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Full Book-Length Novel

Three Go Back

J. Leslie Mitchell

8

Plunged from today into the dawn of time, three castaways into the past wage the strangest fight mankind has known, to get back across twenty thousand years with the message that can bring the lost Golden Age to their descendants!

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Short Stories

The Derelict

William Hope Hodgson

94

Doomed men they were, caught in a dread phenomenon of Nature run amok. What was the hideous secret of the Bheopte—the derelict ship that no man could board and live?

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The Mask

Robert W. Chambers

109

Barred from life and death, she waited—waited for the key that could unlock the sinister talisman which held her prisoner of eternity!

King of the Gray Spaces

Ray Bradbury

120

Chosen . . . one out of a million . . . for only the best could be trusted with the lives of travelers in the space lanes between the planets. . . . This is the story of how one boy received the summons—and how he answered it.

Features

The Readers' Viewpoint

6

In the Next Issue

93

The Editor's Page

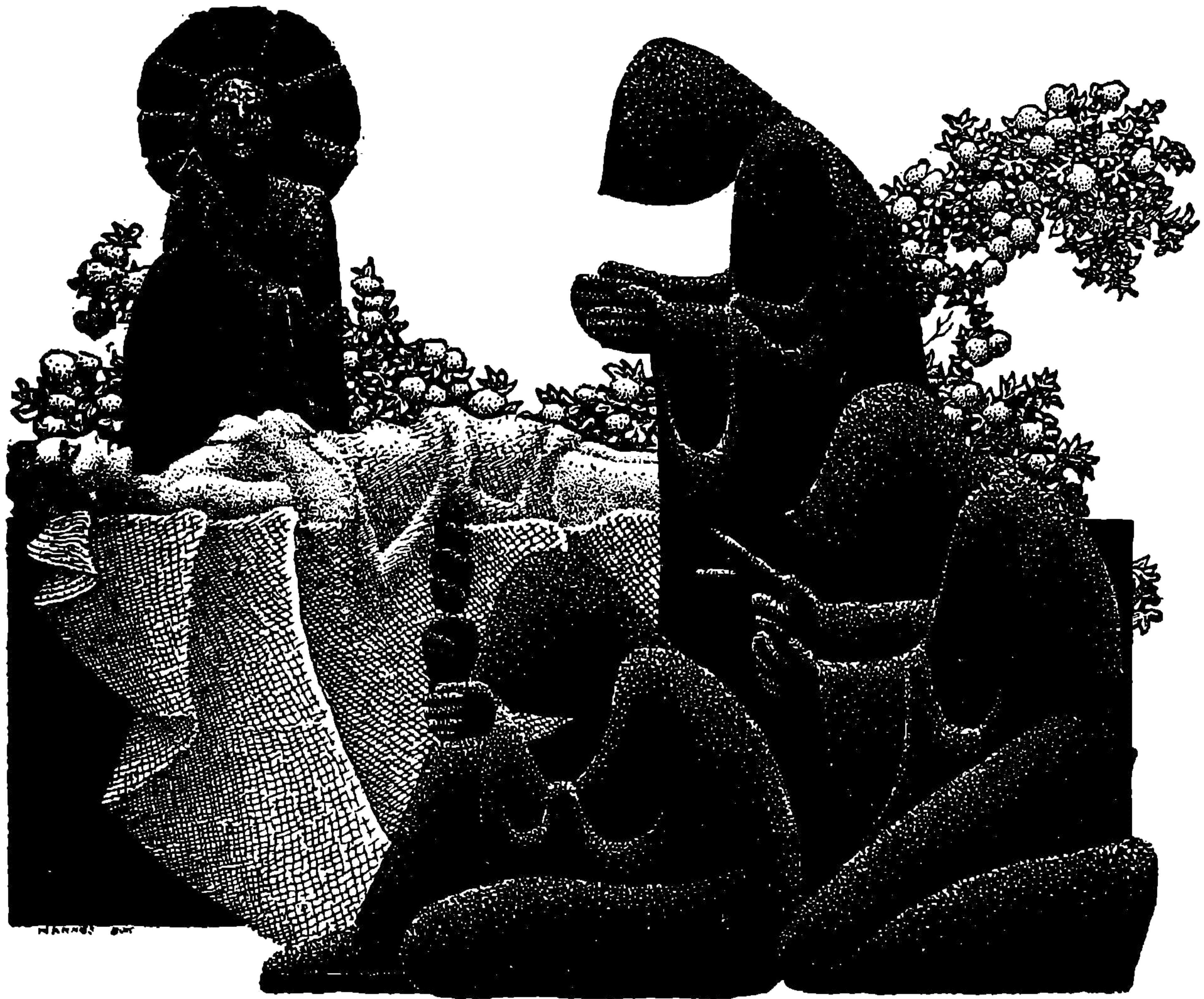
108

The Second Finlay Portfolio

133

All the stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

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THE MASK

By Robert W. Chambers

Barred from life and death alike, she waited—waited for the key that could unlock the sinister talisman which held her prisoner of eternity.

