

# *Radium Girls*

## AUDITION DOC

### Synopsis

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 with her own family and friends, who fear that her campaign for justice will backfire.

---

### Character List

This show is written for actors to have multiple parts, but the cast can be as large as needed. Depending on casting, actors may have more than one role. Grace Fryer and Arthur Roeder will not be double cast in another role.

#### **THE WOMEN IN THE FACTORY (Leads):**

**GRACE FRYER.....**A top-notch dial painter, 15 at the start of the play, 26 at its close. She's our story's heroine, but her path to this position is not direct. Grace is the definition of a dynamic character. In the early years of her life Grace plays by the rules. She follows instructions, keeps quiet, and quite simply does as she is told, trusting that others have her best interests at heart. However, the naivety of her youth soon gives way as she witnesses a taste of the cold realities that life often holds. Once awakened, Grace stoically surges against the tides of power to seek justice for those who have been wronged. Those who seek to fill this role will exhibit their understanding of Grace's complexity through their monologue reads. Students, Grace is not an easy assignment. She must display wonderful versatility throughout the show. I want to see her strength, but I also need to see her humanity and vulnerability beneath the surface. Show me her dimensions. Grace carries the show, and the actor who claims her part will show outstanding strength in the audition.

**KATHRYN SCHAUB.....**Kathryn is Grace's partner in battle. Working alongside Grace at U.S. Radium, Kathryn experiences everything that Grace undergoes. She works in tandem with Grace to put forth her argument against their former employer. The actor who seeks to play Kathryn will have a run for her money. I want a clear, honest read of this character in the audition. Show me your depth of understanding of Kathryn and her sincerity.

**IRENE RUDOLPH.....**Kathryn's cousin and another dialpainter, 17 at the start of the play, later she is in her 20s. Irene is one of the first employees to succumb to her illness.

**MRS. ALMA MACNEIL.....**Their supervisor at U.S. Radium Corp. The enforcer! As the senior female in a position of management, she takes her job very seriously. She works one step above the girls on the floor, and knows all too well it is her responsibility to keep things moving smoothly. Management requires responsibility and sacrifice. She does her duty well.

**THE COMPANY MEN (Leads):**

**ARTHUR ROEDER.....**President of the U.S. Radium Corp., may seem cold-hearted and evil in his decisions, but he is ambitious and has a different set of motivations, not malicious in nature. 34 at the start of the play, 65 at its close. Yes, he makes a series of horrible, problematic decisions. However, he does so with the belief that he is justified in his actions. At least, that is what he must tell himself to survive each day during his ordeal. Roeder is a man of ambition. He is emblematic of the American success story. He is intelligent, decisive, and innovative. And before you write him off as being purely selfish and conniving, reflect on his motivations. He has a company for which he is responsible. He has employees that require his strength. He has shareholders who require his perseverance. The actor who seeks to fill Roeder's shoes will display the inner struggle that this all-too-human character undergoes.

**EDWARD MARKLEY.....**Legal Counsel for the company C.B. Markley's take on the situation that erupts within the company is simple; he must prevail against those who would bring down his employer. During power struggles, the black and white of right and wrong often gives way to shades of grey. We know this to be true, and few exhibit this reality better than Markley. Markley should be portrayed as being an unyielding force of energy for his company. Still, he should not be played blatantly malicious. As is the case with everyone else, he does what he thinks is right.

**"CHARLIE" LEE.....**Vice President of U.S. Radium Corp., later President of the company, supports the company at all costs. After devoting his life to the U.S. Radium Corp, he feels compelled to preserve it to the bitter end. Lee works to maintain the company to which he has committed his life.

**DR. VON SOCHOCKY.....**Founder of the U.S. Radium Corp., Inventor of the luminous paint, validates all with scientific fact and has a long journey to resolution. As the inventor of the magnificent translucent paint, he bears the ultimate responsibility for the deaths of countless human beings. Realizing this truth, he works to do what is right as time progresses. Gentlemen, one thing this character requires is a truly solid use of dialect. **Has a German accent.** Impress me with your preparation for this role. He's a wonderful character. He represents the humanity of the company.

### **THEIR FAMILY & FRIENDS:**

**TOM KREIDER**.....Grace's boyfriend and a decent guy. Most of the time he provides the emotional support that Grace requires. Tom loves Grace with all of his being. He stands by her even as her condition deteriorates. Still, he isn't always one hundred percent in support of Grace's decisions. He challenges her thinking and fights to convince her of what he believes to be correct. In doing so, he represents those who influence our thinking the very most, our loved ones. Tom does not challenge Grace for the sake of selfishness. His council is intended to protect her. Tom should be played as a typical working-class man of his era. He's self-reliant, dedicated, and honest.

**DIANE ROEDER**.....Married to Arthur Roeder. Diane is Arthur's support mechanism. She positively influences her husband, encouraging his support for those with difficult lives. She also shares in the struggles her husband undergoes, personally dealing with public censure for her husband's actions. She must battle to find justification for maintaining support of her husband amidst an avalanche of condemnation against him. It is no easy task. Again, Diane is not an easy character to portray. In the audition I want to see a powerful read.

