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Dramatic Publishing

RADIUM GIRLS

A Play in Two Acts

by

D.W. GREGORY



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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“The best new play in New Jersey professional theatre.”
The Star-Ledger

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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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* * * *

All producers of *RADIUM GIRLS* *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.”

AUTHOR'S NOTE

RADIUM GIRLS is a work of historical fiction. Although it is based on events that occurred in and around Orange, New Jersey, 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.

PROGRAM CREDIT

RADIUM GIRLS was originally produced at Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey. Under a commission from Ensemble Studio Theatre of New York, it was subsequently revised. Any productions of this play **must** give program credit to these theatres, to read as follows:

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

This credit must appear in a type, manner or position of no less prominence than other producers of the play.

RADIUM GIRLS was first produced at Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, May 11-28, 2000. Joseph Megel directed with the following cast:

Grace Fryer Mary Bacon*
Arthur Roeder Daren Kelly*
Kathryn Schaub/Societywoman/Board Member/
Shopgirl/Mrs. Michaels Sarah Winkler*
Irene Rudolph/Miss Wiley/Harriet/Board Member/
Miss Young/Scientist/Photographer Elizabeth Baron*
Sob Sister/Dr. Knief/Mrs. Roeder/MacNeil/
Mrs. Fryer/Venecine Salesman T. Cat Ford*
Lee/Dr. Drinker/Bailey/Lovesick Cowboy/Flinn/
Male Shopper/Roach Michael Perilstein*
Tom/Reporter/Berry/Board Member/Scientist Karl Kenzler*
Markley/Von Sochocky/Madame Curie/Widow/
Martland/Store Owner Jim Ligon*
Dialpainter/Second Reporter/Board Member/
Assistant Stage Manager Jennifer Ginsberg
Production Stage Manager Uriel Menson*

* *Actors Equity Association member*

Casting by Michele Ortlip; set design by Jim Bazewicz; costumes by Valerie Holland Hughes, lighting by Ted Mather, sound by Dean Gray and Jonathan Taylor, makeup and properties by Tiffany M. Bazewicz. John Pietrowski, artistic director, Playwrights Theatre, Robert Carr, producer.

The play was also presented in a workshop production at Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pa., in April 2001.

Under a grant from Ensemble Studio Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Science & Technology Project, the play was subsequently revised. This revision was presented at the University of Washington-Seattle, March 6-17, 2002. Shanga Parker directed, with the following cast:

Grace Fryer Simone Fraser
Arthur Roeder Michael Koenen
Berry/Martland/Flinn/Store Owner Andy Kidd
Markley/Von Sochocky/Photographer Roni Weiss
Irene Rudolph/Wiley/Mrs. Michaels/
Board Member #2 Kate Holte
Kathryn Schaub/Harriet/Societywoman/
Board Member #1/Shopgirl Jessica Wells
Mrs. MacNeil/Mrs. Fryer/Sob Sister/Clerk/
Elderly Widow Emily Cedergreen
Reporter/Tom Kreider/Dr. Knef Michael Place
Mrs. Roeder/Madame Curie/Venecine Salesman/
Board Member #3 Holly Patterson
Lee/Drinker/Bailey/Lovesick Cowboy/
Male Shopper/Court Mathew Ahrens

Set by Matt Smucker, costumes by Ellen C. King, lights by Jesse Prince, sound by Matthew Jaeger. Stage manager, Audrey Murray.

The play was again revised and presented at Venture Theatre, Billings, Mont., Feb. 28-March 22, 2003. Mace Archer directed. In April 2003, the play was produced at the Catholic University of America, Grover Gardner directing.

RADIUM GIRLS

A Play in Two Acts
For at least 4 men and 5 women, extras

CHARACTERS

THE WOMEN IN THE FACTORY

GRACE FRYER A top-notch dialpainter,
15 at the start of the play, 26 at its close.
KATHRYN SCHAUB Her friend, another dialpainter,
also 15 at the start of the play.
IRENE RUDOLPH Kathryn's cousin,
17 at the start of the play. Later she is in her 20s.
MRS. ALMA MACNEIL Their supervisor.

THE COMPANY MEN

ARTHUR ROEDER Pres i dent of the U.S. Ra dium Corp.,
34 at start of the play, 65 at its close.
EDWARD MARKLEY Counsel for the company.
C.B. "CHARLIE" LEE Vice president,
later president of the company.
DR. VON SOCHOCKY Founder of U.S. Radium Corp.,
inventor of the luminous paint.