ALTHOUGH I knew nothing of chemistry, I listened fascinated. He picked up an Easter lily which Genevieve had brought that morning from Notre Dame and dropped it into the basin. Instantly the liquid lost its crystalline clearness. For a second the lily was enveloped in a milk-white foam, which disappeared, leaving the fluid opalescent.

Changing tints of orange and crimson played over the surface, and then what seemed to be a ray of pure sunlight struck through from the bottom where the lily was resting. At the same instant he plunged his hand into the basin and drew out the flower.

"There is no danger," he explained, "if you choose the right moment. That golden ray is the signal."

He held the lily towards me and I took it in my hand. It had turned to stone, to the purest marble.

"You see," he said, "it is without a flaw. What sculptor could reproduce it?"

The marble was white as snow; but in its depths the veins of the lily were tinged with palest azure, and a faint flush lingered deep in its heart.

"Don't ask me the reason of that," he smiled, noticing my wonder. "I have no idea why the veins and heart are tinted, but they always are. Yesterday I tried one of Genevieve's goldfish—there it is."

The fish looked as if sculptured in marble. But if you held it to the light the stone was beautifully veined with a faint blue, and from somewhere within came a rosy light like the tint which slumbers in an opal. I looked into the basin. Once more it seemed filled with clearest crystal.

"If I should touch it now?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he replied, "but you had better not try."

"There is one thing I'm curious about," I said, "and that is where the ray of sunlight came from."

"It looked like a sunbeam, true enough," he said. "I don't know, it always comes when I immerse any living thing. Perhaps," he continued, smiling—"perhaps it is the vital spark of the creature escaping to the source whence it came."

I saw he was mocking, and threatened him with a mahlstick; but he only laughed and changed the subject.

"Stay to lunch. Genevieve will be here directly."

"I saw her going to early mass," I said, "and she looked as fresh and sweet as that lily—before you destroyed it."

"Do you think I destroyed it?" said Boris, gravely.

"Destroyed, preserved, how can we tell?"

We sat in the corner of a studio near his unfinished group of "The Fates." He leaned back on the sofa, twirling a sculptor's chisel and squinting at his work.

"By the way," he said, "I have finished pointing up that old academic 'Ariadne,' and I suppose it will have to go to the Salon. It's all I have ready this year, but after the success the 'Madonna' brought me I feel ashamed to send a thing like that."

The "Madonna," an exquisite marble, for which Genevieve had sat, had been

the sensation of last year's Salon. I looked at the "Ariadne." It was a magnificent piece of technical work; but I agreed with Boris that the world would expect something better of him than that. Still, it was impossible not to think of finishing in time for the Salon that splendid, terrible group half shrouded in the marble behind me. "The Fates" would have to wait.

We were proud of Boris Yvain. We claimed him and he claimed us on the strength of his having been born in America, although his father was French and his mother was a Russian. Every one in the Beaux Arts called him Boris. And yet there were only two of us whom he addressed in the same familiar way—Jack Scott and myself.

Perhaps my being in love with Genevieve had something to do with his affection for me. Not that it had ever been acknowledged between us. But after all was settled, and she had told me with tears in her eyes that it was Boris whom she loved, I went over to his house and congratulated him. The perfect cordiality of that interview did not deceive either of us, I always believed, although to one at least it was a great comfort. I do not think he and Genevieve ever spoke of the matter together, but Boris knew.

Genevieve was lovely. The Madonna-like purity of her face might have been inspired by the "Santus" in Gounod's Mass. But I was always glad when she changed that mood for what we called her "April Maneuvers." She was often as variable as an April day. In the morning grave, dignified, and sweet; at noon laughing, capricious; at evening whatever one least expected. I preferred her so rather than in that Madonna-like tranquillity which stirred the depths of my heart. I was dreaming of Genevieve when he spoke again.

"What do you think of my discovery, Alex?"

"I think it wonderful."

"I shall make no use of it, you know, beyond satisfying my own curiosity so far as may be, and the secret will die with me."

"It would be rather a blow to sculpture, would it not? We painters lose more than we ever gain by photography."

Boris nodded, playing with the edge of the chisel.

"This new, vicious discovery would corrupt the world of art. No. I shall never

confide the secret to anyone," he said, slowly.

IT WOULD be hard to find anyone less informed about such phenomena than myself; but of course I had heard of mineral springs so saturated with silica that the leaves and twigs which fell into them were turned to stone after a time. I dimly comprehended the process, how the silica replaced the vegetable matter, atom by atom, and the result was a duplicate of the object in stone.

