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July 19, 1956

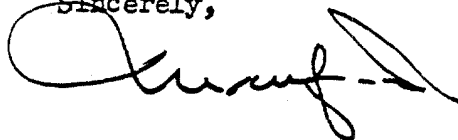
Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.
Director, Kettering Laboratory
University of Cincinnati
Eden Avenue
Cincinnati 19, Ohio

Dear "Dr. Kehoe":

As one of the first to sign up for a part in "The Luscious Luce Lunacy," now playing in all the papers, I think you are entitled to the enclosed ticket to what strikes me as the most knowing performance of this thrilling melodrama thus far.

What I have learned from inside sources about the case, plus what I have reason to suspect, makes quite a story, which unfortunately cannot be told at this time. It should all come out in due course, however, and whenever it does, some faces may glow a bit.

Sincerely,



MB:GW

Enclosure



Italy Doubts Arsenic Made Mrs. Luce III

U.S. Experts Also Skeptical Of CIA Report on Paint

By the United Press.

WASHINGTON, July 18.—Something very much resembling the mystery of the month seemed to be developing today in the story of Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce and the arsenical roses in her boudoir.

Mrs. Luce, U.S. ambassador to Italy, is suffering from arsenic poisoning. And the question arises: How did she get it? The story in dispatches from New York and Rome. They were splashed across the front pages with photographs and questions.

But if Tempo of Rome reported that one of the two toy poodles that Mrs. Luce had brought to Italy apparently was a victim of the poison.

The "fallout" came from the Borgia white roses that adorn the ceiling of the room. It not only drifted into the air but got into Mrs. Luce's food and morning coffee, the magazine reported.

This, said Time, explains the recurring illness which Mrs. Luce has been suffering. Time credited agents of the Central Intelligence Agency with discovering the source of the poisonous particles.

Questions Raised.

But questions have been raised about the accuracy of CIA's detective work, although no one was suggesting a definite poison attempt or foreign intrigue.

Italian newspapers openly asked if the CIA had given a complete explanation to back

American women in Italy, especially in Rome.

Joseph F. Battley, president of the National Paint Varnish and Lacquer Assn., said he would "question that someone could formulate, deliberately or accidentally, a paint with an arsenic compound of sufficient strength . . . to cause illness of the type which Mrs. Luce suffered."

"Paint forms a tough, hard film that has no pigment affinity," he said. "A good example is the murals, hundreds of years old, on ceilings all over Italy. Today's modern paints are specially formulated to withstand numerous scrubbing and washing."

Agricultural Sprays.

Mr. Battley said arsenic trioxide "has been used extensively in Italy for agricultural sprays. It is conceivable it could be used against house insects or rodents, but it is inconceivable that it was used intentionally in a paint film." In Italy, Anat, the semi-official Italian news agency, quoted Rome scientists as saying the use of arsenic compounds in paints was "generally abandoned" at least 30 years ago.

The scientists went on to explain, however, that when arsenic compounds are used in paint, a poisonous hydrogen-arsenic gas develops very slowly under the influence of air and moisture and through the action of moulds. But if there were an arsenic

compound in the paint, the question arose why other persons in the ambassador's residence were not poisoned.

A State Department spokesman said the situation which led to Mrs. Luce's case "has been corrected." The roses have been covered with heavy tarpaper redone in a different type of paint.

"Let me emphasize," the State Department spokesman said, "this was purely an accident and there is absolutely no implication that it was otherwise."

No Ill Effect.

Ellsworth Bunker, who occupied the same villa while ambassador to Rome in 1952 and 1953, said he suffered no ill effects.

"My wife does recall the paint did flick off some," Mr. Bunker, now president of the American Red Cross, said, "but it didn't seem to bother me. Of course, I was only there for a year."

In Cincinnati, Dr. Robert A. Kehoe, of the Kettering Laboratory of Applied Physiology, said that prolonged exposure to small amounts of arsenic can produce "chronic" cases of arsenic poisoning.

Dr. Kehoe said such cases often develop after the subject absorbs tiny particles of arsenic "over a long period of time."

'Seaman Jones'

The fallout that hit Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce proves the old adage that truth, skillfully handled, can be stranger and more enticing than fiction—or any TV script.

It had everything: A beautiful woman, herself a former playwright. A suspected poison plot, with Mrs. Luce losing her hair by the brushful, her teeth loosening and her fingernails brittle. A mysterious boudoir in an Italian 17th century villa. A glittering society waltz that soured one night because Mrs. Luce's right foot turned numb.

But then the great diplomatic mystery was solved with plenty of credit to all hands: The Central Intelligence Agency whose sleuths tailed every suspect, the United States Navy, whose doctors laboratory-tested ambassadorial specimens, hiding her identity under the wonderful name of "Seaman Jones," the State Department which worried the while for fear diplomatic relations might be jeopardized.

And a final journalistic triumph by Time magazine, which just happens to be owned by Mrs. Luce's husband. Turned out it was just arsenic dust sifting down from the paint on her bedroom ceiling. It got in her breakfast coffee.

Mrs. Luce now has been properly treated, and we're glad she's coming along all right. She leaves this week for a three-week Mediterranean cruise.

Next: Will she get back in time to be a featured speaker at the Republican national convention? Stay tuned.

Booth from N.Y. World-Telegram and Sun, July 18, 1962

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