

Name _____

Date _____



Grace Fryer

Yo, it's the tale of a woman—Grace Fryer was her name.

Worked in a factory, the price she paid was pain.

Radium in her hands, the glow in the night,

She didn't know the poison was creeping in her life.

In 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie

Discovered the chemical element radium. It would be

A source of excitement for the way that it glowed.

Soon enough, it could be found in products and homes:

Toothpaste, make up, food. It wasn't yet

Clear to people that there were negative effects

On the human body when radium was ingested.

At the same, one company would benefit

From radium's glow-in-the-dark shine.

US Radium Corporation designed

Glowing watch dials, compasses, and clocks

That World War I soldiers used in the dark.

In 1917, they opened a new factory

And hired Grace Fryer, age 18,

Along with other young women to be dial painters.

They used water, glue, and powdered radium

To paint dial numbers. But after just a few

Strokes, the brush would lose shape. What should they do?

Supervisors said, "Go ahead and lick

The brush, then reshape the point with your lips."

Dial-painting jobs, she was just a young girl,

Brushing on the numbers, watch 'em swirl and twirl.

"Radiant," they said, but they never let her know

That radium in her blood would make her body slow.
Dial-painting jobs, so many young girls,
Brushing on the numbers, watch 'em swirl and twirl.
“Radiant”—nah, had to let the world know
The truth. And today, the impact still shows.
The bosses knew the harm—they didn’t have any shame.
They turned a blind eye for the money and the fame.
They told 'em, “Lick the brush; don’t worry 'bout the risk.”
But Fryer felt something in her bones she couldn’t dismiss.
She quit in 1920, went to work in a bank.
Then came the lost teeth and then the jaw pain.
As years went by, the sickness started to show.
Her jaw’s rotting away; her bones feeling low.
She fights the pain, but the truth is clear:
The radium’s in her veins, year after year.
Doctors connected the poisoning to her days
In the factory. So her and four other painters
Joined together to file a lawsuit
Against US Radium Corporation. The powerful
Company’s lawyers stalled and delayed.
Despite their declining health throughout the case,
All five women showed up to the court hearings.
Over time, the case got attention and started appearing
In the media. Public pressure gained steam,
Forcing US Radium Corp. to finally
Settle in 1928. Grace Fryer
And the Radium Girls held their feet to the fire.
She died five years later, but she lives on
In the fight for safe workplaces and labor laws.
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