

À écouter

france  
culture

# Radium Girls, des femmes lumineuses.



"L'histoire oubliée des  
Radiums Girls"

02 fév. 2019, France Culture

*Loulou création photos France Culture.*







Qui se souvient, enfant, avoir scruté longuement dans le noir les chiffres lumineux d'un cadran de montre ou de réveil, dont l'effet magique faisait oublier l'heure donnée ?











Grace Fryer meurt en 1933  
mystérieusement  
et dans la souffrance







Autour de sa tombe  
encore aujourd'hui  
la radioactivité s'envole



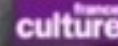


Elle travaillait  
dans une usine  
d'horloges phosphorescentes





et des dizaines  
d'autres ouvrières  
sont mortes comme elle

The logo for France Culture, consisting of a purple square with the words "france culture" in white lowercase letters.A black and white photograph of several young women, the Radium Girls, working in a laboratory. They are hunched over their work, and the scene is dimly lit, with a strong light source from the left. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

Voici la  
scandaleuse  
histoire des  
Radium Girls







Quand Marie et  
Pierre Curie découvrent  
le radium en 1898





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on n'en connaît  
pas encore les  
dangers








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CRÈME POUDDRE  
**THO-RADIA**  
EMBELLISSANTES PARCE QUE CURATIVES  
à base de Thorium et de radium selon la formule du  
DOCTEUR ALFRED CURIE

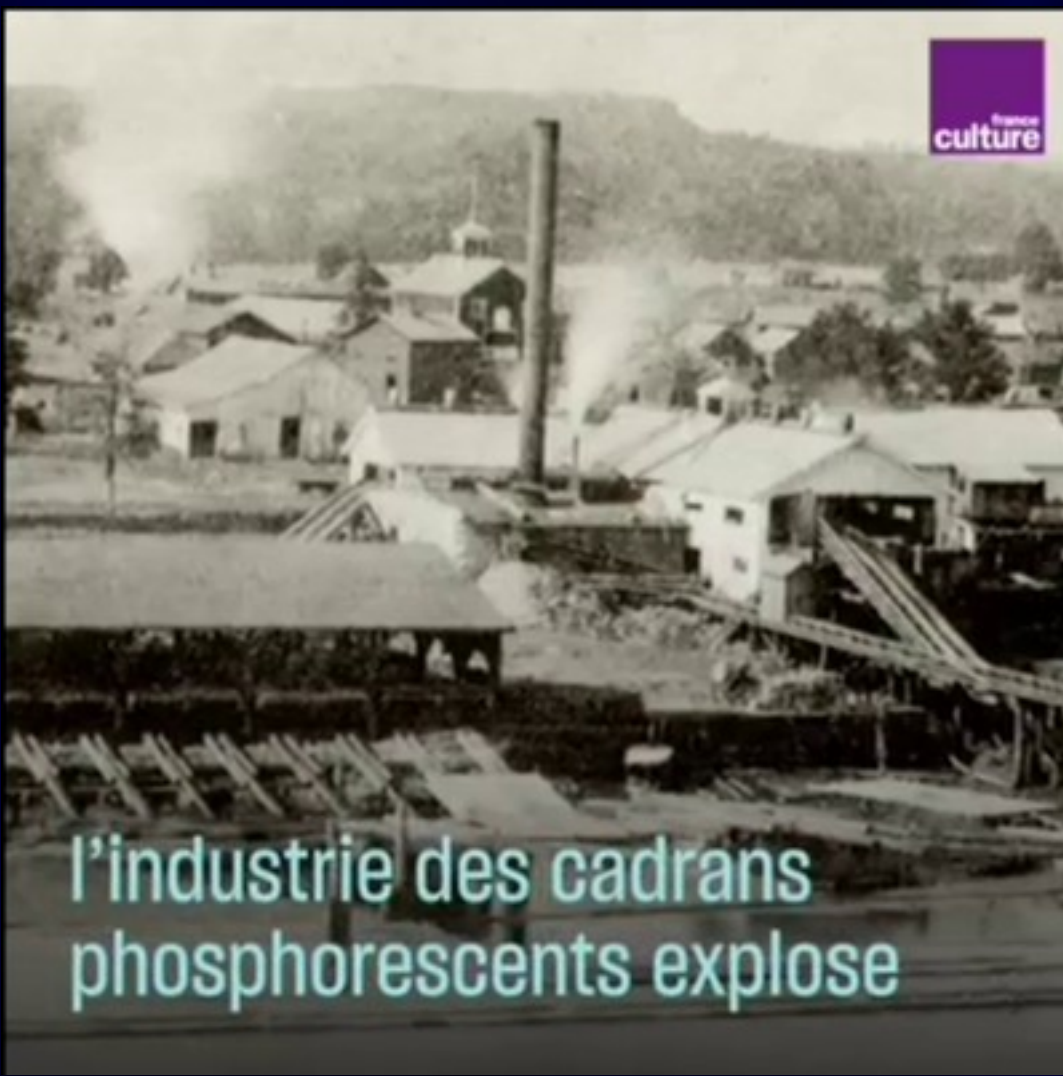
son utilisation se propage  
à tout type de produits




