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Dramatic Publishing

Radium Girls



Competition version

Comedy/Drama by D. W. Gregory

Radium Girls

Competition version

Comedy/Drama. By D.W. Gregory. Cast: 5m., 5w. May be expanded to 30 or more. In 1926, radium was a miracle cure, Madame Curie an international celebrity, and luminous watches the latest rage—until the girls who painted them began to fall ill with a mysterious disease. Inspired by a true story, *Radium Girls* traces the efforts of Grace Fryer, a dial painter, as she fights for her day in court. Her chief adversary is her former employer, Arthur Roeder, an idealistic man who cannot bring himself to believe that the same element that shrinks tumors could have anything to do with the terrifying rash of illnesses among his employees. As the case goes on, however, Grace finds herself battling not just with the U.S. Radium Corporation but also with her own family and friends, who fear that her campaign for justice will backfire. Written with warmth and humor, *Radium Girls* is a fast-moving, highly theatrical ensemble piece for 10 actors, who play more than 30 parts—friends, coworkers, lovers, relatives, attorneys, scientists, consumer advocates and myriad interested bystanders. Called a “powerful” and “engrossing” drama by critics, *Radium Girls* offers a wry, unflinching look at the peculiarly American obsessions with health, wealth and the commercialization of science. *Unit set with simple props. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: RD2.*

Cover: Andover High School, Andover, Mass., featuring (l-r) Lauren Wanthal, Emily Wivell and Maci Letsky. Photo: Kevin J. Doyle. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

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Radium Girls

Competition Version

By

D.W. GREGORY



Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Originally produced by Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey and developed with a commissioning grant from The Ensemble Studio Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Science and Technology Project.”

Radium Girls premiered at Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey in May 2000. Under a commission from Ensemble Studio Theatre of New York, it was subsequently revised.

This competition version of *Radium Girls* was developed with the assistance of director Steven Barker and drama students at Camp Lejeune High School and with the assistance of Nikki Kaplan and students at Imagination Stage in Bethesda, Md.

The students of Camp Lejeune performed a 40-minute competition version in October 2013. Steven Barker directed with the following cast:

Grace Fryer	Cassidy Campbell
Harriet Roeder/Kathryn Schaub/ Customer/Elderly Widow.....	Kate Donnellan
Irene Rudolph/Diane Roeder/ Sob Sister/Venecine Salesman	Rebecca Pierce
Mrs. MacNeil/Mrs. Fryer/Photographer	Albane Debuire
Arthur Roeder	Branden Ellington
Von Sochocky/Markley/ Knef/Store Owner	Oshun Brown
Lee/Flinn/Male Shopper	Nick Rangel
Lehman/Tom/Reporter	Thomas Ziegler
Kathryn Wiley	Courtney Combs
Berry/Lovesick Cowboy	Christian Alaya

In addition, the Andover High School Drama Guild performed this competition version of *Radium Girls* as a part of the 2014 Massachusetts Educational Theatre Guild Drama Festival. Susan Choquette directed with the following cast:

Grace Fryer Emily Wivell
Harriet Roeder/
Kathryn Schaub/Customer Lauren Wanthal
Irene/Diane Roeder/Sob Sister Maci Letsky
Mrs. MacNeil/Mrs. Fryer/
Shopgirl/Photographer Kate Rigazio
Kathryn Wiley Courtney Plati
Arthur Roeder Evan Pantely
Lehman/Tom/Reporter Carter Letsky
Von Sochocky/Markley/
Store Owner/Knef Conor Meehan
Lee/Flinn/Male Shopper Peter Reilly
Berry/Clerk Connor Dwyer

Of 117 initial entries, the play was one of 14 selected to to advance to the final round. Throughout the preliminary and semifinal rounds of competition, *Radium Girls* won the following awards:

Excellence in Acting: Emily Wivel, Evan Pantely, Lauren Wanthal, Maci Letsy and Carter Letsky

Excellence in Set Design: Sasha Schwartz

Excellence in Technical Excellence for Projections: Daniel O’Leary and Sabrina Delmonaco

Excellence in Lighting Design: Erica Shaw

Excellence in Set Construction: Gisele Aoun, Matthew Boulanger, Emily Lin, Daniel O’Leary, Anna Quartararo, Sasha Schwartz, Erica Shaw and Tia Lommel

In addition, Maci Letsky was awarded an Excellence in Acting Award at the state level.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Radium Girls is a work of historical fiction based on events that occurred in and around Orange, N.J., between 1918 and 1928. The characters and incidents portrayed have been shaped to serve the drama. Certain characters are entirely fictitious, and others are based on multiple individuals.

