

BARBICANE: (*forging ahead, jovially*) Of course, there are a great many issues we will need to assess. But before all of that... (*to ARDAN, stepping aside*) Miss Ardan?

ARDAN: (*striding up to the podium to address the CROWD*) Bonjour, mon beaux Américains! (*SHE waves to crowd as THEY cheer.*) I am honored to accept Monsieur Barbicane's gracious invitation to command your magnificent projectile as it travels to the Moon!

(*More cheering. BARBICANE and ARDAN shake hands ceremonially. BARBICANE joins MASTON in the seats behind the podium and ARDAN steps forward once more on the dais.*)

ARDAN: Humanity began by traveling on foot, then by horse, by railroad car. And the vehicle of the future is the projectile! Someday, the oceans of space will be crossed as the oceans of the Earth, as easily as we now sail from Paris to Tampa! Considérez: Alpha Centauri is twenty-six thousand billion miles away! So should we be daunted by the distance to the Moon? Non, mes amis! Distance is an empty word that will eventually be reduced to zero!

(*The CROWD grows wild with cheers, enthralled by ARDAN's passion.*)

PRESS: (*ad lib.*) Have you planned other space missions? Do you feel ready to travel to space? What made you decide to propose this journey?

MASTON: (*leaping forward to settle the PRESS, regaining some control*) If you'll each just state your query in an orderly fashion-

PENROSE: (*rising from her seat and speaking unprompted*) Phoebe Penrose, *Baltimore Star*.

MASTON: (*muttering*) For the love of-

PENROSE: How do you intend your pilot to breathe on the Moon? We don't even know if there's air up there.

MASTON: (*pointedly to ARDAN and BARBICANE*) Yes, that *would* seem concerning. And I would *love* to answer that-

ARDAN: (*stepping in*) You'll have to forgive me, for I am not an astronomer. However, I understand that, on the July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1860 eclipse, the able French astronomer Laussedat noticed that the points of the sun's crescent were blurred, suggesting the presence of a *little* atmosphere.

(*PENROSE nods, jotting quickly in her notebook. Another JOURNALIST shouts a follow-up question.*)

JOURNALIST 1: Will that be enough?

ARDAN: Certainly! (*droll*) And I'll economize by breathing only on great occasions.

(*The CROWD laughs uproariously.*)