A black and white historical photograph of an industrial town, likely during the early 20th century. The scene shows several large, multi-story buildings, a prominent tall smokestack emitting a plume of white smoke, and a complex network of wooden structures and tracks in the foreground. The background features a hilly landscape under a clear sky.

Aux États-Unis,  
pendant la  
1<sup>re</sup> Guerre mondiale





l'industrie des cadrans  
phosphorescents explose

A black and white photograph of a large classroom filled with students sitting at their desks. The students are dressed in early 20th-century attire. The classroom has rows of desks and a chalkboard in the background.

dans les années 1920  
près de 4 000 femmes  
dont Grace, y sont employées





Leur travail ?






Peindre méticuleusement  
près de 250 cadrans par jour






The image shows the cover of the book 'The Radium Girls' by Kate Moore. The cover features a black and white photograph of a woman in a dark, heavy coat, possibly in a laboratory or industrial setting. The text is in a light blue or teal color. A purple square logo with the text 'france culture' is in the top right corner. A decorative gold scrollwork border is on the left and right sides. A teal audio waveform is overlaid on the bottom half of the cover.

Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

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La compagnie disait d'effiler  
son pinceau entre ses lèvres




Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

france  
culture

pour faire une pointe fine.









Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

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Toutes les Radiums Girls peignaient  
leur cadran de la sorte donc