NOTES FOR COMPETITION

This version of the play is a competition version adapted from the full-length script available through Dramatic Publishing Company. The running time of this text is approximately 60 minutes.

For a cutting of about 40 minutes, the following scenes should be omitted: 3, 14, 15, 17 and 18. Additional material should be added to the top of scene 5 as marked, and other cuts are indicated in brackets and italics in order to meet required running times for competition, additional cuts may be necessary. For competition purposes only, additional cuts can be made at the discretion of the director.

NOTE ON PRODUCTION:

Radium Girls works best with minimal props and sets and simple costumes—only what is needed to present a transformation to new characters. The most effective productions use the same table and a few chairs to double for all the locations. Scene changes are made by the actors and costume changes take place in view of the audience. In some productions, the ensemble has remained onstage during the entire performance, as witnesses to the action—a device that can speed and smooth transitions but probably works best with nine to 10 actors doubling into the various parts.

Radium Girls

(Competition version)

CHARACTERS

THE WOMEN IN THE FACTORY:

GRACE FRYER: a dial painter

KATHRYN SCHAUB: her friend

IRENE RUDOLPH: Kathryn's cousin

MRS. MACNEIL: their supervisor

THE COMPANY MEN:

ARTHUR ROEDER: president of the U.S. Radium Corp.

EDWARD MARKLEY: counsel for the company

DANIEL LEHMAN: the chief chemist

CHARLIE LEE: vice president

DR. VON SOCHOCKY: founder and inventor of the paint

THEIR FAMILY & FRIENDS:

TOM KREIDER: Grace's boyfriend

DIANE ROEDER: Married to Arthur

HARRIET ROEDER: daughter of Arthur and Diane

MRS. FRYER: Grace's mother

THE ADVOCATES:

KATHERINE WILEY: N.J. Consumer's League

RAYMOND BERRY: attorney for the dial painters

THE COURT: a judge in Essex County

THE SCIENTISTS:

DR. KNEF: a dentist

FREDERICK FLINN: Phd hygienist, Columbia University

DR. HARRISON MARTLAND: medical examiner, Essex County

THE PRESS:

REPORTER (JACK YOUNGWOOD)
SOB SISTER (NANCY JANE HARLAN)
PHOTOGRAPHER

THE PUBLIC:

CLERK
STORE OWNER
CUSTOMER
MALE SHOPPER
SHOPGIRL
ELDERLY WIDOW
LOVESICK COWBOY
VENEKINE SALESMAN

TIME: The 1920s

PLACE: In and around Orange, N.J.

This version of *Radium Girls* is written to be performed by a cast of at least nine actors doubling as follows:

GRACE
ROEDER
HARRIET / MRS. MACNEIL / CUSTOMER / WIDOW /
MRS. FRYER
KATHRYN / SHOPGIRL
IRENE / MRS. ROEDER / SOB SISTER / VENEKINE
SALESMAN
WILEY / CLERK / PHOTOGRAPHER
LEE / FLINN / MALE SHOPPER / BERRY /
LOVESICK COWBOY
TOM / REPORTER / LEHMAN
VON SOCHOCKY / STORE OWNER / MARKLEY /
KNEF

With 10 actors:

GRACE

ROEDER

HARRIET / MRS. MACNEIL / CUSTOMER / WIDOW /
MRS. FRYER

KATHRYN / SHOPGIRL

IRENE / MRS. ROEDER / SOB SISTER

WILEY / CLERK / PHOTOGRAPHER

LEE / FLINN / LOVESICK COWBOY

TOM / REPORTER / KNEF

VON SOCHOCKY / STORE OWNER / MARKLEY

LEHMAN / BERRY / MALE SHOPPER / VENECINE
SALESMAN

Other doubling is possible with a larger cast.

Radium Girls

(Competition version)

Prologue: The Abandoned Factory, 1949

AT RISE: *The old dial-painting studio in the U.S. Radium Corporation factory, late 1940s. Grit on the floor—tables and chairs askew. An elderly man in a trenchcoat [ARTHUR ROEDER] enters. He takes in the sight, pauses to right a chair. Draws his finger across the dusty surface of a table. Looks about, perplexed.*

HARRIET (*off*). Papa?

ROEDER. Over here.

(HARRIET ROEDER enters. She observes her father.)

HARRIET. What are you doing?

ROEDER. This is where I saw her last.

HARRIET. This is morbid, Papa.

ROEDER. Her last day at the dials. The other girls threw her a little party.

(Sound of giggling girls.)

ROEDER (*cont'd*). Thirty to 40 girls on the floor ...

