



On a May night in 1902, in Paris, Marie and Pierre Curie went to the old shed where Marie had spent many years of hard work. In the darkness, they saw a beautiful light. No one had ever seen it before. It was the glow of radium.



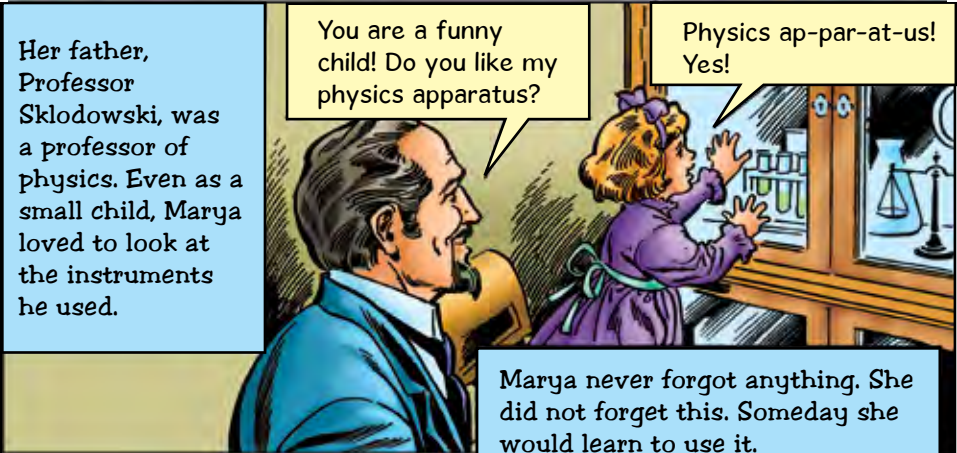
Marie Curie, the discoverer of radium, was the first great woman scientist—and the first person ever to win two Nobel prizes. She gave the world a new branch of science and a new medical treatment.



She began life as Marya Sklodowska in Warsaw, Poland.

My dear children, your mother has just presented you with a new baby sister, Marya!

When will we see her?

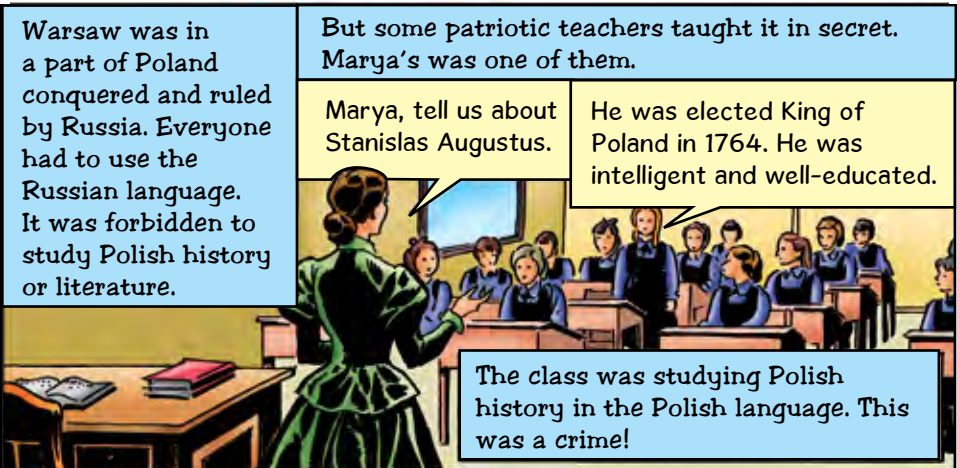


Her father, Professor Sklodowski, was a professor of physics. Even as a small child, Marya loved to look at the instruments he used.

You are a funny child! Do you like my physics apparatus?

Physics ap-par-at-us! Yes!

Marya never forgot anything. She did not forget this. Someday she would learn to use it.



Warsaw was in a part of Poland conquered and ruled by Russia. Everyone had to use the Russian language. It was forbidden to study Polish history or literature.

But some patriotic teachers taught it in secret. Marya's was one of them.

Marya, tell us about Stanislas Augustus.

He was elected King of Poland in 1764. He was intelligent and well-educated.

The class was studying Polish history in the Polish language. This was a crime!

Suddenly a bell rang. The class froze.

The signal!
Quick, girls!



Four girls ran along the aisles collecting books and papers.



They ran with them to another room.

Get out your sewing!



They returned to their seats as the door opened. It was the headmistress with the Russian school inspector.

This is a sewing class. While the girls work, I read them Russian fairy tales!

H'm ... I see.



The inspector opened one desk lid. He found nothing.



I want to question one of your pupils.

Very well. Marya Sklodowska, please stand.



Marya had prayed not to be called on, but she always was. She spoke perfect Russian and was the best student, though also the youngest.

Now she answered perfectly the inspectors many questions.

Name the tsars who have reigned since Catherine II. Tell the names and titles of the royal family.

Paul I, Alexander I, Nicholas I, Her Majesty the Empress, His Imperial Majesty ...



Later, Professor Sklodowski was given a much poorer job. Marya talked to her older sister, Bronya.

I've won a scholarship to the high school. Should I go there? It is a Russian school. They are our bitter enemies!

Of course you should go!



The Russians want to keep us ignorant. We must learn everything we can! And you most of all because you are so smart!



So Marya went to the high school. And in June of 1883, there were graduation ceremonies.



The gold medal for the best student goes to Marya Skłodowska!

Her father was very proud.

We have many relatives in the country who want you to visit them. You must spend the next year enjoying yourself!

But papa, I expected to go to work!



You are only fifteen years old. You spent most of your life studying hard! Now you must have fun!



So Marya went visiting. Her aunts stuffed her with good food. Her uncles taught her to ride horseback. Her cousins took her to parties.

Look, tonight I danced through the soles of my shoes!



Wait until there is a kulig,* you will dance for two days and nights!

* kulig, an old Polish winter tradition sleigh ride party moving from house to house