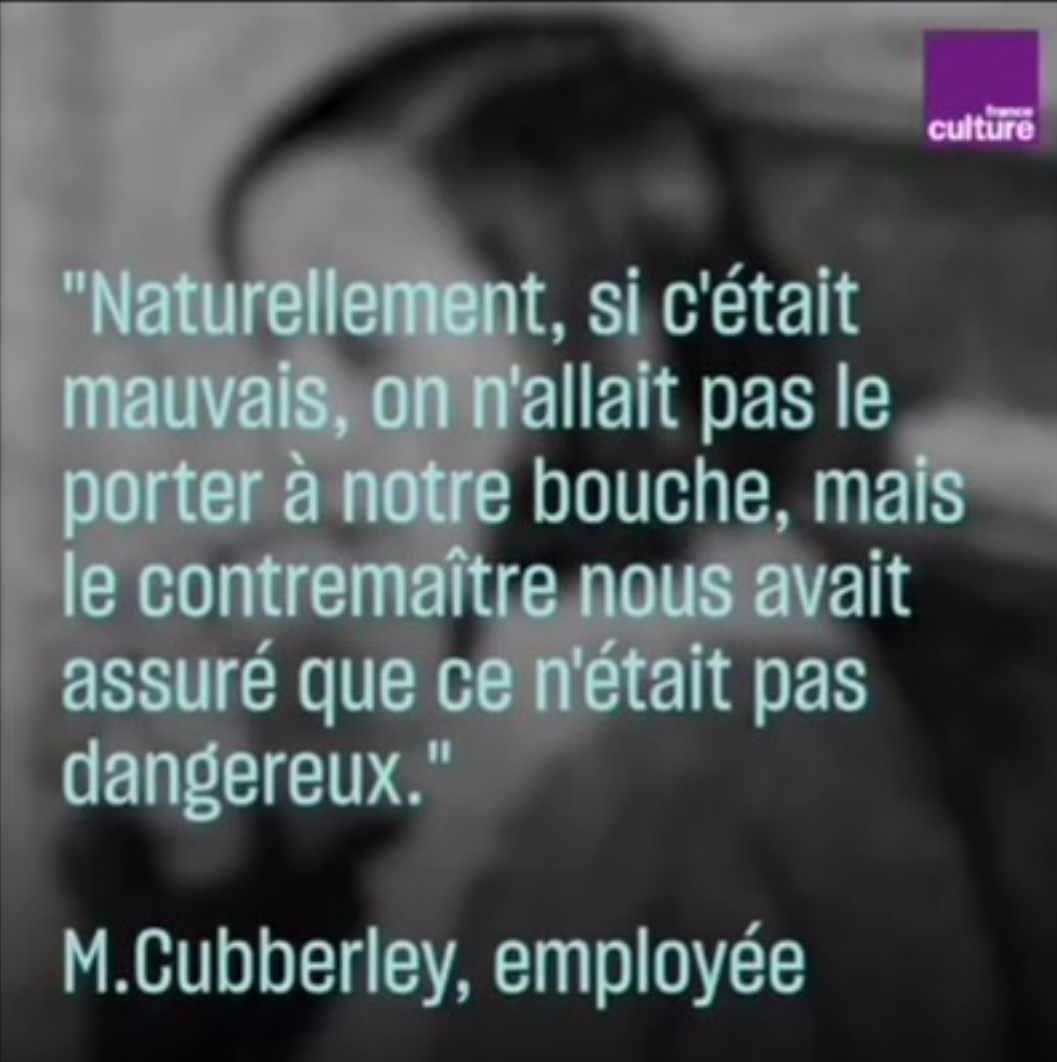


Kate Moore  
Ecrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

france  
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elles ingéraient cette peinture radioactive  
en effilant leur pinceau entre leurs lèvres.



A blurred, grayscale image of a person's face, likely a woman, serving as the background for the text.

"Naturellement, si c'était mauvais, on n'allait pas le porter à notre bouche, mais le contremaître nous avait assuré que ce n'était pas dangereux."

