

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre

The Marie Curie Chat Show

by Noëlle Janaczewska

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

It is important that the actor playing Marie Curie plays no other parts. Other than that, *The Marie Curie Chat Show* may be cast as the director wishes. Some roles are clearly female or male, others (Cheshire Cat, Professor Gravity, for example), can be played by performers of either gender.

Floor Manager

Marie Curie (Marya Sklodowska) 1867 - 1934

Paolina Velez

Violet Rivers

Professor Gravity

Aunty Gwen

Teacher

Alice

Cheshire Cat

The Red Queen

Research Director

Mileva (Maric) Einstein 18? - 1948

Mrs. Maric (Mileva's mother)

Violet's Dad

Bronia (Marie Curie's sister)

Rosalind Franklin 1920 - 1958

James Watson b. 1928

Katarina Kranjc 19? -

Careers Adviser

Senior Engineer

James Miranda Stuart Barry 1795 - 1865

Nurse

Official 1

Official 2

Louisa Atkinson 1834 - 1872

Gossip 1

Gossip 2

Reporter 1

Reporter 2

Darkness. Slightly distorted chat show type music. Lights come up to the hustle and bustle of a television studio.

FLOOR MANAGER Marie Curie, this is your final call. Standing by, we're going live - five - four - three - two -

A loud burst of chat show theme music.

FLOOR MANAGER Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the show. Tonight we have a very special program for you. Please put your hands together to greet your host for this evening: Madame Marie Curie.

The music crescendos as MARIE CURIE enters. Music fades down.

MARIE CURIE Good evening and welcome to The Marie Curie Chat Show. I'm delighted to be here with you tonight *(A burst of music and television applause)* to consider what role we want science to have in our lives. *(Pause. Another burst of music and television applause)* And we're going to be joined this evening by a truly fantastic line-up of guests -

The chat show theme music crescendos again, then fades out.

MARIE CURIE So, the big question: what is science? And what do we want it to be?

PAOLINA VELEZ enters.

PAOLINA VELEZ Lots of things. The excitement of finding out how things work.

MARIE CURIE Paolina Velez. Engineer.

A burst of television applause.

VIOLET RIVERS enters.

VIOLET RIVERS Possibilities. Trying to understand why things are the way they are.

MARIE CURIE Violet Rivers. Botanist.

Another burst of television applause.

PAOLINA VELEZ I want a science that is open

Night time. VIOLET RIVERS works away in the quiet house. A single shaft of yellow light makes a slash across her body. The sounds of late night: cicadas, distant voices, faint bursts of music and the slam of car doors.

MARIE CURIE Violet Rivers works late into the night.

VIOLET RIVERS While my daughter sleeps. Her breath flickering among the wallpaper roses.

AUNTY GWEN The window open to the night garden and the stars above.

VIOLET RIVERS Mapping *olearia myrsinoides* - silky daisy bush, by the light of a lamp that used to belong

AUNTY GWEN To me

VIOLET RIVERS To my Aunty Gwen.

AUNTY GWEN Writing notes with a sharp, red pencil.

MARIE CURIE In her mind's eye The Botanist, Violet Rivers, connects dreams and science into a rhapsody of scattered lines.

AUNTY GWEN Bright as a button; sharp as a needle.

TEACHER You're so sharp Violet Rivers, one of these days you're going to cut yourself.

MARIE CURIE That's what your teacher said about you.

TEACHER And when you do cut yourself, don't expect any sympathy from me!

MARIE CURIE The Botanist writes notes into theories, theories into possibilities, and possibilities into fieldwork that takes her first to *olearia myrsinoides*

VIOLET RIVERS And then from that daisy bush to what might be a new discovery. Of course, it may just be a localised mutation, even a polymorphism. But there's a slight, butterfly-wing of a chance that it may be a whole new species. I won't know until I've examined its molecular structure in more detail.

MARIE CURIE In the biology of her imagination, The Botanist calls the new possibility: *Olearia Rosaflorea*. *Olearia* meaning daisy, and *rosa* after her daughter.

VIOLET RIVERS And because the flowers I've seen are pale pink.

The sound of a door opening and a child's footsteps. VIOLET RIVERS stops her work and looks to where the sound comes from.

VIOLET RIVERS *(As if talking to her young daughter)* Rosa? What's happened to Teddy? Oh dear, he's lost an arm. Never mind. *(Pause)* I'll sew him back together. *(Pause)* No, not now. *(Pause)* I'm too busy, darling. Tomorrow. I promise.

VIOLET RIVERS returns to her work, surrounded by the dark silence of the house. Slowly the light changes.

Music begins. The music that accompanies the ALICE/THE RED QUEEN/CHESHIRE CAT scenes is bold and lively.

During the ALICE/THE RED QUEEN/CHESHIRE CAT scenes, the chess board floor is lit. The players in these scenes are confined to the board and can only move in prescribed directions, e.g. the CHESHIRE CAT can move only on black squares, THE RED QUEEN can move only diagonally, etc.

ALICE Where am I?

MARIE CURIE Asks Alice.

CHESHIRE CAT Where you are depends on where you're trying to get to.

MARIE CURIE Replies the Cheshire Cat.

ALICE I'm not sure where I want to go

CHESHIRE CAT Then it doesn't matter where you are.

ALICE I just want to know that I am somewhere.

CHESHIRE CAT It's easy to be somewhere; it's being nowhere that's really difficult.

THE RED QUEEN Rubbish!

MARIE CURIE Screeches The Red Queen.

THE RED QUEEN You get nowhere if you walk far enough.

ALICE How?

THE RED QUEEN If you walk and walk until you can't go any further, then

eventually you must arrive back where you started from, so you've got nowhere.

ALICE But you'd have passed through all sorts of places on your way, so -

CHESHIRE CAT I should warn you, The Red Queen can be very unpredictable.

THE RED QUEEN Can you prove to me that the world is not flat and coated with marzipan?

ALICE Not exactly. But I can show you a round world makes more sense, and I can give you a delicious marzipan recipe.

CHESHIRE CAT Don't say I didn't warn you.

The light changes.

PAOLINA VELEZ twists and somersaults on the trapeze. Illuminated by a bluish light. After a while, she drops to the ground, pushes away the swing/trapeze, and becomes engrossed in her work. The rest of the space is dark.

The RESEARCH DIRECTOR calls to PAOLINA VELEZ from the dark.

RESEARCH DIRECTOR Polly -

PAOLINA VELEZ Yes?

RESEARCH DIRECTOR Would you mind calling my wife and telling her I'll be late home. I'd call myself, but -

PAOLINA VELEZ That's O. K., I've got to make a couple of calls of my own.

RESEARCH DIRECTOR And, Polly -

PAOLINA VELEZ Mm ...?

RESEARCH DIRECTOR How about joining me for a cup of coffee? I know you're busy, but I could really do with a second opinion here -

PAOLINA VELEZ O.K., but I need to finish this -

RESEARCH DIRECTOR Thanks Polly.

PAOLINA VELEZ resumes her work. The sounds of the laboratory; intermittent bursts of sounds from a radio. The RESEARCH DIRECTOR interrupts.