

“The Tribulations of a Stone Lady” video transcription

Theatre curtains rise to reveal a statue of a woman in a long dress with a little cape. Her thick, plaited hair comes down over her shoulders. She is smiling, with her right hand on her chest. She is in the middle of lots of old objects, in the shop of an antiques dealer in Auxerre. We see a man with a moustache, wearing a beret and looking at a Roman general’s helmet.

[Narrator]

This is the unusual story of a lovely lady...made of stone. Louis David was the caretaker at the theater of Auxerre.

The man, Louis David, sees the statue. He turns to the antiques dealer to ask its price.

[Narrator]

He was also the prop man and set decorator...in other words, something of a jack of all trades!

Louis David leaves the shop happy, carrying the statue wrapped in paper in his arms.

[Narrator]

In a second-hand store, for a very low price, he found a little statue,

At the theatre entrance, we see posters for a show about ancient Greece. Louis David walks inside with the statue.

[Narrator]

which was perfect for the set of the theater’s next production. When she entered the theater, the stone lady stepped into the limelight...

The stone lady stands in the center of the stage; the set is decorated to recreate ancient Greece, with temple columns and a blue sea background. Actors in Roman-style clothes perform their lines. At the end of the show, the actors take a final bow and the curtains close before the stone lady.

[Music]

The set has changed for a different show: *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand. While the actors play on stage, we see the stone lady abandoned behind the scenes amongst the outfits and accessories.

[Actor playing Cyrano]

Et ce soir, il me semble que je vais vous parler pour la première fois...

[Narrator]

but her glory was short-lived, and her career ended behind the scenes...where she served as a hat-stand.

Backstage, we see the stone lady being used as a hat stand. While Louis David carries a prop, the theatre director—a large man with a big moustache and sideburns—approaches him, frowning with his arms on hips.

[Narrator]

But she was considered a nuisance:

[Director]

- "Hey, Louis, that peculiar statue of yours is in the way. You'll have to get rid of it..."

[Louis David]

- "Very well, sir."

Louis David leaves the statue in the street, packed away in a large suitcase tied with string. He looks sad.

[Narrator]

Louis David didn't want to throw her away, so he left her on a street corner, hidden in a suitcase.

[Louis David]

- "Farewell, my beauty, and good luck..."

Two policemen find the suitcase. They lean over it to take a closer look. We see the suitcase being taken away on a horse-drawn carriage.

[Narrator]

And that's where the police found her. The police chief ordered her to be taken to the city museum.

At the museum, one of the policemen opens the suitcase to show the statue to the curator. The latter, who has a large white moustache and wears small, round glasses on the tip of his nose, looks skeptically at the statue.

[Narrator]

The museum director was not impressed. He was willing to keep her, but not put her on display.

In the museum storeroom, we see a room warden chatting to a cleaning lady. The stone lady stands amongst many other objects, gathering dust on the shelves and floor.

[Narrator]

So she was put in the storeroom, where she collected dust with a pile of other objects.

The curator shows the storeroom to a younger man in a suit with a brown beard. He approaches the stone lady.

[Narrator]

Ten years later in 1907, when the archaeologist Maxime Collignon visited the museum, he stopped short in front of her.

[Maxime Collignon]

- "You have some remarkable works, sir. This piece, for example... What is it?"

[Curator]

- "Oh, that? An oddity... impossible to date. Very roughly carved, if you want my opinion."

[Maxime Collignon]

- "May I? ... Extraordinary... The Musée du Louvre might buy it from you... "

[Curator]

- "I'd rather exchange it for a painting."

[Maxime Collignon]

- "That's settled then."

We see the island of Crete. In the background, a magnificent palace built on a rocky spur overlooks the deep blue sea; a ship sails in the distance. In the center of the foreground, we see the stone lady perched on a low wall.

[Narrator]

So that's how this long-neglected stone lady discreetly entered the Musée du Louvre. She was carved in Crete over 2,600 years ago. She's extremely rare, and absolutely priceless...Now she's known, quite simply, as "the Lady of Auxerre".