
(calling)
Marie! We need you.

Marie walks over, wiping her hands on her skirt.

MARIE
Yes?

She rubs her fingers together nervously.

CLOSE ON a BEAKER catching drops of rain from the roof.

Marie stares at it rather than looking directly at the students.

PIERRE
We're trying to determine a
relationship between a known amount
of uranium in a given material and
how much radium we can expect to be
produced...

MARIE
(finishing his sentence)
Over a given period of time.

PIERRE
Precisely.

Marie brings over a rolling BLACKBOARD. She flips it over and starts furiously scribbling a graph and a few calculations.

CLOSE ON Paul watching her. She has the quiet beauty of the inspired. He is transfixed.

Marie finishes the calculation.

MARIE
It's fairly simple once you see it.

PIERRE
Ah, yes.

Pierre and his students move closer to the board.

The problem solved, Marie heads back to her assistants.

A KNOCK at the door followed by GASTON DARBOUX, 60, excitable as he is intellectual.

PIERRE (CONT'D)
 Ah, Monsieur Darboux.
 (to his students)
 That will be all for today.

The students disperse. Paul follows Pierre over to Darboux.

DARBOUX
 Pierre. How are you?

PIERRE
 I'd be better if my laboratory had
 a working roof, Darboux.
 (to Marie)
 Marie. We're off to town.

Darboux notices Marie in the mix of assistants.

DARBOUX
 Ah, Madame Curie. Excuse me, I did
 not see you there.

MARIE
 Bon jour, Monsieur Darboux.

He goes over to her and gives her a proper French greeting.

DARBOUX
 You should be coming with us, you
 know. We're creating a proposal to
 put before the Academy next month.
 And I believe we're discussing
 education for girls today, Pierre?

MARIE
 Yes, it's number two on your
 agenda. I've reviewed all of my
 notes on the matter with Pierre.

PIERRE
 In great detail, believe me.

DARBOUX
 But surely you don't trust this old
 sop to deliver them properly.

Pierre ignores the comment. Marie chuckles.

MARIE
 I appreciate the invitation, but
 we're trying to mine the few
 samples we have left before they're
 ruined.
 (she heads back to work)
 (MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

And, forgive me, but I have no stomach for Academy proposals.

PIERRE

I'll see you at home, then. Coming, Paul?

Paul nods as he puts on a coat. Pierre walks right past the COAT RACK without noticing it.

MARIE

Pierre.

She swoops over, takes a BLACK COAT off the rack and brings it to Pierre.

MARIE (CONT'D)

You'll forget all your senses one of these days.

Pierre puts a hand on her cheek, admiringly: a thank you before going.

Marie pushes her wet hair back as she looks after them a moment.

The RAIN picks up suddenly and she turns to her assistants.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Quickly!

EXT. PARIS STREET - DUSK

The rain has stopped but left DEEP PUDDLES in the street.

Pierre, Paul and Darboux are gathered together on a corner.

PIERRE

Until tomorrow, then. Thank you for all your support, Monsieur Darboux.

(a nod to Paul)

Paul.

He turns and walks down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARIS STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Pierre walks with his head held high in thought, oblivious to the street around him.

ON THE NEXT STREET:

We see a TRUCK DRIVER trying to get his horses to pull his truck out of a mud puddle.

In front of the wheels: a BROKEN COBBLESTONE.

ON PIERRE'S STREET:

Pierre closes his eyes in strained thought, trying to work out a problem in his head. He starts to turn a corner.

ON THE NEXT STREET:

The driver YELLS to his horses and they start to lift the truck out.

PIERRE turns the corner.

THE DRIVER'S TRUCK comes out of the mud with a lurch. He jumps into the cab and YELLS for them to keep going.

PIERRE slips on the broken piece of COBBLESTONE and falls into the street.

The DRIVER sees him at the last minute and pulls up on his REINS.

Pierre lays unconscious on the street as both horses miraculously miss stomping down on him.

The WHEELS of the truck screech to a halt but not before:

THE BACK WHEEL rolls up to Pierre's HEAD, and...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE CURIE HOME - NIGHT

Insistent KNOCKING.

FROM FAR BEHIND, we see Marie open the door on two OFFICIALS in uniform.

Marie turns her face towards us, ashen white, lost.

We now see who she was looking at:

TWO GIRLS (3 and 7) sitting in the other room, watching curiously.

FADE TO:

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

A FIRE crackles. It reflects against Marie's tear-stained face as she holds PIERRE'S BLACK COAT, bloodied and torn.

She RIPS a piece of the coat, holds it against her cheek and throws it into the flames.

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marie lies silent and subdued in bed.

YOUNG IRENE, 9, responsible beyond her years, brings in a TRAY.

IRENE

I brought you some soup, Mé-mé. You haven't been eating enough these past weeks.

Marie watches her brave little daughter setting up the tray.

MARIE

Come here, sweet.

Marie stretches her arms out and Irene's face melts into tears. She climbs into bed with her mother.

Marie strokes her hair.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Shhhh. We'll be all right. It will all be all right. Look at me.

She holds Irene's face.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I want you to come wake me in the morning. Time to get back to work, I think.

Irene smiles and nods.

EXT. THE CURIE HOME - DAWN

The sun rises above this humble cottage on the outskirts of Paris.

A KNOCK.

IRENE (O.S.)

Mé! Wake up, Mé!

INT. MARIE'S BEDROOM - MORNING - FOUR YEARS LATER

IRENE, now 13, opens the door with the same tray in her hands.

The bed is empty.

MARIE (O.S.)

No, no. I've no time for breakfast.

Marie comes out from behind her closet door, fully dressed in her signature black.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I'll be late.

Irene cocks her head and holds out a ROLL anyway, which Marie scoops up on her way out.

INT. SORBONNE CLASSROOM - DAY

Marie stands in front of a class full of young male STUDENTS, reading from her lecture notes.

MARIE

The experiment was not successful...

The NOISE of a crowd of protestors outside swells. Marie struggles to be heard.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(straining her voice)

...was largely unsuccessful, however-

LEON (O.S.)

(shouting)

Shall we continue to allow our academic institutions-

EXT. THE SORBONNE - CONTINUOUS

LEON DAUDET, 43, overweight, an enflamed face behind his long mustache, stands in front of 50 or so young male PROTESTORS.

LEON

(shouting)

-to UPROOT our city's traditional French values, with their LIBERAL dogma?

CROWD

NO!!

LEON

And HERETICAL propaganda?

CROWD

NO!!!

INT. SORBONNE CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the back of the class, TWO STUDENTS whisper to each other as Marie is drowned out by the noise of the protest.

STUDENT #1

I can't hear a word she's saying.
If the Sorbonne is going to hire a
woman, they could at least hire one
with a stronger voice.

STUDENT #2

She didn't even earn the position.
She inherited it from her husband.

A REPORTER, 40s, a weasel of a man, sits behind the two students and, overhearing them, scribbles in a NOTEBOOK.

MARIE gives up on trying to shout over the noise, grabs a piece of chalk and starts writing the rest of her lecture out on the BLACKBOARD.

INT. SORBONNE CLASSROOM - A WHILE LATER

STUDENTS file out the front door of the classroom, while on the opposite side,

MARIE stares out the WINDOW

at the dispersing crowd below.

She touches a HANDKERCHIEF to her upper lip and tries to calm her breath.

The REPORTER approaches her.