This I confess had never interested me greatly, and, as for the ancient fossils thus produced, they disgusted me. Boris, it appeared, feeling curiosity instead of repugnance, had investigated the subject, and had accidentally stumbled on a solution which, attacking the immersed object with a ferocity unheard of, in a second did the work of years. This was all I could make out of the strange story he had just been telling me. He spoke again after a long silence.

"I am almost frightened when I think what I have found. Scientists would go mad over the discovery. It was so simple, too; it discovered itself. When I think of that formula, and that new element precipitated in metallic scales—"

"What new element?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of naming it, and I don't believe I ever shall. There are enough precious metals now in the world to cut throats over."

I pricked up my ears. "Have you struck gold, Boris?"

"No, better; but see here, Alec!" he laughed, starting up. "You and I have all we need in this world. Ah! how sinister and covetous you look already!" I laughed, too, and told him I was devoured by the desire for gold, and we had better talk of something else; so, when Genevieve came in shortly after, we had turned our backs on alchemy.

Genevieve was dressed in silvery gray. The light glinted along the soft curves of her fair hair as she turned her cheek to Boris; then she saw me and returned my greeting. She had never before failed to blow me a kiss from the tips of her white fingers, and I promptly complained of the omission. She smiled and held out her hand, which dropped almost before it had touched mine; then she said, looking at Boris:

"You must ask Alec to stay for luncheon." This also was something new. She had always asked me herself until today.

"I did," said Boris, shortly.

"And you said yes, I hope." She turned to me with a charming conventional smile. I might have been an acquaintance of the day before yesterday. I made her a bow. "*J'avais bien l'honneur, madame*"; but, refusing to take up our usual bantering tone, she murmured a hospitable commonplace and disappeared. Boris and I looked at each other

"I had better go home, don't you think?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know," he replied, frankly.

While we were discussing the advisability of my departure, Genevieve reappeared in the door-way without her hat. She was wonderfully beautiful, but her color was too deep and her lovely eyes were too bright. She came straight up to me and took my arm.

"Luncheon is ready. Was I cross, Alec? I thought I had a headache, but I haven't. Come here, Boris," and she slipped her other arm through his. "Alec knows that, after you, there is no one in the world whom I like as well as I like him, so if he sometimes feels snubbed it won't hurt him."

"*A la bonheur!*" I cried; "who says there are no thunder-storms in April?"

"Are you ready?" changed Boris. "Aye ready"; and arm-in-arm we raced into the dining-room, scandalizing the servants. After all, we were not so much to blame; Genevieve was eighteen, Boris twenty-three, and I not quite twenty-one.

SOME work that I was doing about this time on the decorations for Genevieve's boudoir kept me constantly at the quaint little hotel in the Rue Sainte-Cecile. Boris and I in those days labored hard, but as we pleased, which was fitfully, and we all three, with Jack Scott, idled a great deal together.

One quiet afternoon I had been wandering alone over the house examining curios, prying into odd corners, bringing out sweetmeats and cigars from strange hiding-places, and at last I stopped in the bathing-room. Boris, all over clay, stood there washing his hands.

The room was built of rose-colored marble, excepting the floor, which was tessellated in rose and gray. In the center was a square pool sunken below the surface of the floor; steps led down into it; sculptured pillars supported a frescoed ceiling. A delicious marble Cupid appeared to have just alighted on his ped-

estal at the upper end of the room. The whole interior was Boris' work and mine. Boris, in his working clothes of white canvas, scraped the traces of clay and red modelling-wax from his handsome hands and coquettled over his shoulder with the Cupid.

"I see you," he insisted; "don't try to look the other way and pretend not to see me. You know who made you, little humbug!"

It was always my rôle to interpret Cupid's sentiments in these conversations, and when my turn came I responded in such a manner that Boris seized my arm and dragged me towards the pool, declaring he would duck me. Next instant he dropped my arm and turned pale. "Good God!" he said. "I forgot the pool is full of the solution!"

I shivered a little, and dryly advised him to remember better where he had stored the precious liquid.

"In Heaven's name, why do you keep a small lake of that gruesome stuff here of all places?" I asked.

"I want to experiment on something large," he replied.

"On me, for instance!"

"Ah! that came too close for jesting; but I do want to watch the action of that solution on a more highly organized living body; there is that big, white rabbit," he said, following me into the studio.

Jack Scott, wearing a paint-stained jacket, came wandering in, appropriated all the Oriental sweetmeats he could lay his hands on, looted the cigarette-case, and finally he and Boris disappeared together to visit the Luxembourg Gallery, where a new silver bronze by Rodin and a landscape of Monet's were claiming the exclusive attention of artistic France.

I went back to the studio and resumed my work. It was a Renaissance screen, which Boris wanted me to paint for Genevieve's boudoir. But the small boy who was unwillingly dawdling through a series of poses for it today refused all bribes to be good. He never rested an instant in the same position, and inside of five minutes I had as many different outlines of the little beggar.