THEIR FAMILY and FRIENDS

TOM KREIDER Grace's boyfriend,
several years older than she.
DIANE ROEDER. Married to Ar thur Roeder.
HARRIET ROEDER. Their daugh ter.
Nine years old at first, later she is in her 30s.
ANNA FRYER Grace's mother.

THE ADVOCATES

KATHERINE WILEY The executive director,
New Jersey Consumer's League.
RAYMOND BERRY An attorney for the dial painters.

THE SCIENTISTS

DR. CECIL DRINKER A Harvard industrial hygienist.
DR. HARRISON MARTLAND . The county medical examiner.
DR. JOSEPH KNEF A dentist.
DR. MARIE CURIE. Discovered radium.
FREDERICK FLINN, Ph.D. Columbia University
industrial hygienist.

THE PRESS

REPORTER (JACK YOUNGWOOD) A reporter,
Newark Ledger.
SOB SISTER (NANCY JANE HARLAN) . . A tabloid reporter,
New York Graphic.

THE WITNESSES

WILLIAM J.A. BAILEY An entrepreneur, manufacturer of
Radithor.
MRS. MICHAELS A consumer of Radithor.
SOCIETY WOMAN Mrs. James (Cora) Middleton,
a well-bred woman.
CLERK An overworked public employee.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHO TAKE AN
INTEREST IN THE CASE.

THE TIME: The 1920s.
THE PLACE: Orange, New Jersey.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

RADIUM GIRLS is written to be performed by an ensemble of at least four men and five women, though a larger cast can perform it. The ensemble plays BOARD MEMBERS, members of the PUBLIC and various PRESS as the scenes require. All BOARD MEMBERS are men; all PRESS are men except SOB SISTER. Suggested doubling for major speaking parts:

With 9 actors:

ACTOR 1: GRACE

ACTOR 2: KATHRYN/BOARD MEMBER #1/
SHOPGIRL/SOCIETYWOMAN/HARRIET

ACTOR 3: IRENE/MISS WILEY/BOARD MEMBER #2/
PHOTOGRAPHER/MRS. MICHAELS

ACTOR 4: SOB SISTER/CLERK/ELDERLY WIDOW/
MRS. FRYER/MACNEIL

ACTOR 5: MRS. ROEDER/MADAME CURIE/
CUSTOMER/BOARD MEMBER #3

ACTOR 6: LEE/DRINKER/BAILEY/ FLINN/
MALE SHOPPER/COURT/LOVESICK COWBOY

ACTOR 7: TOM/REPORTER/BERRY/KNEF

ACTOR 8: MARKLEY/ VON SOCHOCKY/
STORE OWNER/VENECINE SALESMAN/MARTLAND

ACTOR 9: ROEDER

With 10 actors:

ACTOR 1: GRACE

ACTOR 2: KATHRYN/SOCIETYWOMAN/HARRIET/
SHOPGIRL/BOARD MEMBER #1

ACTOR 3: IRENE/MISS WILEY/BOARD MEMBER #2/
MRS. MICHAELS

ACTOR 4: SOB SISTER/MACNEIL/CLERK/MRS. FRYER

ACTOR 5: MRS. ROEDER/MADAME CURIE/
CUSTOMER/BOARD MEMBER #3

ACTOR 6: LEE/BAILEY/DRINKER/LOVESICK
COWBOY/MALE SHOPPER/COURT

ACTOR 7: BERRY/MARTLAND/FLINN/STORE OWNER
ACTOR 8: TOM/REPORTER/KNEF/VENECINE SALESMAN
ACTOR 9: MARKLEY/VON SOCHOCKY/ELDERLY
WIDOW/PHOTOGRAPHER
ACTOR 10: ROEDER

The action takes place in a variety of places in and around Orange, N.J., between 1918 and 1928. The style is meant to be cinematic, briskly paced and mixing naturalistic scenes with more comic, presentational scenes. Of necessity, set and furnishings must be simple: eight wooden chairs and two or three narrow tables, which remain at all times. Such a set should accommodate fluid transitions from scene to scene; in fact, certain scenes are meant to be transitional—taking place while the set is changed. A sense of place is created by the rearrangement of the tables and chairs, with the help of lights, sound, props, and costumes, to suggest different locations—home, factory, office, hospital, etc. All set changes are to be effected by the actors in view of the audience, and props should be minimal. Costume changes, too, must be simple—only what is needed to present a transformation to new characters.

