

# THESE SHINING LIVES

BY MELANIE MARNICH

## PLACE

Chicago and Ottawa, Illinois

## SETTINGS

Catherine and Tom's home.  
The Radium Dial work room.  
Courtroom.  
The shore of Lake Michigan.

## TIME

1920's and 1930's

THESE SHINING LIVES chronicles the strength and determination of women considered expendable in their day, exploring their true story and its continues resonance. Catherine and her friends are dying, it's true; but there is a story of survival in its most transcendent sense, as they refuse to allow the company that stole their health to kill their spirits—or endanger the lives of those who come after them.

## CHARACTERS

### **Catherine (20s-30s)** *Leading Female*

Catherine is the audience's "Everywoman" in the play, their way in to the story – she narrates directly to the audience and is in every scene in the play. A significant part of the play examines the relationship between Catherine and her husband Tom, and how their loving partnership is affected first by her decision to work at all, later by her initial worries about her health, and finally by her diagnosis and her decision to go to court. She is by turns gutsy, scared, resolute, affectionate, intimate – and always likeable. She has several monologues delivered on stage alone, so the actress will need to have a commanding stage presence. Given the fluidity of the play, she also needs to be able to switch quickly between scenes, settings and emotions smoothly and convincingly.

### **Tom (20s-30s)** *Leading Male*

Tom is married to Catherine. This is a role demanding huge range from an actor, as Tom needs to express the full gamut of emotions, from injured male pride (when his wife first starts to work – and earns more than him) to overwhelming love; terrified fear to heartbreaking grief; murderous anger to burning passion. There is also plenty of back story to explore: Tom fought in the First World War and his experiences there clearly had a powerful impact upon him; Catherine saved him, but he cannot save her...

**Charlotte (20s-30s) Major Supporting Female**

If these Radium Girls are the Pink Ladies, Charlotte is the Rizzo character. She is fast-talking, fast-living, bolshy and bold, funny, sexy, cynical and wild – yet with perhaps the most sensitive soul of all the women hidden inside her brash exterior; a sensitivity she only sometimes lets show.

**Pearl (30s-40s) Major Supporting Female**

Pearl is the joker of the group (literally: she has a passion for ‘knock, knock’ jokes). She is sweet, friendly, and eager to please. A bit of a giggler.

**Frances (30s-40s) Major Supporting Female**

Frances is the ‘moral backbone’ of the gang. While she is more serious and reserved than the others, she also has a very dry sense of humour and a big heart, and she is well-loved and well-respected by her friends.

**Mr. Rufus Reed (any age) Major Supporting Male**

Mr. Reed is the foreman of Radium Dial, the company where the women work. The actor playing him will need to decide how much he knows about the terminal effect of the radium, when he knows it, and why he keeps working there regardless, even though he knows the work is killing the women. This part requires an actor who can express wordlessly what he is thinking or feeling – or, rather, express it even while the script may be giving him lines that don’t give away those emotions.

**Dr. Dalitsch (any age) Supporting Male, can be combined with another role**

Dr. Dalitsch is the one doctor who is honest with the women, and he is the one who delivers the diagnosis that they will die because of the radium poisoning. He is blunt yet kind, a good soul.

**Leonard Grossman (any age) Supporting Male, can be combined with another role**

Leonard Grossman, attorney at law, is the take-no-prisoners lawyer who agrees to represent the women in court. He is a showman: charismatic, confident, dominating the stage with huge energy. He is an impassioned socialist and a brilliant lawyer, as well as a frank realist; he’s quick-witted and fast-talking, yet also kind. He takes the case because it’s the right thing to do, not to make money.

**Reporter 1 / Reporter 2 / Radio announcer (any age)**

*Supporting, gender unspecified, can be combined with another role*

**Company Doctor / Dr. Rowntree (any age)**

*Supporting male, can be combined with another role*

**Daughter (aged 5-8) Supporting**

Daughter of Tom and Catherine

**Son (aged 5-8) Supporting**

Son of Tom and Catherine

## LEAD/MAJOR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS ACCOMPANYING AUDITION MONOLOGUES

If you intend to audition for a lead/major supporting character, please prepare one of the monologues below. It does not need to be memorized, but my hope is that it will be prepared at a level that allows you to fully act out the words, not just read from a paper. Please look at the list of characters and their character traits and ages to help you pick which monologue you would like to use for your audition.

### CATHERINE DONOHUE

There is a God. And he's made of time.  
There's a devil, and he's made of time.  
There are angels, miracles, and sins, and they're all made of hours.  
On the shore of the lake with my friends that last time.  
I watched the kids play and thought of my boy and girl.  
I watched the husbands and wives and thought of the man I love.  
I walked to the water.  
I walked in.  
I stood there.  
Small waves and grace all around.  
Faith at the edge of the world.  
And I think, lucky me, that I still believe in it all.  
After all of this.  
And then a gift.  
A million clocks stopped in the city.  
Watches closed their eyes.  
Their hands folded.  
Their faces slept.  
The earth stopped turning.  
And time stood still for just a minute, just for us.  
The moon came out.  
The stars came out.  
Time was kind, after all.  
And I knew I was blessed to have held so much of it in my hands.  
In the quiet, in the water, I could see my face.  
Next to mine, the faces of everyone I love.  
The faces of my friends.  
And so many more.  
All looking back at me.  
For that moment, while time turned its face, we were all there.  
And we were shining.