"Are you posing or are you executing a song and dance, my friend?" I inquired.

"Whichever monsieur pleases," he replied, with an angelic smile.

Of course I dismissed him for the day, and of course I paid him for the full time, that being the way we spoil our models.

After the young imp had gone, I made

a few perfunctory daubs at my work, but was so thoroughly out of humor that it took me the rest of the afternoon to undo the damage I had done, so at last I scraped my palette, stuck my brushes in a bowl of black soap, and strolled into the smoking-room. I really believe that, excepting Genevieve's apartments, no room in the house was so free from the perfume of tobacco as this one.

It was a queer chaos of odds and ends hung with thread-bare tapestry. A sweet-toned old spinet in good repair stood by the window. There were stands of weapons, some old and dull, others bright and modern, festoons of Indian and Turkish armor over the mantel, two or three good pictures, and a pipe-rack. It was here that we used to come for new sensations in smoking. I doubt if any type of pipe ever existed which was not represented in that rack.

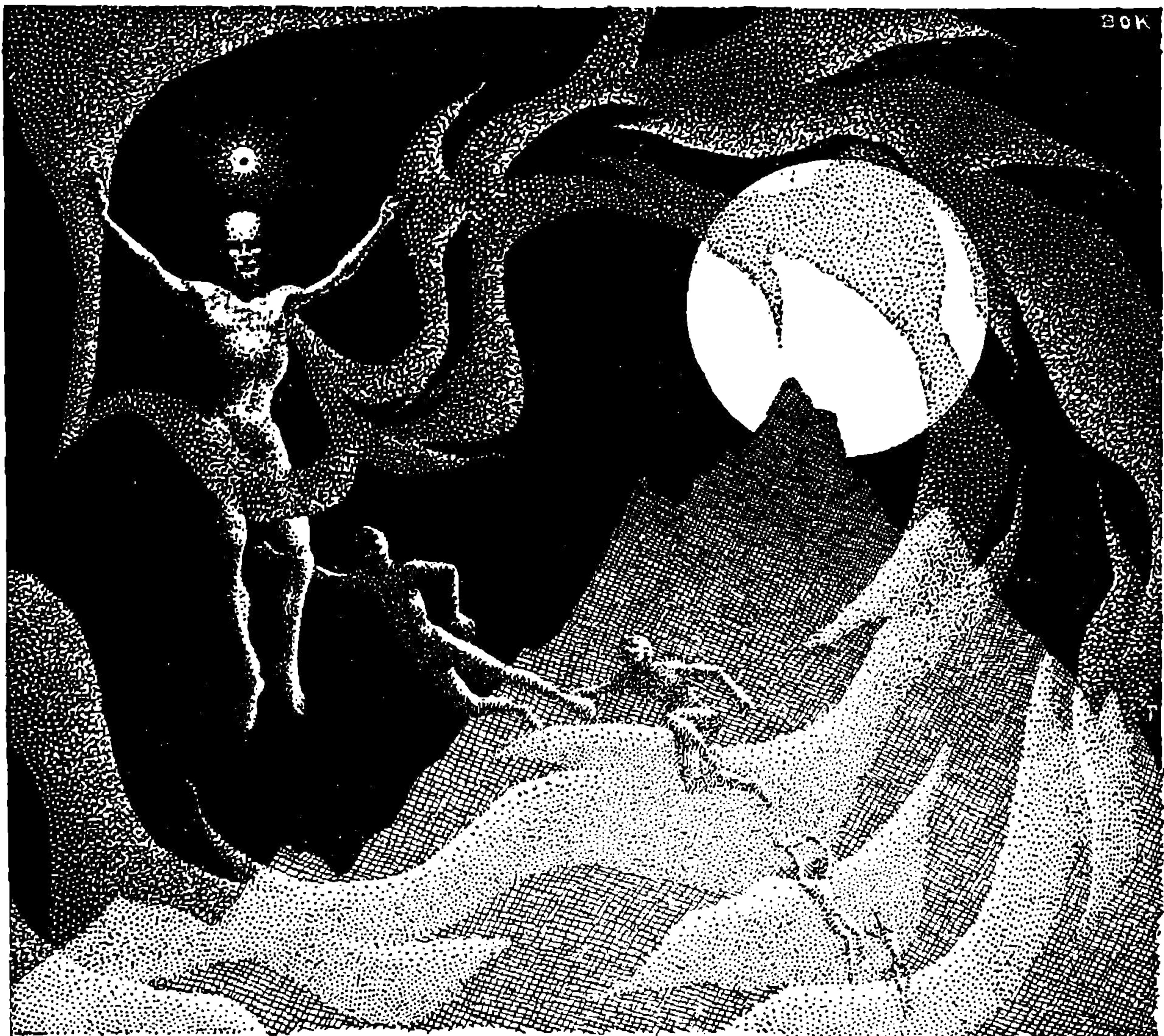
When we had selected one, we immediately carried it somewhere else and smoked it; for the place was, on the whole, more gloomy and less inviting than any in the house. But this afternoon the twilight was very soothing; the rugs and skins on the floor looked brown and soft and drowsy; the big couch was piled with cushions. I found my pipe and curled up there for an unaccustomed smoke in the smoking-room. I had chosen one with a long, flexible stem, and, lighting it, fell to dreaming. After a while it went out; but I did not stir. I dreamed on and presently fell asleep.