(An echo of a voice, distant: "Grace, over here ... ")

ROEDER (*cont'd*). And me ... watching over them.

(GRACE FRYER enters, ghostlike, with a tray of dials. ROEDER sees her.)

HARRIET. We shouldn't be in here. This building's been condemned.

ROEDER. And that business with the brushes? I didn't invent that. It was Von Sochocky's process—his invention.

HARRIET. It was years ago, Papa.

ROEDER. People blamed me for that, but I wasn't the technical man ... I had my shareholders to think about.

(GRACE turns and looks at ROEDER accusingly. Four loud ticks of the clock.)

Scene 1:

U.S. Radium Corp. and Hotel Ballroom, 1923

(A light shift, and the abandoned factory bursts to life as ROEDER hands off his coat and hat to HARRIET—who crosses off. He observes as MRS. MACNEIL, KATHRYN SCHAUB and IRENE RUDOLPH enter with trays of dials and paint. CHARLIE LEE enters with a clipboard. He consults with ROEDER. KATHRYN and IRENE approach GRACE—she displays her ring finger. They respond with excitement; the men are amused. MACNEIL crosses and claps her hands—the girls obediently go back to work. ROEDER hands the clipboard back to LEE as the scene in the factory freezes. Light shift again as ROEDER crosses to address the audience as shareholders of the U.S. Radium Corp.)

ROEDER (*cont'd*). Gentlemen. We stand today at the threshold of a new era. An era of ingenuity. An era of possibility. Marked by the marriage of commerce ... and science ... Radium, my friends, is the fruit of that marriage. And like the automobile before it, like the telephone and the telegraph, this miracle element began as a novelty—and is now a necessity of daily life.

(The crowd erupts in thunderous applause. ROEDER acknowledges it.)

ROEDER *(cont'd)*. Luminous watches, luminous dials—these were agents of victory in Europe! Now radium is about to become the agent of a new victory. The coming victory over cancer.

(More applause. ROEDER nods. The speech is over. DANIEL LEHMAN, the company chemist, enters as LEE crosses to join them.)

LEHMAN. Arthur! What a day!

ROEDER. Dan. What did I tell you? They love us.

LEE. Did you see Von Sochocky? White as a sheet.

LEHMAN. He's here?

LEE. Back of the hall.

LEHMAN. I'm surprised he had the nerve.

(KATHERINE WILEY approaches.)

ROEDER. Hold on, boys. *(To WILEY, with genuine warmth.)* Miss Wiley! What a nice surprise. Charlie, Dan: you remember Miss Wiley. Of the Consumer's League?

WILEY. Gentlemen.

ROEDER. Miss Wiley was our valued partner in last spring's laundry crisis.

LEHMAN. Miss Wiley! No more complaints I hope? From the housewives in Orange?

WILEY. The laundry is fine, thank you, Dr. Lehman.

LEE. Ought to be—we spent a lot of money on those filters.

WILEY. The fact is, I'm here on that other matter.

ROEDER *(with less cheer)*. Your letter. This is not the best time, Miss Wiley.

WILEY. I was hoping you might answer the immediate question—

LEHMAN (*jumping in*). I'll answer it: There's no white phosphorous in the paint, Miss Wiley.

WILEY. But the young lady's condition ...

LEHMAN. There's no white phosphorous anywhere on the property.

WILEY. Then how do you explain the bone decay in her jaw?

LEE. This is one of our girls we're talking about?

ROEDER. Former employee. Left us about two years ago.

LEE. Why don't you talk to her current employer, then?

WILEY. She's not working currently. She's too ill.

ROEDER. I'm sorry to hear it. But let me assure you, Miss Wiley—we are taking your concerns very seriously. (*A look to LEHMAN.*)

LEHMAN. We're consulting with the Harvard School of Industrial Medicine.

WILEY. You mean Dr. Drinker?

ROEDER. You know him?

WILEY. Fairly well. The chair of our league is a colleague of his.

ROEDER. Then we can agree? Whatever Dr. Drinker concludes—you will be satisfied?

WILEY. I expect so. Thank you, Mr. Roeder. Gentlemen.

ROEDER (*as she crosses away*). Have some cake, Miss Wiley!

LEE. Whatever the trouble is—it can't be anything at the plant.

ROEDER. We'll look at it. Meanwhile, Charlie—you just keep smiling.

(He slaps LEE on the back. Factory whistle blows. Men cross away, lights shift and scene transforms.)

Scene 2:
The Factory, the Following Day

(The girls in the factory spring to life.)