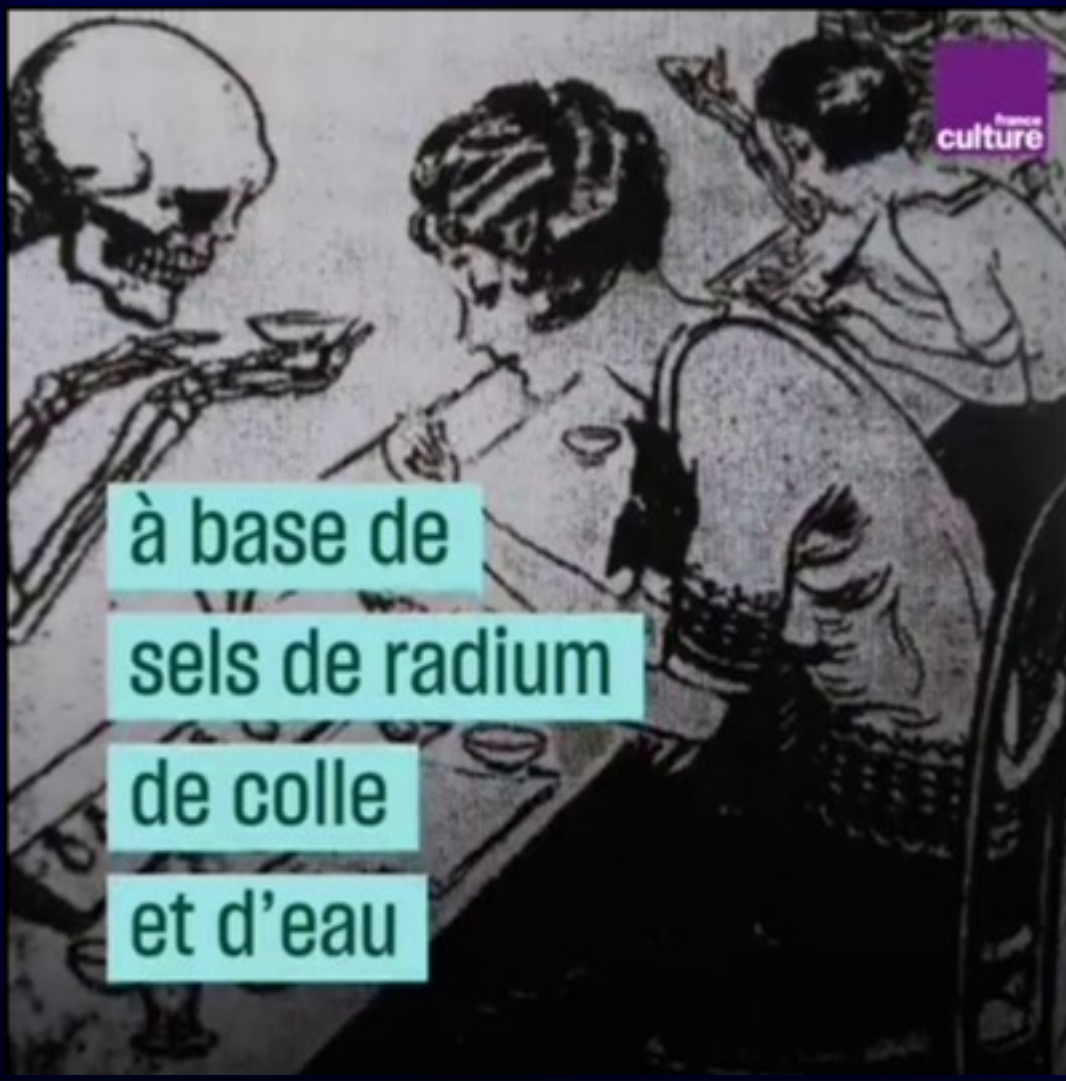
M.Cubberley, employée












à base de  
sels de radium  
de colle  
et d'eau





A vintage black and white photograph of a woman with a short, curly bob haircut, wearing a dark, sleeveless dress with a large floral corsage on her left shoulder. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The photo is set against a dark background.

la poudre scintillante  
se dépose sur leurs mains,  
leurs cheveux, leurs épaules



Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

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culture




On les appelaient les "revenantes"





Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, *The Radium Girls*

france  
culture



parce que quand elles  
rentraient à pied du travail


Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

france  
culture

elles luisaient comme des esprits









Kate Moore  
Écrivaine, "The Radium Girls"

france  
culture

Elles rivalisent de vitesse pour avoir le meilleur rendement. Elles affinent continuellement le pinceau en le portant à la bouche. Et lorsque quittant l'atelier, elles marchent dans la rue à la nuit tombée, un stupéfiant halo lumineux les entoure : leurs vêtements, leurs cheveux, leur peau luisent.




à cause de cette poussière de radium phosphorescente qui les enveloppait.

Publicité pour un produit capillaire au radium, 1924.