I awoke to the saddest music I had ever heard. The room was quite dark; I had no idea what time it was. A ray of moonlight silvered one edge of the old spinet, and the polished wood seemed to exhale the sounds as perfume floats above a box of sandal-wood. Someone rose in the darkness and came away weeping quietly, and I was fool enough to cry out, "Genevieve!"

She dropped at my voice, and I had time to curse myself while I made a light and tried to raise her from the floor. She shrank away with a murmur of pain. She was very quiet, and asked for Boris. I carried her to the divan, and went to look for him; but he was not in the house, and the servants were gone to bed. Perplexed and anxious, I hurried back to Genevieve. She lay where I had left her, looking very white.

"I can't find Boris nor any of the servants," I said.

"I know," she answered, faintly, "Boris



"I thought of the King in Yellow, wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and of lost Carcosa that lies beyond the moon."

has gone to Ept with Mr. Scott. I did not remember when I sent you for him just now."

"But he can't get back in that case before tomorrow afternoon, and—are you hurt? Did I frighten you into falling? What an awful fool I am, but I was only half awake."

"Boris thought you had gone home before dinner. Do please excuse us for letting you stay here all this time."

"I have had a long nap," I laughed "so sound that I did not know whether I was still asleep or not when I found myself staring at a figure that was moving towards me, and called out your name. Have you been trying the old spinet? You must have played very softly."

I would tell a thousand more lies worse than that one to see the look of

relief that came into her face. She smiled adorably and said, in her natural voice: "Alec, I tripped on that wolf's head, and I think my ankle is sprained. Please call Marie and then go home."

I did as she bade me, and left her there when the maid came in.

AT NOON next day when I called, I found Boris walking restlessly about his studio.

"Genevieve is asleep just now," he told me; "the sprain is nothing, but why should she have such a high fever? The doctor can't account for it; or else he will not," he muttered.

"Genevieve has a fever?" I asked.

"I should say so, and has actually been a little lightheaded at intervals all night. The idea!—gay little Genevieve, without a care in the world—and she keeps say-

ing her heart's broken and she wants to die!"

My own heart stood still.

Boris leaned against the door of his studio, looking down, his hands in his pockets, his kind, keen eyes clouded, a new line of trouble drawn "over the mouth's good mark, that made the smile." The maid had orders to summon him the instant Genevieve opened her eyes. We waited and waited, and Boris, growing restless, wandered about, fussing with modelling-wax and red clay. Suddenly he started for the next room. "Come and see my rose-colored bath full of death," he cried.

"Is it death?" I asked, to humor his mood.

"You are not prepared to call it life, I suppose," he answered. As he spoke he plucked a solitary goldfish squirming and twisting out of its globe. "We'll send this one after the other—wherever that is," he said. There was feverish excitement in his voice. A dull weight of fever lay on my limbs and on my brain as I followed him to the fair crystal pool with its pink-tinted sides; and he dropped the creature in.

Falling, its scales flashed with a hot, orange gleam in its angry twistings and contortions; the moment it struck the liquid it became rigid and sank heavily to the bottom. Then came the milky foam, the splendid hues radiating on the surface, and then the shaft of pure, serene light broke through from seemingly infinite depths. Boris plunged in his hand and drew out an exquisite marble thing, blue veined, rose tinted, and glistening with opalescent drops.

"Child's play," he muttered, and looked wearily, longingly, at me—as if I could answer such questions! But Jack Scott came in and entered into the "game," as he called it, with ardor. Nothing would do but to try the experiment on the white rabbit then and there. I was willing that Boris should find distraction from his cares, but I hated to see the life go out of a warm, living creature, and I declined to be present.

Picking up a book at random, I sat down in the studio to read. Alas, I had found "The King in Yellow." After a few moments, which seemed ages, I was putting it away with a nervous shudder, when Boris and Jack came in, bringing their marble rabbit. At the same time the bell rang above and a cry came from the sick-room. Boris was gone like a

flash, and the next moment he called: "Jack, run for the doctor; bring him back with you. Alec, come here."

