

Ma - Mack,

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 12, 1945.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Do you know who she is and
what the story is about?

E. R.

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THE SAVOY PLAZA
FIFTH AVENUE 55th AND 59th STREETS
NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

March 24th, 1945

Dear Eleanor,

I am sending you a queer little story. You will know the people in it, even though I've changed the scene from the house on the Hudson to a chateau on the Loire. It's not a story I will ever try to publish, but I had pleasure in writing it.

I would love to see you some time. Would you ever have a moment when you come to New York? I have never wanted to bother you, because I know what your busy life is, but I don't want to go back to France without seeing you. My life is busy too, it worries ^{me} never to have seen Mrs Parish all winter, but I've had a bad winter myself.

FIRE MUSIC

I must have been about fourteen. For the last two years I had been in love with Rene, I had been in love with Monique, I had been in love with the enchanted chateau on the hill over the Loire.

Rene was twenty-two or twenty-three then, a man I thought, proud of him, brother of my convent friends Claire. Monique was the sister, half way between them. She was three or four years older than Claire and I. She was lovelier than any one else in the world. Not always beautiful, but with something about her far beyond beauty. You felt it dimly sad, that something, as if it were a spell upon her. "Miss", who had brought up all three of them, said that Monique was "fay."

What happened to Monique in the end was so tragic, that, even today, people ~~in Paris~~ remember.

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Rene had charm too, grace, if one can use the word about a boy, a funny disdainful elegance in everything he did, an air of knowing, even then, that nobody was worth while, nor anything. He had a way of wrinkling his nose and screwing up his light blue eyes and laughing just at himself. Claire was a pretty child, with curls like sunny bubbles. All three of them belonged to the chateau of fantastic memories, a king's pleasure and a favorite's

disgrace.

And I too seemed to belong there, from the minute I scrambled down from the train at Onzain. It was always in the autumn and always at early night fall.

Once, I remember, Rene met me at the station and kissed my hand among the bags on the platform. I knew he was teasing, but I didn't wash my hand for a week.

It was not of Rene though that I thought, driving home by the woods road. Claire and I were sure I was in love with him; but I wanted to sit in front with Justin, the coachman, who might perhaps have let me drive the reins,-- Rene never drove if he could help it. It was of the smell of Touraine I was thinking of, the touch of Touraine on my forehead in the autumn dusk; all that was so a part of my happiness about Monique.

Many things were more than Rene, but Monique was always everything. All ~~the~~ beautiful things were Monique. The slim new moon in the twilight, was Monique, and the glint of the river under the long bridge. The increasing happiness of every turn of the road through the woods was Monique, and of the moment of crossing the draw-bridge over the moat. The fire light at tea was Monique and the shine of the polished floors. All delicate lights were Monique and all music was Monique, specially the music of autumn winds at the window of the room that Claire and I shared in the children's wing.

Claire and I stayed awake always as long as we could, talking about everything we knew. We talked a great deal about love. Claire was engaged to most of her cousins.

We wished Rene would ask me to marry him, and then we

could be together always, all of us, and live in the chateau for ever and ever. We talked with deep interest of my love for Rene. But we never talked of my love for Monique, which was quite another thing, a fairy tale thing.

Of course Claire knew. I had a snapshot of Monique in a leather frame. Every night I stood it on a chair by my bed. Claire thought that was un-necessary, as I would be seeing Monique in the morning, but she was most sympathetic. She rather looked up to me because I wrote poetry. The poetry was all written to Monique. I showed it to Claire, but to Monique, never.

I remember an odd thing about that poetry. There were always flames in it, flames between Monique and me so that I could not get to her, flames beyond her that she'd have to pass through. Queer, because the end of things, of so many, such pitious things, for Monique, was to be in flames.

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One afternoon, she asked me if I wanted to come with her for a drive. She did not tell me where we were going, nor how she had persuaded Justin to let her take the reins.

It was almost sunset. We crossed the lawns and the beech woods and turned away from the Loire through level fields.

Monique drove well, I don't know how, with such fragile hands.

She did not talk to me, -sitting very straight beside her, - but she sang to herself all the way. Her soft sweet voice was deep and a little husky, as if some emotion blurred it with tears.

The sun was gone over the rim of the fields and night was gathering. It was a road I did not know. I did not know the village ahead of us, where lights were being lit, one by one, around the squat dark square church tower. I did not ask any questions.