**HARRIET ROEDER**.....Arthur and Diane's daughter, 9 years old at first, later she is in her 30s. Harriet loves to climb trees. She also chooses to dress in the fashions of her day.

**ANNA FRYER**.....Grace's mother. The guiding force behind Grace's early development. She is a decent, hardworking woman. Anna is a rational and reasonable person. She stands by her daughter through thick and thin. However, when she feels that her family's ability to survive is at last on the line, she resolves herself to steer Grace towards a new path. Grace's ultimate decision towards the end of the play is interesting. Perhaps her mother's influence convinces her after all. Anna has a wonderful amount of stage time, and she is a solid character.

### **THE ADVOCATES:**

**KATHERINE WILEY**.....Here's our source of inspiration. Miss Wiley is a woman ahead of her time. She campaigns for social justice and seeks to fight tyranny wherever it exists. As the executive director of New Jersey's Consumer's League, Miss. Wiley stands up for the working-class men and women of her state. She should be played as unapologetically strong, determined, and idealistic. She is a progressive thinker, and her battle is to make the world a better place for the little people who have no voice. Without these individuals' tireless efforts, the world would be a much worse place. Ladies, show me strength, pride, and conviction in the audition as you read for this role. She is the catalyst for action from which our heroine springs forth.

**RAYMOND BERRY**..... An attorney for the dial painters, Berry works to build the case against U.S. Radium. He's a decent, moral man. He's also one of the few male characters that isn't unsympathetic in one way or another. He works on behalf of the common man. He fights for justice.

## **THE SCIENTISTS:**

**DR. CECIL DRINKER.....**A Harvard industrial hygienist. Drinker is the man behind uncontaminated scientific research. His findings represent actual truth and not paid truth.

**DR. HARRISON MARTLAND.....**The county medical examiner

**DR. JOSEPH KNEF.....**A dentist. What does he believe in? What do you want him to believe in? He's more than happy to voice that opinion in your presence. He's insincere, manipulative, and devoid of convictions. In our first encounter with him we believe he's a wonderful, sympathetic person. Later on, we see that he's anything but. Still, as with all human beings, he must believe his actions are justified. He is perhaps the clearest display of one of the show's themes; he works for his own best interests. He requires versatility and complexity.

**DR. MARIE CURIE.....**Discovered radium. In the audition I will be seeking a candidate who can present a solid dialect. Do your homework, ladies. Show me some preparation. Curie has few decent scenes, and is one to be taken seriously. **Has a Polish accent.**

**FREDERICK FLINN, Ph.D.....**He is an industrial hygienist from Columbia University. Like anything, science can be corrupted by money. Flinn is a paid consultant who provides credible testimony that U.S. Radium is not responsible for the illness and deaths of its employees.

**THE PRESS: REPORTER.....**A reporter, Newark Ledger. The Reporter joins Sob Sister to present the news to the public. I'm open to a few interpretations of this character. Have fun with this one.

**SOB SISTER.....**A tabloid reporter, New York Graphic. She provides ongoing commentary throughout the play and ultimately has her own interests in mind as well. She provides the ongoing commentary of our story, filling the audience in with updates between scenes. If you seek this role I want to see a somewhat stereotypical take on a reporter of this era. However, be careful. She's not a cartoon, she's a person. Sob Sister is our societal conscience, leading an increasingly strong voice of protest against a clearly harmful entity to the public, U.S. Radium.

## **THE WITNESSES:**

**WILLIAM J.A. BAILEY.....**An entrepreneur, manufacturer of Radithor

**MRS. MICHAELS.....**A consumer of Radithor

**SOCIETY WOMAN.....**An example of a proper lady, Society Woman leads official ceremonies and hosts the crème de la crème of good society. I want to see polish and refinement on the part of the actor cast in this role.

**CLERK.....**An overworked public employee

**OTHER CHARACTERS - MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHO TAKE AN INTEREST IN THE CASE**

## **Audition Materials**

Please note that anyone auditioning for a lead role must audition with a memorized monologue. You may audition with one of the monologues provided below or feel free to find one of your own. If auditioning with a monologue of your choosing, the material should be 30-60 seconds in length when spoken.

### **GRACE FRYER**

I'm goin' to court, Ma. I want those people to look at me! I want them to look at me and explain how it's my fault I got sick working in their factory! Ma. All my life, I've done what other people told me to do. I quit school. Because you said I should. I put that brush in my mouth 'cause Mrs. McNeil said I should. I never said, please can't I finish school? I never said, I don't like the taste of this paint. I never argued. Even though I knew- Ma. I knew somethin' wasn't right. At night, I'd lie in bed, and I'd see my dress. Hanging on the back of the closet door. All aglow. My shoes on the floor. My hairbrush. And comb. On the dresser. So much light, Ma. So much light! And I never once questioned. I never once asked! Don't you see? They knew I wouldn't. That's what they were counting on.