I went and stood at her door. A frightened maid came out in haste and ran away to fetch some remedy. Genevieve, sitting bolt upright, with crimson cheeks and glittering eyes, babbled incessantly and resisted Boris's gentle restraint. He called me to help. At my first touch she sighed and sank back, closing her eyes, and then—then—as we still bent above her, she opened them again, looked straight into Boris's face, poor, fever-crazed girl, and told her secret.

At the same instant our three lives turned into new channels; the bond that had held us so long together snapped forever, and a new bond was forged in its place, for she had spoken my name, and, as the fever tortured her, her heart poured out its load of hidden sorrow. Amazed and dumb, I bowed my head, while my face burned like a live coal, and the blood surged in my ears, stupefying me with its clamor.

Incapable of movement, incapable of speech, I listened to her feverish words in an agony of shame and sorrow. I could not silence her, I could not look at Boris. Then I felt an arm upon my shoulder, and Boris turned a bloodless face to mine.

"It is not your fault, Alec; don't grieve so if she loves you—" But he could not finish; and as the doctor stepped swiftly into the room, saying, "Ah, the fever!" I seized Jack Scott and hurried him to the street, saying, "Boris would rather be alone." We crossed the street to our own apartments, and that night, seeing I was going to be ill, too, he went for the doctor again. The last thing I recollect with any distinctness was hearing Jack say, "For Heaven's sake, doctor, what ails him, to wear a face like that?" and I thought of "The King in Yellow" and the Pallid Mask.

I was very ill, for the strain of two years which I had endured since that fatal May morning when Genevieve murmured, "I love you, but I think I love Boris best," told on me at last. I had never imagined that it could become more than I could endure.

Outwardly tranquil, I had deceived myself. Although the inward battle raged night after night, and I, lying alone in my room, cursed myself for rebellious thoughts unloyal to Boris and unworthy of Genevieve, the morning always brought

relief, and I returned to Genevieve and to my dear Boris with a heart washed clean by the tempests of the night.

Never in word or deed or thought while with them had I betrayed my sorrow even to myself.

THE mask of self-deception was no longer a mask for me; it was a part of me. Night lifted it, laying bare the stifled truth below; but there was no one to see except myself, and when day broke the mask fell back again of its own accord. These thoughts passed through my troubled mind as I lay sick, but they were hopelessly entangled with visions of white creatures heavy as stone, crawling about in 'Boris' basin—of the wolf's head on the rug, foaming and snapping at Genevieve, who lay smiling beside it.

I thought too, of the King in Yellow wrapped in the fantastic colors of his tattered mantle, and that bitter cry of Cassilda, "Not upon us, O King, not upon us!" Feverishly I struggled to put it from me, but I saw the Lake of Hali, thin and blank, without a ripple or wind to stir it, and I saw the towers of Carcosa behind the moon. Aldebaran, the Hyades, Alar, Hastur, glided through the cloud rifts which fluttered and flapped as they passed like the scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow. Among all these, one sane thought persisted. It never wavered, no matter what else was going on in my disordered mind, that my chief reason for existing was to meet some requirement of Boris and Genevieve.

What this obligation was, its nature, was never clear; sometimes it seemed to be protection, sometimes support, through a great crisis. Whatever it seemed to be for the time, its weight rested only on me, and I was never so ill or so weak that I did not respond with my whole soul. There were always crowds of faces about me, mostly strange, but a few I recognized, Boris among them.

Afterwards they told me that this could not have been, but I know that once at least he bent over me. It was only a touch, a faint echo of his voice, then the clouds settled back on my senses, and I lost him, but he did stand there and bend over me once at least.

At last, one morning I awoke to find the sunlight falling across my bed, and Jack Scott reading beside me. I had not strength enough to speak aloud, neither could I think, much less remember, but I could smile feebly as Jack's eyes met

mine, and, when he jumped up and asked eagerly if I wanted anything, I could whisper, "Yes, Boris." Jack moved to the head of my bed, and leaned down to arrange my pillow; I did not see his face, but he answered, heartily, "You must wait, Alec, you are too weak to see even Boris."

I waited and I grew strong; in a few days I was able to see whom I would, but meanwhile I had thought and remembered. From the moment when all the past grew clear again in my mind, I never doubted what I should do when the time came, and I felt sure that Boris would have resolved upon the same course so far as he was concerned; as for what pertained to me alone, I knew he would see that also as I did. I no longer asked for anyone. I never inquired why no message came from them; why, during the week I lay there, waiting and growing stronger, I never heard their names spoken.

Preoccupied with my own searchings for the right way, and with my feeble but determined fight against despair, I simply acquiesced in Jack's reticence, taking for granted that he was afraid to speak of them, lest I should turn unruly and insist on seeing them. Meanwhile I said over and over to myself how it would be when life began again for us all. We would take up our relations exactly as they were before Genevieve fell ill. Boris and I would look into each other's eyes, and there would be neither rancor nor cowardice nor mistrust in that glance.