The dirt road changed to cobbles. The village was just one street along the road, low roofs and little lighted windows.

Beside the church there was an open door under a lantern and a sign: "Bureau de Poste."

Monique pulled up the roans at the door. "I think they will stand," she said, and gave me the reins.

I hoped a dog would spring out from somewhere, ^{and} ~~at~~ the roans ~~and they~~ would plunge and rear, so that I could be heroic mastering them.

~~Monique came out from~~
~~There was a lantern over the post office, ~~door~~, In the~~
~~the lantern, her~~
 light of ~~it~~, I saw ~~Monique's~~ face, ~~as she came out.~~

What happened to Monique? It was a white ghost that came out the post office door, ~~under the lantern~~.

She climbed up beside me and said, "Can you drive home?"

I could do anything, because I knew she was crying and couldn't see and counted on my faithfulness.

I had trouble to hold the roans. They were going home, they tried to break into a canter, a gallup, a run.

The side lamps lit up the road, the moss banks, the tree stems, showed buckwheat stubble, potato roots, stacked rye, half under mist.

I was driving with all my soul. My child soul rose in strength to not let me be afraid of the roans, to make me handle ~~them~~ ^{them} well and keep them to the road and leave Monique alone with her

desperate young sorrow.

Something terrible had happened to Monique. That I did not know what it was did not matter. It must have been a letter. A letter from some one who could kill her. Monique's face under the lamp at the post office door had been the face of a girl that someone had killed.

It was my first knowledge of helplessness. However much you love, you can't help. There is only to keep still, to not even touch the hem of the garment. There is only to make things go on, all the things, you don't know why.

For me, there was just to get the roans home. I dreaded the darkness of the woods. I dreaded the difficult turn in at the gate of the chateau park. Horses always shied at the white posts.

There would be the drawbridge, the court with the old well and the arcades, the door that let you in to the hall full of hunting things and tennis things and to the salle des gardes and people at tea. I knew Monique wanted the little turret door where there was only Annette, the lingère, with the pekenese.

Monique got down, stumbling a little, and I drove on around to the stables

That night, people came to dinner, neighbors from within driving distance.

Monique was beautiful and as quick and as light as if tears had no weight. We watched her dance, Claire and I, through the windows under the arcades.

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The next morning, Claire and I meant to persuade "Miss"

to let us go up and rummage in the attics because it was raining.

Monique came to breakfast with us and drank some coffee and said she'd play for me in the music room.

She sat at the piano against the rainy windows and played an eerie little music that must have been made up just for me, with the rain falling. Then suddenly, she was playing the fire music from the Valkyrie. I never had heard her play it before. The fire music was around Monique, sweeping her up into something very great of tragedy.

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Soon after, I went back to live in America.

I had a few letters from Monique. I used to sleep with them under my pillow. And then she did not write any more.

Claire wrote to me about Monique's marriage. She said it was very queer. Nobody wanted her to marry him, but she couldn't be stopped. It was as if she were a hunted creature, that ran for refuge into a trap. It all happened so quickly, Claire said, that there was no time to realize it. Every body cried except Monique.

~~When Monique was saying good-bye at the drawbridge she kissed Claire twice, and told her to send the last kiss to her.~~

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Nor the sea between, nor the years make me forget the drive through the soft still autumn darkness of Touraine.

In the back of my heart, there has always remained my fairy-tale love.

People told me of Monique that she had two little daughters and that she was not happy. People said many things about her and blamed ^dher for many things. They did not know she had been killed, that night in the village post office.

*

You can't understand why you don't know it, across time and space, when death comes to people you love. You ought to know, the strange thing is that you don't.

Of course I heard about the Bazar de la Charité fire in the rue Jean Goujon; in New York everyone talked about it. But somehow I never thought of Monique's being there.

I was at the Metropolitan. It was the Valkyrie. Someone came into the box and told me. How could I not have known? The little girls had been with her. They were found, the three together, ^{some what} ~~a little~~ apart from the struggle.

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So ends the story of Monique.

Rene's story is ended too. He lived alone in the chateau over the Loire. He would see no one, he who had been sought by everyone. I know he lived with dreams he could not tell, and with some bitter disillusion.

Claire wrote to me of Monique that she had been very tired of living.

She must have been terribly tired, turning around and around in the trap.

She had adored the little girls, Claire said,--and they

were gone with her.

Through the years, it has come to seem to me almost right
that the music of fire should have been about them.

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