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

As a few of the names have confounded some actors in various productions, I here offer suggested pronunciations:

Roeder – REED-er
Von Sochocky – VON Sa-SHOCK-y
Schaub – SHAWB
Amelia Maggia – a-MAL-ia MAD-ja
Albina – al-BUY-na
Quinta – KIN-ta
Venecine – VEH-nah-seen
Radithor – RAY-da-thor
Knef – NEF
Kreider – CRY-der

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Radium Girls began nearly six years ago as an idea I pitched to John Pietrowski, artistic director of Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, in Madison. It was a story that literally took place in John's back yard, and so he immediately said "yes" to my proposal and worked diligently to support what turned out to be a long process of research, writing and revision. My sincere thanks to John and his staff—literary manager Peter Hays, managing director Elizabeth Murphy, publicist Lucy Ann Saltzman and the original Dr. Von Sochocky, Jim Ligon, who doubles in the most essential role of box-office manager. Thanks also to Joseph Megel, who directed the premiere as well as a series of readings and workshops that led up to it. A number of other individuals also assisted me by providing encouragement, opportunity or access to essential information as I researched and developed the script. My thanks to John Eisner of the Lark Theatre; Mark Plesent of The Working Theatre; Chris Smith and J. Holtham of the Ensemble Studio Theatre; Mia McCullough and Brian Russell of The American Theatre Company in Chicago; Lois Densky-Wolff of the Harrison Martland Collection at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey; Dr. James Stebbings of Chicago; Dr. Gene Saraceni, now retired from Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pa.; Shanga Parker at the University of Washington-Seattle; and Tom Donahue, Gail Beach and Grover Gardner at the Catholic University of America and Mace Archer and Lysa Fox of Venture Theatre in Billings, Montana. Particular thanks to Claudia Clark, author of the definitive work on the dialpainters, "Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform 1910-1935." Claudia personally directed me to materials at the Library of Congress and came to see several productions of the play, offering me a most helpful critique from a historian's perspective—and this during a time when she was battling a life-threatening illness. Her courage and generosity have touched me deeply. And lastly, my love and gratitude to my private cheering section: My husband Paul and my family and friends, particularly Dominique Cieri and Lucy Ann and Simon Saltzman, who housed and fed me during repeated visits to New Jersey to work on the play.

D.W.G.

Silver Spring, Md., April 2003

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *A room in the U.S. Radium plant. GRACE alone in a pin spot. GRACE is speaking as if she is in the office of her attorney, RAYMOND BERRY, who is either unseen or in shadow.*

GRACE. So much light. *(She looks around, taking in the memory of the dialpainting studio.)* Daylight. All the time. And on sunny days—you almost felt like you were sitting outside. It was that bright.

BERRY'S VOICE. That surprised you, Grace?

GRACE. It was a factory. I thought it would be dark. And dirty.

BERRY. Then why go to work there?

GRACE. I was fifteen. It was time I paid my own way.

BERRY. Pay your own way? What about school?

GRACE. Oh, I didn't miss it so much. The girls were all so nice and the work wasn't hard. It wasn't like factory work, really. It was more like art, painting those dials. We were artists.

(Crossfade to ROEDER, opposite, speaking as if he is in his own office, where the company lawyer, EDWARD MARKLEY, is questioning him. Like BERRY, MARKLEY is either unseen or in shadow.)

ROEDER. I'm not really the one you should be talking to.

Von Sochocky. He's the one you should talk to.

MARKLEY'S VOICE. Now, Arthur. You know he won't talk to us.

ROEDER. It was his process.

(Behind him, lights rise slowly on the room in the factory, where IRENE and KATHRYN, two dialpainters, are mixing up paint.)

MARKLEY'S VOICE. Tell me about that process, Arthur.

You used a powder...

ROEDER. We used a powder. The girls mixed it with an adhesive to make the paint. And that business with the brushes—I didn't invent that. They were doing that when I started there.

MARKLEY. But you knew about it.

ROEDER. We all knew about it. We just didn't realize what it meant.

(As lights fade on ROEDER, they rise full on IRENE and KATHRYN, giggling and applying paint to their faces. Enter GRACE.)

GRACE. Irene?

IRENE. In here!

GRACE. Irene? What are you doing?

