

An-Dinh Nguyen

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“A woman strides alone under a cool drizzle, humming the harmony of a song.”

Auditions based on that scene have closed; a promising young performer has been cast. But what kind of role is it?

Those who didn't understand the character played up her sweetness, the kind a high school physics teacher could joke about attracting to sour candy. Those who grasped her better stressed not her elfin nature but her internal combustible engine—one that propelled her, emitted sparks of dry wit, and could sound off with surprising brassiness. Salty and bitter were latent flavors in her that these actors made stronger.

Further explorations of the character revealed still greater possibilities. Though she was sketched as “sheltered” in romance, global travel, and other sweeping experiences, the most masterful auditioners conveyed a woman whose imagination pumped her lifeblood. She was inspired by others' cinematic visions; she extrapolated devastating conflicts from routine matters; she perceived intense longings in casual compliments. This character moved in various personal directions, from astronomy to classic R & B, and even within one professional field like media, from book and magazine publishing to motion pictures. Yet once she revved up that engine and steered toward one destination—like film and TV production—her arrival there was certain. Her covert kinetic energy just needed recognition from those who'd fulfill her potential best.

The most effective actors also noted the aptness of this character's surroundings. She wasn't marching through the rain to dodge it, they pointed out; she relished the gentle chill and moistening garments. In fact, maybe she preferred the grayness to the sunlight of her peers' fantasies. Precisely because the sprinkle blurred her vision, her

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mind's eye found its moody mysteries and subtle details fascinating. As it quieted the streets, they said, this weather did not oppress her spirits but awakened them.

In some portrayals, the character was embracing her solitude, too. If caught with a companion, yes, she could cozily huddle and field grumbles about the wetness, the discomfort, the inconvenience. But walking without one was liberating, not lonesome. Then again, where was she walking to? Could it be, paradoxically, to a friend? Perhaps she had dueling needs for introversion and intimacy. Perhaps she desired to share stories, unleash secrets, or ping around perplexities about the human condition for others' enjoyment and enlightenment. Perhaps she wanted to provide enrichment at her destination as much as she wanted to find it during her journey. Auditioners who took their interpretations that far went far in the process themselves.

Meanwhile, the character's humming proved especially provocative. Why did she avoid the melody? Was she an alto settling for supporting notes? To the selected actor, this woman sympathized with the quieter, more peculiar, but no less insistent musical line that literally gave an easy tune layers. The character liked to showcase overlooked ideas, freshen neglected styles of expression, examine juxtaposed dynamics, and wring new excitements from old scenarios. By acknowledging this individual's thirst for thoroughness—creative and otherwise—the winning performer completed her startlingly colorful and convincing portrait of the woman as a keen young artist.