La santé de Grace  
et de ses collègues  
se détériore



A black and white portrait of a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a dark dress and a pearl necklace. The image is partially obscured by text boxes.

mal de dents

fracture spontanée des os

douleur articulaire atroce

anémie

nécrose...





le radium se fixe sur  
les os et les désintègre







la colonne vertébrale  
de Grace Fryer est  
**pulvérisée**





les cancers  
se multiplient







notamment,  
celui de la mâchoire  
chez des dizaines d'ouvrières

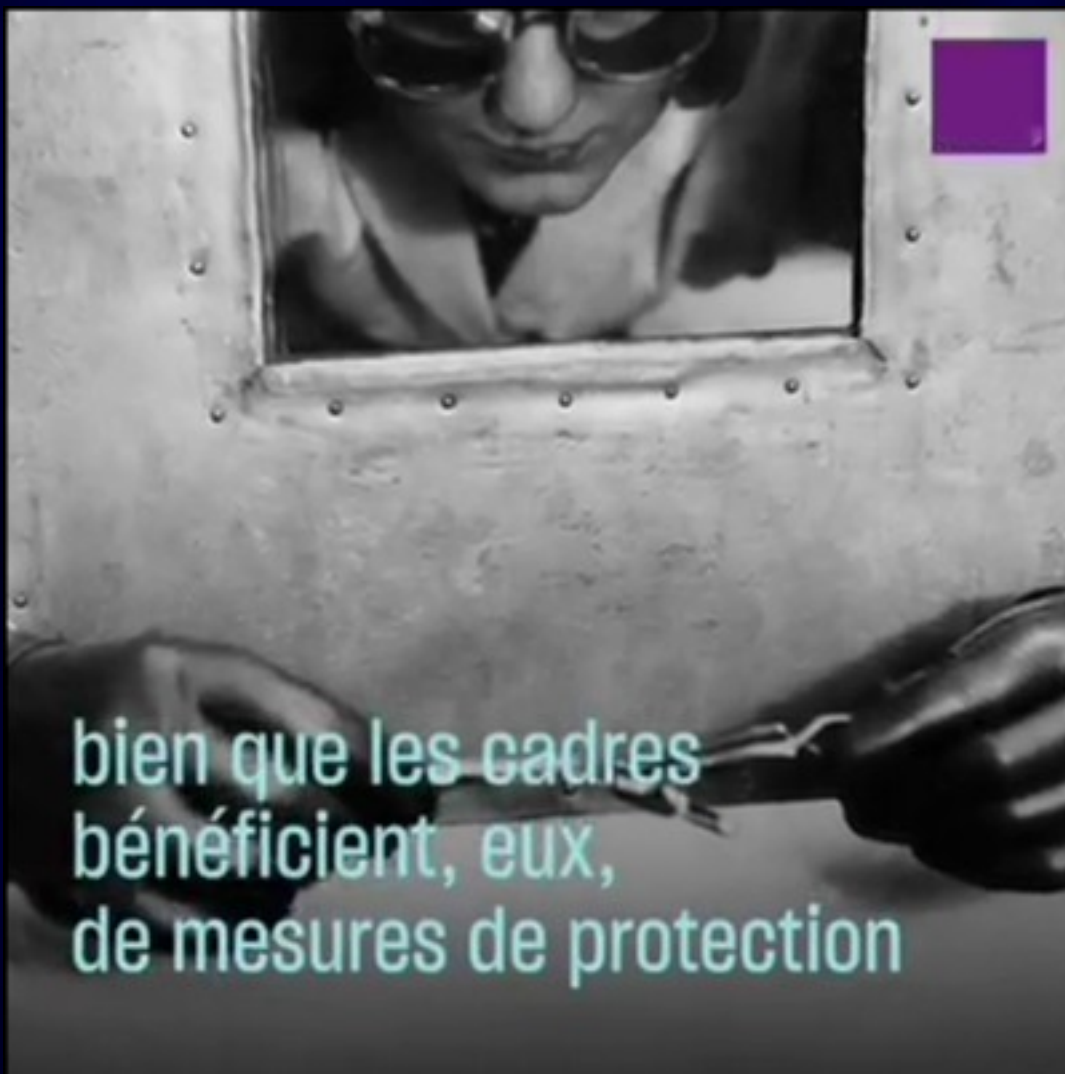