I would be with them again for a little while in the dear intimacy of their home, and then, without pretext or explanation, I would disappear from their lives forever. Boris would know; Genevieve—the only comfort was that she would never know. It seemed, as I thought it over, that I had found the meaning of that sense of obligation which had persisted all through my delirium, and the only possible answer to it. So when I was quite ready, I beckoned Jack to me one day, and said:

"Jack, I want Boris at once, and take my dearest greeting to Genevieve. . . ."

WHEN at last he made me understand that they were both dead, I fell into a wild rage that tore all my little convalescent strength to atoms. I raved and cursed myself into a relapse, from which I crawled forth some weeks afterwards a boy of twenty-one who believed that his

youth was gone forever. I seemed to be past the capability of further suffering, and one day, when Jack handed me a letter and the keys to Boris's house, I took them without a tremor and asked him to tell me all.

It was cruel of me to ask him, but there was no help for it, and he leaned wearily on his thin hands to reopen the wound which could never entirely heal. He began very quietly.

"Alec, unless you have a clue that I know nothing about, you will not be able to explain any more than I what has happened. I suspect that you would rather not hear these details, but you must learn them, else I would spare you the relation. God knows I wish I could be spared the telling. I shall use few words.

"That day when I left you in the doctor's care and came back to Boris, I found him working on 'The Fates.' Genevieve, he said, was sleeping under the influence of drugs. She had been quite out of her mind, he said. He kept on working, not talking any more, and I watched him.

"Before long I saw that the third figure of the group—the one looking straight ahead, out over the world—bore his face; not as you ever saw it, but as it looked then and to the end. This is one thing for which I should like to find an explanation, but I never shall.

"Well, he worked and I watched him in silence, and we went on that way until nearly midnight. Then we heard a door open and shut sharply, and a swift rush in the next room. Boris sprang through the doorway, and I followed; but we were too late. She lay at the bottom of the pool, her hands across her breast. Then Boris shot himself through the heart."

Jack stopped speaking, drops of sweat stood under his eyes, and his thin cheeks twitched.

"I carried Boris to his room. Then I went back and let that hellish fluid out of the pool, and, turning on all the water, washed the marble clean of every drop. When at length I dared descend the steps, I found her lying there as white as snow. At last, when I had decided what was best to do, I went into the laboratory, and first emptied the solution in the basin into the waste-pipe; then I poured the contents of every jar and bottle after it.

"There was wood in the fireplace, so I

built a fire, and, breaking the locks of Boris's cabinet, I burned every paper, note-book, and letter that I found there. With a mallet from the studio I smashed to pieces all the empty bottles, then, loading them into a coal-scuttle, I carried them to the cellar and threw them over the red-hot bed of the furnace.

"Six times I made the journey, and at last not a vestige remained of anything which might again aid one seeking for the formula which Boris had found. Then at last I dared call the doctor. He is a good man, and together we struggled to keep it from the public. Without him I never could have succeeded. At last we got the servants paid and sent away into the country, where old Rosier keeps them quiet with stories of Boris's and Genevieve's travel in distant lands, whence they will not return for years. We buried Boris in the little cemetery of Sevres. The doctor is a good creature, and knows when to pity a man who can bear no more. He gave his certificate of heart disease and asked no questions of me."

Then, lifting his head from his hands, he said, "Open the letter, Alec; it is for us both."

I tore it open. It was Boris's will, dated a year before. He left everything to Genevieve, and, in case of her dying childless, I was to take control of the house in the Rue Sainte-Cecile, and Jack Scott the management at Ept. On our deaths the property reverted to his mother's family in Russia, with the exception of the sculptured marbles executed by himself. These he left to me.

The page blurred under our eyes, and Jack got up and walked to the window. Presently he returned and sat down again. I dreaded to hear what he was going to say; but he spoke with the same simplicity and gentleness.

"Genevieve lies before the 'Madonna' in the marble-room. The 'Madonna' bends tenderly above her, and Genevieve smiles back into that calm face that never would have been except for her."

His voice broke, but he grasped my hand, saying, "Courage, Alec." Next morning he left for Ept to fulfil his trust.

THE same evening I took the keys and went into the house I had known so well. Everything was in order, but the silence was terrible. Though I went twice to the door of the marble-room, I could not force myself to enter. It was beyond my strength. I went into the smoking-

room and sat down before the spinet. A small handkerchief lay on the keys, and I turned away, choking.

"It was plain I could not stay, so I locked every door, every window, and the three front and back gates, and went away. Next morning Alcide packed my valise, and, leaving him in charge of my apartments, I took the Orient express for Constantinople. During the two years that I wandered through the East, at first, in our letters, we never mentioned Genevieve and Boris, but gradually their names crept in. I recollect particularly a passage in one of Jack's letters replying to one of mine:

"What you tell me of seeing Boris bending over you while you lay ill, and feeling his touch on your face and hearing his voice, of course troubles me. This that you described must have happened a fortnight after he died. I say to myself that you were dreaming, that it was part of your delirium, but the explanation does not satisfy me, nor would it you."