IRENE. Shut the door.

KATHRYN. Amelia's workin' inspection today.

GRACE. Is that bad?

IRENE. Not for us.

KATHRYN. She's gonna be sittin' in this room all day. By herself, in the dark, checkin' dials.

IRENE. Poor thing.

KATHRYN. Poor thing.

IRENE. So we're gonna give her a little surprise.

KATHRYN. Boo! Like the Cheshire Cat! (*IRENE and KATHRYN laugh.*)

GRACE. Oooh! Won't that make her mad?

KATHRYN. Let her get mad.

IRENE. That's half the fun.

GRACE. I don't want to make her mad.

IRENE. Oh, Grace! Do you have to be that way about everything?

GRACE. What way?

KATHRYN. Your teeth, Grace. Put some on your teeth. (*GRACE consents to be painted.*)

IRENE. Ain't like Amelia don't deserve it. She paints more dials than any girl on the floor. And can't be bothered to talk to nobody either. You say "Amelia! What's new?" She just looks at ya funny.

GRACE. I don't think she can speak much English.

IRENE. It wouldn't kill her to smile, would it? (*Footsteps and voices off.*)

KATHRYN. She's comin'.

IRENE. Get the light!

(KATHRYN turns out the light, and they crouch down giggling as someone enters the room. Then they jump up, their faces glowing like jack-o'-lanterns in the dark. A scream, laughter, and the lights go up again, revealing a stunned MRS. MACNEIL, ROEDER and VON SOCHOCKY. If this effect cannot be achieved, then

MACNEIL and others can walk in on them before KATHRYN gets to the light. In that case the beat continues, if necessary, as follows:

[KATHRYN. Where's the switch?

IRENE (*going for the switch*). For pity's sakes, Kathryn!]

(Enter ROEDER, VON SOCHOCKY and MACNEIL.)

IRENE. Oops.

GRACE. Mrs. MacNeil!

MACNEIL. Paintin' yer faces. Have ya gone off yer minds?

IRENE. It was just a joke.

MACNEIL. Just a joke? A joke like that can lose a girl her job.

VON SOCHOCKY. Now, now, Mrs. MacNeil. I'm sure that's not necessary.

MACNEIL. I don't tolerate no foolishness, Doctor.

VON SOCHOCKY. Ja, very good. Foolishness, we don't want. Do we? Mr. Roeder. This is the inspection room. All the dials come here that are painted. And here, are some of the girls who should on the floor be working. Girls, this is Mr. Roeder. My new vice president. And your new plant manager.

MACNEIL. And I was just telling Mr. Roeder what a fine bunch of girls we have here. I'm sure now he must think I'm halfway out of my mind.

VON SOCHOCKY. Mr. Roeder. Perhaps you have some words for the girls? Mrs. MacNeil? (*He ushers MRS. MACNEIL out of the room.*)

ROEDER. Well. (*A moment as he regards them.*) Girls. This paint you've been playing with. It's very expensive. You realize this? (*Mumbled acknowledgment.*) It takes several tons of ore to produce a single gram of radium. That's a lot of work—hard work, for the men in the extraction plant. But they do this work gladly. You understand why? Why they work so hard? What we are all working for?

GRACE. The war?

ROEDER. That's right. The war. The dials you paint save lives, girls. Our boys in the field depend on them. To read them in the dark, no mistaking what they see. Otherwise...some of those boys won't be coming home. So, girls. If you play around and don't take the work seriously...well, you're playing into the hands of the Kaiser. And we don't want that, do we?

GIRLS. No sir... Oh, no! Etc.

ROEDER. So let's get back to work now and leave the tomfoolery to home. (*The GIRLS file away, but GRACE lingers.*)

GRACE. Mr. Roeder? I just—I just wanted to say. I—I am sorry. I won't do nothin' like this ever again.

ROEDER. Well, dear. Just keep this in mind: If you do right by us, we'll do right by you.

(*A tableau, then:*)

SCENE 2

(*Enter SOB SISTER and REPORTER as GRACE and ROEDER break.*)

SOB SISTER. May 17, 1921. Nancy Jane Harlan here—for the New York Graphic! The New York Graphic's only girl reporter!

REPORTER. Jack Youngwood for the Newark Ledger! Newark's first source for news!

(The scene transforms to a street scene of excitement with band music, carnival atmosphere. ROEDER and GRACE join CROWD.)