la compagnie  
se défend d'avoir connu  
les risques du radium







bien que les cadres  
bénéficient, eux,  
de mesures de protection






En quelques années,  
beaucoup d'ouvrières  
meurent



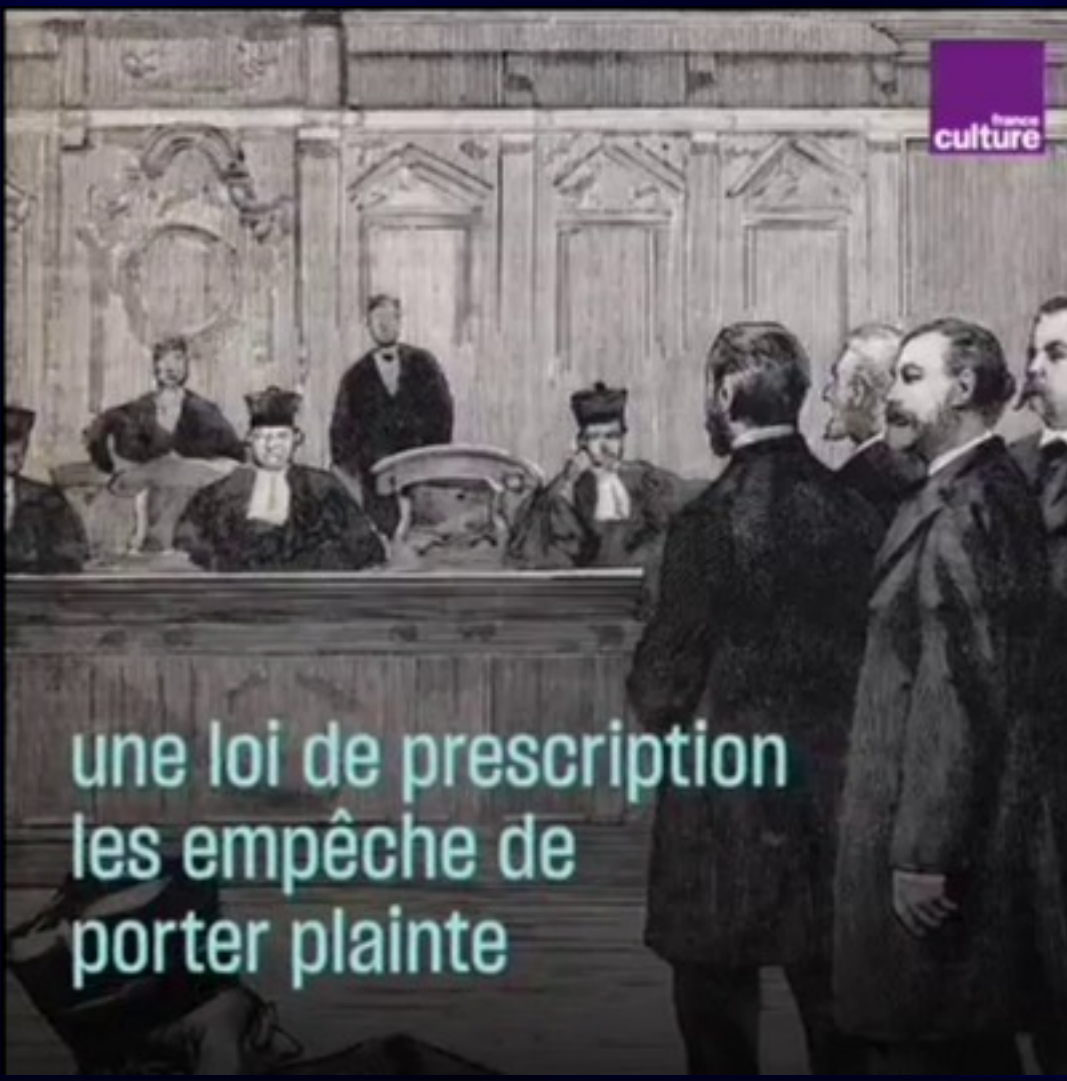


A black and white photograph showing a woman in a dark, patterned dress being held or supported by several men in suits. The woman's head is tilted back, and she appears to be in a state of distress or unconsciousness. The men are looking down at her with serious expressions. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.


