

Lily Robinson



and the Art of Secret Poisoning

*“The crime of poisoning, from its nature, must always be a secret one . . . It seems to have escaped the attention of those who have written on the subject, that the practice of such an art requires the knowledge not only of a dexterous toxicologist, but also of a skillful physician; for success must depend on the exact imitation of some natural cause” (Robert Christison, MD, 1844)**

Lily Robinson was an attractive woman, with long dark hair and captivating green eyes. Although she was diminutive in stature, she stood out in a crowd. It was confidence that set her apart. She smiled secretly inside as she walked down Boston’s fashionable Newbury Street. She had just been given another assignment and the plan would be simple and elegant.

Lily gathered up her keys, hopped in her little red car, and headed to her Cape Cod home. There she could watch the waves and tend to her garden. When she arrived at the house, she donned a wide-brimmed hat and stepped outside to enter her sanctuary. She was greeted by one of her favorite flowers in bloom: dark green palmate leaves with pale blue flowers that winked under their helmets. She tended her plants like delicate treasures, and thought about what she would do. Yes, tea would be nice; she would like that.

The sun dipped farther into the ocean’s edge as Lily took a walk along the beach. The algal blooms clogged the surface of the sea. The red tide was evident and shellfish beds were closed. She liked the idea of small dinoflagellates inhabiting mollusks and rendering them unfit for human consumption. In New England this summer, there would be fewer mussels to pile high in plates filled with broth and butter. There was always someone who would defy the “No Shellfishing” signs and collect just a few mussels for his own consumption, and possibly his own death.

Bending down she picked up a perfect piece of blue sea glass, one she would add to her collection when she returned to the house. Lily liked collections; she had a large assortment of perfectly formed shells from

the genus *Conus*. Such exciting mollusks: some species hunt fish with a small harpoon they carry inside their shell. As the proboscis extends, the harpoon-like tooth bores into the fish and injects *Conus* venom. The paralyzed fish is then reeled inside, engulfed, and digested.

Of all her collections, Lily’s most prized was that of her toxic plants and berries. Carefully dissected parts were kept in small jars on a shelf or in neatly labeled plastic containers in the freezer to retain their potency. Some were species from her own toxic garden, while others had been collected from outside the United States and smuggled home, lost inside her suitcase for just a short time.

Lily Robinson’s target was a man who threatened an entire nation. He worked at one of the most prestigious universities in the city and could not be reasoned with. They had tried. The brilliance of his younger days had given way to a thin bitter man with a wild mane of gray hair and untied shoelaces. He had created a technological breakthrough so revolutionary that the way all communications would occur in the future would be forever changed. All existing encryption codes would be worthless. Yet this secret would not be contained within these borders if he had his way.

There would be a small dinner party to welcome a new member of this man’s department, and Lily would be attending as the guest of a colleague. All had been arranged. The affair was to be a catered. Lily wore a black dress with black satin Jimmy Choo sandals fashioned with delicate crystal buckles. A touch of glitter sparkled on her décolletage. As she exited through the door, she slipped a small plastic container into her Prada bag.

Dinner began with a plate of steamed mussels and broth. The mussels had been cooked in a kettle with leeks, celery, onion, garlic, and parsley. When nearly done, the mixture was seasoned to taste with salt and cayenne pepper. The next course was a watercress and endive salad with olive oil, wine vinegar, salt, pepper, and paprika. The entrée consisted of wild salmon grilled with tarragon and rosemary. For the end of the meal, a luxurious chocolate mousse was served accompanied by an herbal tea. Lily had seen to every detail.

As she drew in a deep breath, Lily folded her napkin in her lap and engaged the eyes of the dark-haired gentleman in the corner of the room. At that moment, just as the waiter was to collect the plates, the man with the long gray hair began to complain of tingling and burning of the lips, tongue, and mouth. He started drooling and gulping down a glass of water to quell his thirst and ease his abdominal pain. His head ached; he felt cold. His colleagues rushed to his

Received October 23, 2008; accepted October 28, 2008.
Previously published online at DOI: 10.1373/clinchem.2008.119826
*A Treatise on Poisons, 4th Edition. The Classics of Medicine Library. Birmingham Alabama: Gryphon Editions; Special Edition 1988, p. 43.

side. They felt a slowed pulse and noted his difficulty with breathing. He seemed confused and then began to vomit and seize. As his eyes closed Lily knew that it would be over soon. She had made sure that it would be finished before the medics arrived.

Lily Robinson excused herself to the ladies room. She reapplied her eyeliner across her top lids, Urban De-

cay Cove. She liked that color; it was green with just a hint of glitter for sparkle. Then she moved her Rose Spectrum lipstick around her lips in sweeping strokes and wished she could disappear into the summer night.

The reader is invited to submit suggestions on the exact nature of the poison used by Lily Robinson.

© 2008 Lily Robinson

Lily Robinson and the Art of Secret Poisoning

In this issue of the Journal, we are introducing a new series entitled “Lily Robinson and the Art of Secret Poisoning” by a prominent clinical chemist/toxicologist writing under the nom de plume of Lily Robinson. Designed to have entertainment and educational value, stories involving the administration of a poison will be published regularly in the “Clinical Chemist.” On the basis of the background information and clinical presentation included in each story, readers are asked to guess the nature of the poison used and to submit their responses to clinchemed@clinchem.aacc.org. In the following issue Lily Robinson will reveal the poison and discuss its clinical properties and analytical detection. One person who correctly identifies the poison used will be chosen randomly by the editorial staff, and will be awarded a gift certificate from the AACC Bookstore. We sincerely hope you will find this series enjoyable, and we strongly encourage you to participate.

Find out how it happened in the February issue!

Think you know how it happened? Send your guess to clinchemed@clinchem.aacc.org now for a chance to win a gift certificate to the AACC Bookstore!

Overseas Laboratory Medicine



It is with great pleasure that I announce the publication of the first issue of *Overseas Laboratory Medicine*, a compilation of articles from *Clinical Chemistry* that have been translated and published by the *Chinese Journal of Laboratory Medicine* (CJLM). This supplement contains 20 original articles, including research articles, reviews, perspectives, editorials, and a clinical case report. The CJLM is the highest ranked in terms of citations among the 118 journals published by the Chinese Medical Association and has a circulation of >10 000. *Overseas Laboratory Medicine*, which is scheduled to be published quarterly, will not only be sent to all subscribers of CJLM but also made available free of charge to all 220 000 laboratory scientists in China. This translation could not have been realized without the vision, perseverance, and hard work of Shi Hong, the managing editor of CJLM, and the help of our own Dennis Lo, associate editor of *Clinical Chemistry*; I am eternally grateful to them both.

This activity is part of the efforts initiated by *Clinical Chemistry* to establish strong ties with our Chinese colleagues and is the first of many potential endeavors. Furthermore, it also represents the first success story of the Journal's effort to disseminate information and make it available to those who are uncomfortable with or unable to read scientific reports in English. Similar agreements have already been made with other professional societies to have articles from the Journal translated to French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese and published in their respective journals. Discussions are currently ongoing to have articles from the Journal translated to Russian and Arabic.