SOB SISTER. Madame Marie Curie, eminent French scientist, embarks on a whistle-stop tour of the United States.

REPORTER. First stop—New York City, where she is greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of well-wishers!

SOB SISTER. The high priestess of science is headed for Washington to receive a gift of one gram of radium—valued at one hundred thousand dollars!

REPORTER. Purchased for her by the members of the Marie Curie Radium Club—an association of one hundred thousand American women—

SOB SISTER. —who each gave one dollar to support humanitarian research with radium.

IRENE. Grace! Over here!

GRACE. Irene! Look! I got my certificate. Member, Marie Curie Radium Club!

IRENE. You gave a dollar?

GRACE. It's all for science!

IRENE. Science! What about my room and board?

GRACE. Oooh! There she is!

(MADAME CURIE steps up to the podium with VON SOCHOCKY and SOCIETYWOMAN. This is Cora Middleton, a well-heeled, well-spoken woman of dignity. She takes a great interest in science—and any other issue likely to place her at the center of excitement.)

SOCIETYWOMAN. Welcome all, welcome all! I must ask you, ladies and gentlemen of the press, please limit your questions! Madame Curie is about to embark on an exhaustive tour of the country. And she is under strict doctor's orders to rest—although, in the typical fashion of a scientist who can think only of her research, her life's work—she has refused to rest! *(Approval from the CROWD.)*

REPORTER. Madame Curie! What will you do with the radium?

MADAME CURIE *(in a thick Polish accent)*. Eh?

REPORTER. What will you do with the radium?

MADAME CURIE. Uh...I will continue my experiments to find better methods for ze treatment of ze cancer. *(Applause.)*

SOB SISTER. Is radium a cure for all cancer?

MADAME CURIE. Cure for ze cancer? Yes, yes. Cure for ze cancer! Zat is so. It has already cured all kinds of ze cancer.

SOB SISTER. But some doctors dispute that!

MADAME CURIE. Zen zey do not understand ze method. Zere is no question—radium will cure ze cancer.

SOB SISTER. Madame Curie!

REPORTER. Madame Curie!

SOB SISTER. Madame Curie! How have you managed to devote yourself both to science—and to your children?

MADAME CURIE. Ah. It has not been easy. (*Laughter from CROWD.*) But my daughters share my gratitude to the American women for their interest in science and my work. I am most grateful.

REPORTER. Madame Curie!

SOB SISTER. Madame Curie!

REPORTER. Madame Curie!

SOCIETYWOMAN. No more questions! Madame Curie is on a tight schedule! Mrs. Andrew Carnegie has sent a car—and will escort Dr. Curie personally—as will I—to Washington—where President Harding will present the gift—of one gram of radium! (*Cheers and excitement as MADAME CURIE and CROWD exits leaving ROEDER and LEE.*)

ROEDER. You see that, Charlie? That is a marketing opportunity! Let's send her one of our customer's watches. Courtesy, the United States Radium Corporation!

LEE. We'll need a press release. (*LEE takes notes as ROEDER ruminates.*)

ROEDER. Radium isn't just for scientists to study. The average American can share in its glory every night. Luminous watches, luminous clocks! Anyone who thinks these are just novelties, consider all the other advances that have taken place in the past fifty years—the electric light. The telegraph—

LEE. The telephone!

ROEDER. The automobile! Inventions all once dismissed as novelties—as toys—

LEE. —are now essentials to modern life. Got it. That ought to sell some watches.

ROEDER. Watches, absolutely. But that's not where the growth is now, Charlie. You heard the lady, it's the medical market.

LEE. And Standard Chemical owns it.

ROEDER. Only because Von Sochocky lets them take it. But if we wanted to, we could get half their business. It's just a matter of positioning.

LEE. Standard Chemical publishes its own journal. Sends it out monthly—to twelve thousand doctors. We could do something similar.

ROEDER. Something scholarly. That the doctors would respect.

LEE. A bibliography. Listing every article ever published on radium...

ROEDER. But with capsule reports—to save the doctors time. They'd get the information, find it fast—

LEE. And have us to thank for it.

ROEDER. We'll send it to every doctor in the U.S. Radium Society.

LEE. Every doctor in the American Medical Association.

ROEDER. That's the spirit, Charlie. Advertising. That's the wave of the future. It's not just the product—it's the way you promote it.

(ROEDER and LEE exit as factory whistle blows.)