

Radium Girls Radium Girls 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

Radium Girls Character Descriptions

Grace (F): 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 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 scene reads. Ladies, 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 audition.

Roeder (M): It would be easy to view Mr. Roeder a coldhearted, evil man. Unfortunately, even coldhearted, evil men do not see themselves as such. Roeder is not a malicious man, per say. 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 right 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. However, the struggle is only visible in tiny, delicately portioned moments of unintended honesty.

Tom (M): No, not that Tom! Our story's Tom is also a decent guy though. Quite honestly, I wish Tom displayed a little more complexity in our story. Still, he's a solid character. He provides the unwavering emotional support that Grace requires. Did I say unwavering? Whoops. There's our complexity. 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.

Markley (M): Markley is the company's legal representative. 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 grey. We know this to be true, and few exhibit this reality better than Markley. I haven't quite developed my feel for this character yet. As such, I'm looking for some different approaches in audition. 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.

Lee (M): NO! Not *that* Lee! Mr. Lee is the vice president, later president, of company. After devoting his life to U.S. Radium he feels compelled to preserve it to the bitter end. In my mind, he's a bit of a Bill Coles (see *Other People's Money*), albeit less sympathetic. Lee works to maintain the company to which he has committed his life. Again, I'm open to some different interpretations of this part. Be creative, and show me your take on the guy.

Sob Sister (S): She's an interesting character. I'll be honest, I was a bit surprised to learn just how large of a role she had. She provides the ongoing commentary of our story, filling the audience in with updates between scenes. Ladies, if you seek this role I want to see a somewhat stereotypical takes on a reporter of this era. However, be careful. She's not a cartoon, she's a person. I offer my rough portrait of the character, but it might not be entirely correct. As with many of the other roles, show me your ideas in audition. Sob Sister is our societal conscience, leading an increasingly strong voice of protest against a clearly harmful entity to the public, U.S. Radium. Sound nice? Well, she isn't perfect. In the clearly running theme of the show, even Sob Sister looks out for her own interests. Yes, she works to give a public voice to events as they unfold, but she's also looking to see newspapers. How does she accomplish her goal? By choosing to tell the bestselling stories she can find.

Miss Wiley (F): 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 the 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 audition as you read for this role. She is the catalyst for action from which our heroine springs forth.

Kathryn (F): 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. A weak actor will play the character without the vital sincerity she requires, given a melodramatic performance during one of the most touching scenes of the show. Ladies, give me a clear, honest read of this character in audition. Show me your depth of understanding of Kathryn is during her conversation with Grace. Impress me.

Von Sochocky (M): Von Schloppy... Von Schlockly. Von Schootchy. I still don't pronounce his name correctly. Anyway, I really like this character. He almost seems to be the most sincere male character of the show. He has a long path towards 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. Impress me with your preparation for this role. He's a wonderful character. He represents the humanity of the company.

Mrs. Roeder (F): Gotta be honest, she is present in one of my favorite scenes of the show. Mrs. Roeder is Roeder'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 maintain support of her husband amidst an avalanche of condemnation against him. It is no easy task. Again, Mrs. Roeder is not an easy character to portray. In audition I want to see a powerful read, ladies.

Mrs. Fryer (F): Grace's wonderful mother, Mrs. Fryer is the guiding force behind Grace's early development. She is a decent, hardworking woman. Mrs. Fryer 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. Mrs. Fryer has a wonderful amount of stage time, and she is a solid character.

Knef (M): Here is E.B. Farnum. 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. Guys, this is not the largest role of the show by any stretch. Still, Knef is a wonderful part to play. He requires versatility and complexity. He will present a challenge, but he's someone the audience is apt to remember. Have fun.

Berry (M): The council for our protagonists, 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. Although I hate saying this, he can be played fairly straightforward. He works on behalf of the common man. He fights for justice.

Reporter (M): The other half of our dynamic press duo, the Reporter tells joins Sob Sister to present the news to the public. I'm open to a few interpretations of this character. Let's see what you're thinking in audition, guys.

Flinn (M): He is an industrial hygienist from Columbia University. Science provides the ultimate truth, right? Scientists see understanding, regardless of where their findings may lead them... right? Well, who's paying bills? 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.

Irene (F): Yet another colleague of Grace, Irene is one of the first employees to succumb to her illness. She's a mid-tier character. Not a bad part, to be sure.

Macneil (F): The enforcer! Ms. Macneil is a supervisor at U.S. Radium. 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.

Madam Curie (F): Not a bad role. In 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, so take her seriously.

Society Woman (F): Exemplary of a proper lady, Society Woman leads official ceremonies and hosts the crème del la crème of good society. I want to see polish and refinement on the part of the actor cast in this role.

Clerk (f): A clerk of the court.

Court (M): A judge.

Drinker (M): A Harvard industrial hygienist, Drinker is the man behind uncontaminated scientific research. His findings represent actual truth and not paid truth. How is his true presented? Well, out of context at first. Want to favorably quote a man whose work proves your wrongdoing? Easy, just select a few small slivers of what he has written and ignore the rest.

Board Members 1-3 (M/F): These are the U.S. Radium Corporation's board members. The tow the company line, again, for their own best interests.

Mrs. Michaels (F): "A consumer of Radithor," which sounds like a descriptions from something on the Syfy Channel. She can't help it, she loves the stuff!

Harriet (F): The spawn of Roeders, Harriet loves to climb trees. She also chooses to dress in the fashions of her day. That's all I got.

Martland (M): He's "the county medical examiner."

Lovesick Cowboy (M): We all have one in our family.

Venecine Salesman (M/F): In a salute to the bagel salesman from Fiddler, the Venecine Salesman pitches his product with equal vigor.

Elderly Widow (F): Her husband passed away.

Male Shopper (M): He loves a good deal.

Customer (F): She loves an even better deal.

Store Owner (M): He loves to offer great deals as loss-leaders. After that, it's profit time, baby!

Shopgirl (F): She hates her job, but she's happy to have a line.

Photographer (F): She's no Susan Ashe.

Bailey (F): He manufactures Radithor.

Extras: Townspeople, courtroom attendants, employees of U.S. Radium, etc.