la plupart sont trop  
malades pour entamer  
une procédure judiciaire





A black and white historical photograph of a courtroom. Several men in 19th-century attire are seated at a long wooden bench. In the foreground, a group of men in dark suits stands with their backs to the camera, looking towards the bench. The room has ornate wood paneling.


une loi de prescription  
les empêche de  
porter plainte

A black and white historical photograph showing five women in 1920s fashion. They are wearing various styles of hats, including wide-brimmed and cloche hats, and dresses with patterns and ruffles. They appear to be in a social setting, possibly a party or a meeting.

1927

un avocat accepte  
de défendre Grace Fryer  
et 4 de ses collègues





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la compagnie insinüe  
que les ouvrières ont  
**la syphilis**



et tente de prouver  
l'innocuité du radium  
par tous les moyens





Jean-Marc Cosset  
Radiothérapeute



Des gens qui étaient manifestement  
en conflit d'intérêt sont venus témoigner



Jean-Marc Cosset  
Radiothérapeute



comme quoi il n'y avait pas de danger.





Jean-Marc Cosset  
Radiothérapeute



Mais en creusant un peu on s'apercevait  
que c'étaient des vrais scientifiques





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qu'ils avaient un laboratoire







mais que le laboratoire était  
largement payé par la Radium Company.



367.787

DAILY TIMES

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# RADIUM DEATH ON RAMPAGE!



L'opinion publique et  
la presse se rangent  
du côté des ouvrières



# To Women Who Know They Soon Will Die

## Victims of Radium Poison Keep Their Faith as Death Nears

By GLADYS ARNE

NEWARK, N. J., June 1 (NEA)—What would you do if you had been told by medical experts that you had only one year to live?

Five young women of New Jersey are living their answer to that question.

They are the victims of radium poisoning now suing the United States Radium corporation, of Orange, N. J., for \$25,000 each on the ground they were fatally poisoned while working with radium products.

### Soleas of Religion

While they wait they are proving that, when death looks just around the corner, one turns instinctively to the simple comforts of home, family, work, play, friends and the solace of religious faith, rather than to unusual deeds or philosophies.

Two of them, Miss Katherine Schuch, of Newark, and Miss Olive Fryer, of Orange, are unmarried.

Katherine Schuch is 25. Her eyes are blind and her spotted hair is white.

"Katherine is a wonderful girl," said a friend who lives in Newark.

### Was Not Worried

"She was not worried about her condition," said a friend who lives in Newark.

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## One Girl Writes Another Holds Job in Bank

ere comfort me. I think about such things more than I use to.

### She Writes Poetry

"Now I'm going to tell you a secret—another thing that helps me."

She brought from a drawer a little notebook.

"Since I've been sick I've been writing poetry. Not to publish. Just for myself. Of course I have not much education. I don't suppose it's any good. See?"

She opened it. It was filled with verses, painstakingly inscribed in ink in a school girl hand.

Many were in a religious vein; one was entitled "Mary," and another "God's Love." But one was about the circus callings, "singling out of key as it trundles down the street."

There was another in "Spring," and one called "Happiness." The last verse went:

"Happiness is in the heart;  
It is not in costly clothes.  
It is found in helping others  
And in serene love."  
"What do you mean by serene love, Katherine?"