KATHRYN. You shoulda seen it, Grace! The church was filled with flowers. Lilies and carnations and orchids. You know how Amelia loved orchids.

IRENE. Those were flags.

KATHRYN. Orchids.

IRENE. Flags.

KATHRYN. I know an orchid when I see one, Irene. Purple orchids. Oh, and that smell? Grace, was that smell, it was like—like—

GRACE. Flowers?

KATHRYN. Like heaven. I was gonna say, like heaven.

IRENE. Like heaven? Kathryn, it was just a funeral. You make it out like it was some kinda Valentino picture.

KATHRYN. It wasn't just a funeral. It was Amelia's—and it was beautiful. The church was like the botanical garden. Oh and the company sent flowers, too—a big spray a carnations.

[GRACE. Sounds like a nice service anyhow.

KATHRYN. Surprised you wasn't there, Grace. What happened? Tom keep you out late? To the pictures?

GRACE (patiently). Wasn't near that exciting. Ma had work to do, so I took the kids to the park.]

(Enter MACNEIL.)

MACNEIL. Girls, girls! The whistle's already gone! Now then. I've received new instructions this day. We're goin' back to the old way of pointin' the brushes. We was losin' too much paint in the cloth.

(She collects the cloth. As she does, the girls, one by one, point the brush on their lips. GRACE hesitates.)

GRACE. But—

MACNEIL. Yes, Grace. Somethin' ya wish to say?

GRACE. Dr. Von Sochocky told me not to do that. Says it's unsanitary.

MACNEIL. Unsanitary? I can't hardly believe he'd say such a thing. The man invented the paint.

(GRACE surrenders the cloth and tips the brush on her lips.)

MACNEIL *(cont'd)*. And you're not to be sharing brushes. Each girl is to get her own brush—and you're not to get a new one till the old is so bad, you can't make a point no more.

KATHRYN *(to IRENE)*. How can ya make quota like that?

MACNEIL. It's not for us to be askin' questions, is it, girls? It's for us to do the work.

(MACNEIL moves away, and the girls set to painting, pointing the brushes on their lips as they proceed.)

KATHRYN. It's not for us to be askin' questions!

IRENE. Here's an instruction for you, MacNeil: Let some of the starch out of yer corset.

(KATHRYN laughs.)

GRACE. Was she at the service?

[IRENE. MacNeil? Are you kidding?]

KATHRYN. Dr. Von Sochocky was though. And Mr. Roeder. Oh! And Grace, you know that fella from crystalizing? What's his name, the one with the red hair?

[GRACE. The tall one with the freckles?]

IRENE. Jerry.

KATHRYN. *I think it's George.]*

IRENE. It's Jerry. Jerry Mallon. He's the one always talkin' to Amelia in the day room.

KATHRYN. Grace! When the mass was over—he goes to the coffin, like this, he goes!

(KATHRYN puts her hand to her lips and slowly blows a kiss to an imaginary coffin.)

GRACE. Really?

KATHRYN. Really!

(They squeal excitedly.)

IRENE. So what if he did?

KATHRYN. So what? He was in love with her, that's so what. Don't you think so, Grace?

GRACE. I guess he had to be if he did that.

KATHRYN. And can you imagine? If he loved her and he never told her, never could bring himself to say! Because ... because she was so beautiful ... and ... and he was so shy. And now it's too late. He didn't tell her, and he'll never get a chance again.

GRACE. Poor Amelia.

KATHRYN. Poor Amelia.

IRENE. Poor kid.

KATHRYN. Her family took it awful bad, Grace. Everyone of 'em cryin'. Even her father. Just bawlin' like a baby.

IRENE. And you know why.

GRACE. 'Cause their daughter had died.

IRENE. What she died *from*.

KATHRYN. Don't go spreadin' stories.

IRENE. Not a story. Her sister told us. No reason Grace shouldn't know.

GRACE. Know what? (*A beat.*) What?

(*IRENE whispers something awful.*)

GRACE (*a gasp*). Amelia?

IRENE. Her father's fit to be tied, too—six girls at home and none of 'em ever goin' to a dance again—all because Amelia upped and died from syphillis.

KATHRYN. Sh!

IRENE. I can't help it if that's what she died from.

GRACE. But Amelia was ever so nice.

IRENE. Guess she got around more than we knew.

(*Enter MACNEIL, ROEDER and DR. VON SOCHOCKY.*)

MACNEIL. Girls, girls! Your attention, please. The gentlemen are here to make an announcement.

VON SOCHOCKY. And to explain some changes, yes?