## **TOM DONOHUE**

Did you serve in the war? Fight?

I did. I signed up. Seems like a million years ago. I saw things that no human being should ever have to see. A guy comes back from something like that, and he can't believe in God. It's impossible. That's what anyone'll tell you. I was raised to believe in God and the saints and in miracles. But then there was this war and after it, I couldn't believe in anything good. But when I first saw Katie, the first thing, the only thing I thought when I saw her face was that there had to be a God, because he made her. That was the only explanation. And I was a praying man again.

Talk about a miracle.

Do you know they pulled bones out of her body while she was still alive? Lifted them right out.  
*(Tom starts to cry.)*

I was going to grow old with this woman.

I was going to die with her.

Maybe I have.

Could you tell me how to live my life now?

Could you tell me what I'm going to do with all this goddamn time?

*(Pulling himself together.)*

I have to go.

I have to see my kids.

I have to get home before they go to bed.

I sing to them. They sing to me.

A lullaby.

Even though we're all too old for it.

It's our little routine.

It makes us feel better.

It's just something we do.

*(He turns to go, stops.)*

Sir? Just so you know...

Every morning I wake up and wonder if today's the day I'm going to kill Rufus Reed.

## **CHARLOTTE**

*(In a rush of storytelling.)*... And I told him, "I absolutely intend to strike this match. And I can smoke if I want to. All the girls are doing it. You live in a *cave*? Haven't you picked up a *magazine*?" And I threw my *Collier's* at him, pointed to the picture of the girl in the Chesterfields ad and said, "There. Isn't she sharp?" Besides, if men can do it, so can we, right? I can smoke all night and day if I want to except that I have to work and that's using my hands, which wouldn't leave them *free* to smoke, but if I *could*, I would. I'd smoke and drink gin and shimmy and he said, "Charlotte, you'd look like a harlot," and he didn't even think that was funny. That fella's so tight, if you put a piece of coal up his—  
*(Rufus Reed, the supervisor, has entered with Catherine right at the end of Charlotte's bit.)*

## **MR. RUFUS REED**

Good morning, ladies.

You know—and I know—that you ladies have had a few concerns lately. There's been some gossip. Harmless, but gossip has a way of getting around. And the company want to let you know—They want to say—Well. Here you go.

Clarification. From the company. In response to said gossip, misguided chatter, et cetera, et cetera. An official promise you can hang your hats on, girls. Listen up and put your minds at ease. They want you to know they're careful. That we use nothing that could cause you harm. (*Reading from the letter.*)

“In the best interest of our employees' safety, Radium Dial does not compromise its product or the health of our workers by using materials of low quality. Radium Dial uses material that contains pure radium *only*. If we at any time had reason to believe that any conditions of the work endangered the well-being of our employees, we would have suspended operations. The health of the employees of the Radium Dial Company is always foremost in the minds of its officials. Most sincerely, Joseph A. Kelly, president.”

There it is. The truth in black and white. So you can rest easy. This company, it's a good company. I know you girls know that. Take a few extra minutes at lunch. Relax. It's a beautiful day out there. Enjoy. Have a good day, girls.

## **PEARL and FRANCES**

(don't have monologues, but here is a combination of some of their best moments)

PEARL: Why don't chickens like people? Because they beat eggs!

FRANCES. If we could hear ourselves...

PEARL. What?

FRANCES. Gossip, Gossip, Gossip.

PEARL. We're not gossiping.

FRANCES. What then?

PEARL. We're sharing vital information about our surroundings. It's crucial to our survival.

FRANCES. It's gossip. Gossip is the devil's radio.

FRANCES. Nice of your brother to lend you his car, Pearl.

PEARL. Yeah, well, just don't tell him he did, okay?

FRANCES. You *stole* his car?

PEARL. Technically, I borrowed it.

FRANCES. You didn't ask?

PEARL. I'm a little fuzzy on the specifics.

PEARL. Hey. This'll make you feel better. Knock knock.

FRANCES. (*exasperated.*) Pearl.

PEARL. But this is a good one! Knock knock.

CATHERINE. Okay, Knock knock.

PEARL. No. *I* said "Knock knock" Now you say—

CATHERINE. Who's there?

PEARL: Aardvark.

CATHERINE. Aardvark who?

PEARL. Aardvark a million miles for one of your smiles! (*A beat.*)

FRANCES. We didn't actually walk here, we took the trolley.