Towards the end of the second year a letter came from Jack to me in India so unlike anything that I had ever known of him that I decided to return at once

to Paris. He wrote: "I am well, and sell all my pictures, as artists do who have no need of money. I have not a care of my own; but I am more restless than if I had. I am unable to shake off a strange anxiety about you. It is not apprehension, it is rather a breathless expectancy—of what, God knows! I can only say it is wearing me out.

"Nights I dream always of you and Boris. I can never recall anything afterwards; but I wake in the morning with my heart beating, and all day the excitement increases until I fall asleep at night to recall the same experience. I am quite exhausted by it, and have determined to break up this morbid condition. I must see you. Shall I go to Bombay or will you come to Paris?"

I telegraphed him to expect me by the next steamer.

When we met I thought he had changed very little; I, he insisted, looked in splendid health. It was good to hear his voice again, and as we sat and chatted about what life still held for us we felt that it was pleasant to be alive in the bright spring weather.

We stayed in Paris together a week, and then I went for a week to Ept with

him, but first of all we went to the cemetery at Sevres, where Boris lay.

"Shall we place 'The Fates' in the little grove above him?" Jack asked, and I answered:

"I think only the 'Madonna' should watch over Boris's grave." But Jack was none the better for my home-coming. The dreams, of which he could not retain even the least definite outline, continued, and he said at times the sense of breathless expectancy was suffocating.

"You see, I do you harm and not good," I said. "Try a change without me." So he started alone for a ramble among the Channel Islands, and I went back to Paris. I had not yet entered Boris's house, now mine, since my return, but I knew it must be done. It had been kept in order by Jack; there were servants there, so I gave up my own apartment and went there to live. Instead of the agitation I had feared, I found myself able to paint there tranquilly. I visited all the rooms—all but one. I could not bring myself to enter the marble-room, where Genevieve lay, and yet I felt the longing growing daily to look upon her face, to kneel beside her.

One April afternoon I lay dreaming in the smoking-room, just as I had lain two years before, and mechanically I looked among the tawny Eastern rugs for the wolf-skin. At last I distinguished the pointed ears and flat, cruel head, and I thought of my dream, where I saw Genevieve lying beside it. The helmets still hung against the threadbare tapestry, among them the old Spanish morion, which I remembered Genevieve had once put on when we were amusing ourselves with the ancient bits of mail.

I turned my eyes to the spinet; every yellow key seemed eloquent of her caressing hand, and I rose, drawn by the strength of my life's passion to the sealed door of the marble-room. The heavy doors swung inward under my trembling hands. Sunlight poured through the window, tipping with gold the wings of Cupid, and lingered like a nimbus over the brows of the "Madonna," and yet, through her white arms, I saw the pale azure vein, and beneath her softly clasped hands the folds of her dress were tinged with rose, as if from some faint, warm light within her breast.

Bending, with a breaking heart, I touched the marble drapery with my lips, then crept back into the silent house.

A maid came and brought me a letter,

and I sat down in the little conservatory to read it; but as I was about to break the seal, seeing the girl lingering, I asked her what she wanted.

She stammered something about a white rabbit that had been caught in the house, and asked what should be done with it. I told her to let it loose in the walled garden behind the house, and opened my letter.

It was from Jack, but so incoherent that I thought he must have lost his reason.

It was nothing but a series of prayers to me not to leave the house until he could get back; he could not tell me why; there were the dreams, he said—he could explain nothing, but he was sure I must not leave the house in the Rue Sainte-Cecile.

As I finished reading I raised my eyes and saw the same maid-servant standing in the doorway holding a glass dish in which two goldfish were swimming.

"Put them back into the tank and tell me what you mean by interrupting me," I said.

With a half-suppressed whimper she emptied water and fish into an aquarium at the end of the conservatory, and, turning to me, asked my permission to leave my service. She said people were playing tricks on her, evidently with a design to getting her into trouble; the marble rabbit had been stolen and a live one had been brought into the house; the two beautiful marble fish were gone, and she had just found those common live things flopping about, there, on the dining-room floor.

I reassured her and sent her away, saying I would look about myself. I went into the studio; there was nothing there but my canvases and some casts, except the marble of the Easter lily.

I saw it on a table across the room. Then I strode angrily over to it. But the flower I lifted from the table was fresh and fragile, and filled the air with perfume.

Then suddenly I comprehended, and sprang through the hallway to the marble-room.

The doors flew open, then, the sunlight streamed into my face, and through it, in a heavenly glory, the "Madonna" smiled, as Genevieve lifted her flushed face from her marble couch and opened her sleepy eyes.