ROEDER. Yes. As you may have heard, Dr. Von Sochocky is stepping down as company president. And he wants to take this opportunity—

VON SOCHOCKY. To make with goodbye. Ladies. Some of you I have known since you were little girls. Coming here during the war to work. Two hundred, three hundred, five hundred dials a day ... (*He stops.*)

MACNEIL. Thank you, doctor.

ROEDER. Yes, thank you, doctor. Now, girls! The doctor is a busy man and must be on his way. So let us wish him the best of luck in his new business ventures. (*Applause.*)

VON SOCHOCKY. And Mr. Roeder. Let us good luck wish to you also. With the new direction you intend the company to take.

IRENE (*to KATHRYN*). New direction?

VON SOCHOCKY. With the slowdown in dial painting—

ROEDER. Now doctor—

VON SOCHOCKY. And business moving to the medical market—there will be lots of changes, yes?

(A beat.)

ROEDER. What the doctor is referring to—Some of our larger customers are setting up their own dialpainting studios.

VON SOCHOCKY. Which means less work for our girls here.

ROEDER. In the short run. However, the Waterbury Clock Company needs help with its new studio. We had planned to make the announcement next week. We'll make it now. Mrs. MacNeil?

MACNEIL. Uh. We'll be askin' some of you girls to go on up there. Kathryn Schaub was one. And Louise Conlon. I have the list downstairs?

ROEDER. We'll post it today. Now, girls. As we are all on the clock ... we'll leave you to your work.

VON SOCHOCKY. Thank you, ladies. My best wishes to you.

MACNEIL. That's back to work with you, girls.

GRACE *(as the men exit)*. You gonna do it, Kathryn? You gonna take that job?

KATHRYN. I will if you do.

GRACE. Tommy would have a fit.

KATHRYN. Just for a few months. Oh come on, Grace, it'd be fun! Won't it be fun, Irene? Irene?

(IRENE sits with her head in her hands.)

GRACE. Irene, honey? You all right?

IRENE. Sure I'm all right. Why wouldn't I be? *(Off GRACE.)* What?

GRACE *(quietly)*. Your mouth is bleeding.

(IRENE wipes her mouth with her hand. She studies the blood. Tableau.)

Four ticks of the clock. Scene transforms.)

Scene 3:
Fryer Home, Dining Room, Fall 1923

(TOM KREIDER is eating leftovers as MRS. FRYER clears the table.)

MRS. FRYER. Thirty-five dollars a week and she quits the place.

TOM. More to life than money.

MRS. FRYER. Wait'll you get to be my age—with a house fulla kids—you'll thank God for ev'ry penny ya put by.

TOM. We got money put by.

MRS. FRYER. How much?

TOM. Enough to get married on.

MRS. FRYER. Don't take much to get married on. Do ya have enough to stay married on?

TOM. You let us get married, we'll find out.

(TOM laughs as GRACE enters.)

GRACE. You still eatin', Tommy?

TOM. It's good.

GRACE *(taking the plate)*. You're gonna get fat.

(MRS. FRYER takes the plate back.)

MRS. FRYER. Gotta keep his strength up. He works hard for his money.

GRACE. Don't start, Ma.

MRS. FRYER. I didn't say nothin'. Was your father hit the roof over it. Most girls give their eyeteeth for a job like that—

GRACE. Ma.

MRS. FRYER. Good money, easy work. Lots a nice-lookin' fellas around the plant—

TOM (*teasing*). You didn't tell me about them, Grace.

MRS. FRYER. And ups and quits the place. I'm tired of it, she says. Are ya tired a the paycheck, I says? Who needs a paycheck, she says. I got me a boyfriend to take me out Saturdays.

TOM. She said that?

GRACE. Oh you know I didn't. And for your information I got a job. I start at the bank on Monday.

MRS. FRYER. And what's it pay?

GRACE. Enough.

MRS. FRYER. Enough. You know what that means, Tom? It don't come close to what they paid at the radium plant.

GRACE. It's office work.

MRS. FRYER. Office work. I guess that means you'll be spendin' more money on clothes.

(MRS. FRYER takes TOM's empty plate and leaves. A beat.)

TOM. Boy. She's steamed at you.

GRACE. I don't see what diff'rence it makes. So long as I'm workin' somewhere.

TOM. Don't make no diff'rence to me. I just thought ya liked it up there.

GRACE (*avoiding his gaze*). Sure I liked it. But I been up there four years.

TOM. So? I been deliverin' mail eight years. And I plan to keep on deliverin' mail another 20 or 30 years. If I'm lucky. (*Taps the table.*) Steady work, Grace. Helps ya sleep at night.

GRACE (*suddenly inspired*). Close yer eyes.