### **ARTHUR ROEDER**

Well. (*a moment as he regards them*) Girls, this paint you've been playing with. It's very expensive. You realize this? It takes several tons of ore to produce a single gram of radium. That's a lot of hard 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? That's right. The war. The dials you paint save lives, girls. Our boys in the field depend on them to read 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? So let's get back to work now and leave the tomfoolery to home. Just keep this in mind: If you do right by us, we'll do right by you.

### **MRS. ALMA MACNEIL**

Girls, girls! The whistle's already gone. Now, then. I've received new instructions this day. We're going back to the old way of pointin' the brushes. We was losin' too much paint in the old cloth. What Grace? Somethin' ya wish to say? Dr. Von Sochocky told you it's unsanitary. Well, I can't hardly believe he'd say such a thing. We've done this for as long as I've been here. Ya must've misunderstood him. Oh, and you're also not to get new brushes until you've done with the old. And they got to be so bad they can't get a point no more.

### **VON SOCHOCKY**

(*This character must utilize a German accent*)

I am here to make with goodbye. And Mr. Roeder has kindly consented. Some of you I have known since you were little girls. Coming here during the war. Working so hard! Day after day at the bench, two hundred, three hundred, some of you, five hundred dials a day! So excited to be part of our work here. When this company I

start, in my own kitchen, mixing up the paint, I knew I found something miraculous, to make life better... easier... and now... what do I read? More and more uses for the radium... more than I dreamed possible.

### **KATHRYN SCHAUB**

That's how it started with Irene. Just a toothache. You wait, Grace. You wait. You'll wake up one morning, your gums hurting so bad you won't be able to open your mouth. So weak and sick ya won't be able to stand up. The pain so bad you won't be able to sleep. And your face so swollen you won't be able to stand the sight of yourself... Three surgeries, Grace, and they wanted to cut her again. She finally said no. She knew. What was left of her jaw rotted so bad... and the worst of it is, I couldn't look at her. Irene was so afraid of being alone- but I left her alone. She died in the middle of the night, and nobody was with her.

### **FREDERICK FLINN**

Reporters are not scientific. They do not follow scientific methods. They write to sell, not educate. The scientist is not concerned with what sells. He is concerned with the truth. He undertakes years of painstaking study to arrive at an understanding of intricate natural processes that most people could never presume to comprehend! You would do well to listen to science and ignore the nonsense that is printed in the newspapers. Because I can tell you right now, radium has nothing to do with what's ailing you... raw meat. That will help with the anemia. Cook it if you must, but eat it twice a week. That will help you.

### **KATHRINE WILEY**

Miss Fryer, if you would be willing to put aside your own need- just for the moment, we can put a stop to that company. We can stop them dead in their tracks. This company has already shown it is willing to go to extremes to protect itself. No, I'm afraid the only way we'll get to them is to hit them where it matters most. Their public image. When every newspaper in America tells your story, how you were sorely treated. How you suffered. How the company denied all responsibility! Believe me, Miss Fryer, when that happens, Arthur Roeder will come to the table with his hat in his hands.

### **SOB SISTER**

Evenin' girls! How about a picture? We need some pictures for the Graphic's exclusive on the girls. We are willing to give you five thousand dollars, whadda ya say, Grace? That sound good to you? Think you could use five thousand dollars? Perhaps you're familiar with Benarr McFadden, the herbalist? His patented herbal therapy is just the thing to get the girls back on their feet! And the Graphic will pay for it! All we ask is the exclusive rights to their story from here on out. Of course, we'll have to get our money's worth- a regular series of features with pictures following the course of your treatment, your illness, recovery- or otherwise- depending on how it goes.

### **DOCTOR KNEF**

This was an expensive case to treat and I never did get no compensation. The girl died. Her family never paid... so here it is straight- There's going to be a lot more girls coming out and saying they got sick here. So maybe we

can do business. I scratch your back, you scratch mine, that sort of thing. I'd examine them for radium necrosis, and then I would come up with a favorable diagnosis for you- pyorrhea, say, or something else. Quite a few cases will just die a natural death anyway- and the rest we can put off for a while until the statute of limitations kicks in and it's too late to sue.

### **RAYMOND BERRY**

Three months! Three months to study an x-ray. It's outrageous! And the girls! Did you see the girls? Their eyes were like saucers, looking at me. Terrified. How are they going to hold out three more months? Kathryn Schaub could barely make it into the courtroom today! And Grace. She was trying so hard not to cry. And of course, I had all the answers. "Go home, girls, get some rest." That's the best I can do. "Get some rest". I don't understand these people. How can they play this kind of game? With those poor girls sitting right there!

### **DIANE ROEDER**

Mrs. Mitchell from across the street. She walked right past me this morning, didn't say a word to me. I know she saw me. And the woman at the market. And the green grocer... the way they glanced at each other... and at the club, Mrs. Middleton and the other ladies. The whispers... at the club today, someone actually had the nerve to say to me: is it true? Is it true, she said? Did your husband poison those women? I said: "Mrs. Cowles. IF you think it's true, then why would you speak to me at all?"