### Would Help Others

"Why I mean helping others without getting anything back. You need what I would do with my money if I got it. I guess I'd pay the bill, see. We have power. But if there's some left, I'd like to help people who have suffered like me. Don't you've suffered you are hard about me. You have to have it."

"She was not worried about her condition," said a friend who lives in Newark.

les 5 Radiums Girls  
obtiennent des  
compensations financières...





Death News

By GLADYS ANNE

NEWARK, N. J., June 1 (NBA)—What would you do if you had been told by medical experts that you had only one year to live?

Five young women of New Jersey are living their answers to that question.

They are the victims of radium poisoning now being the United States Radium corporation, of Orange, N. J., for \$25,000 each on the ground they were fatally poisoned while working with radium products.

Sales of Religion

While they wait they are proving that, when death lurks just around the corner, one turns instinctively to the simple comforts of home, family, work, play, friends and the solace of religious faith, rather than to cerebral death or philosophies.

Two of them, Miss Katherine Schuch, of Newark, and Miss Grace Feyer, of Orange, are unmarried.

Katherine Schuch is 24. Her eyes are vivid blue and her tumbled hair is silky red. Pain has given her a pallid skin. She has a slim, smart figure.

"Katherine wears clothes well," her friends used to say. "Katherine's a wonderful dancer." But now she walks with a heavy, dragging step, supporting herself by clenching chair or table.

Was War Worker

"My mother was proud of me," she told me. "She wanted me to have a good education and become a school teacher. She is dead now. She died when she learned what happened to me. Oh, many times we were told that we had only one year to live."



à l'amiable

JOB IN DARK

ery comfort me, I think things more than I can

She Writes Po

"Now I'm going to tell you another thing that she brought from a drawer in a little notebook.

"Since I've been sick I've been writing poetry. Not to publish. Just for myself. Of course I have not much education. I don't suppose it's any good. See?"

She opened it. It was filled with verses, painstakingly inscribed in ink in a school girl hand.

Many were in a religious vein; one was entitled, "Mary," and another "God's Love." But one was about the circus calliope, "ringing out of key as it trundles down the street."

There was another in "Spring," and one called "Happiness." The last verse went:

"Happiness is in the heart;

It is not in outer clothes.

It is found in helping others

And in servile love."

"What do you mean by servile love, Katherine?"

Would Help Others

"Why I mean helping others without getting anything back. You asked what I would do with my money if I got it. I guess I'd pay the bills, first. We have plenty. But if there's some left, I'd like to help people who have suffered like me. Until you've suffered you are hard about pain. You have to have it yourself to sympathize."

Grace Feyer, the heroine song by Katherine, works in a bank in Newark and holds a passbook in her box.

She is 25. Her hair is dark, her eyes deep brown. The disease is creeping the round contours of her face. She wears a brace from her back and another on her foot, and she had 12 operations on her joints.

She was quite discouraged. The doctors grow in vain, without any. But the girl sits and sings. She sings, "Sweet Home," "The Star Spangled Banner," "The Rose Tree," "The Bird Song," "The Rose Tree," "The Bird Song," "The Rose Tree," "The Bird Song."







france  
culture

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meurent peu après





France  
culture

Grace Freyer  
avait 34 ans







Le retentissement médiatique  
du procès a fait avancer  
les droits des travailleurs



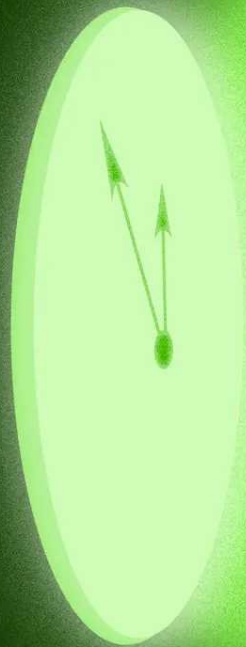


en poussant d'autres  
salariés à attaquer leur  
employeur en justice





Un documentaire de Marie Chartron, réalisé par Laurent Paulré. Archives INA :



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