ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1948 Cover by Boris Dolgov

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

VERSE

Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

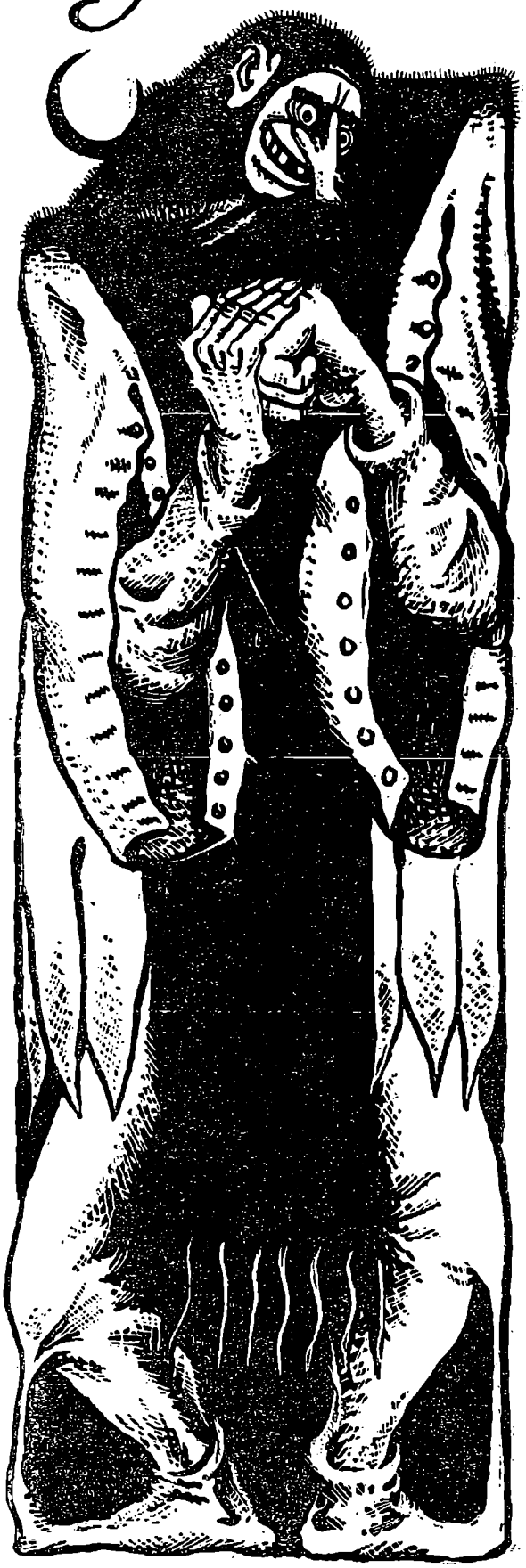
Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 20 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, $1.00. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

173

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A. Vol. 40, No. 2

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

And Give Us Yesterday



BY SEABURY QUINN

FOR the tenth time Angela picked up the letter from the Quartermaster General with Form 345, Military, enclosed, the four options she might exercise: have him left near the beach where he fell, have him brought back for interment in a private cemetery, have him shipped to some foreign country, or sent back for burial in Arlington. She wanted none of them. She wanted her boy back, her Harold with his neat brown hair that waved a little just above the temples, steady hazel eyes and ready smile that lifted slightly more to the left than the right.

Three years ago when she received the formal notice from the War Department with its facsimile of the Adjutant General's signature she had felt betrayed, desolate, all her high hopes crumbled into fragments at her feet. She hadn't fainted, hadn't cried, but she had bitten her lips till the salty taste of blood was in her mouth as she sat with her hands demurely folded in her lap, all feeling gone from her eyes. She wanted desperately to cry, but there were no tears. She wanted desperately to pray, but couldn't; God seemed somehow terribly unreal. Then, with a feeling all her insides were becoming unfastened—and not the faintest notion what she could do about it—she walked slowly to his bedroom with the Japanese prints on the walls, the scarf of brown-blocked Java linen for a counterpane and her and Darcy's photographs on the dresser. She drew back the door of the closet where his suits draped in orderly array on hangers, tweeds, flannels, worsteds, dress and dinner kits, brown shoes and

Is a fallen loved one not better left among the honored dead?

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

black on wooden trees set toe to toe, hats neatly brushed and put away in pasteboard boxes. A little whiff of peat from Harris tweeds and Shetland weaves came to her, and the faint, elusive scent of lavender and Russia leather and tobacco—odors redolent of him as carnation or violet may be of a beloved woman—and, scarce knowing what she did, she drew the sleeve of a camel's hair topcoat round her shoulders, sank her cheek in its soft, silky fleece. "Harold," she murmured, her voice muffled by the yielding cloth. "Oh, my boy; my boy!" Then she let her breath out slowly, with an odd jerk in it, as if she had not breathed for a long time and needed practice to pick up the way of it again.

Since that day nothing seemed to matter. "Thank you, thank you, very much," she had told the minister, "Thank you," to the kind old ladies of the congregation, "Thank you," to the laundryman and grocer and the men who came to read the electric and gas meters, and the tone with which she voiced her thanks was flat, expressionless, almost mechanical. The War Department's citation and the Purple Heart had no more impact on her numbed senses than a fresh blow on a punch-drunk boxer. She ignored the stilted, sloppily typed communications from the Veteran's Administration. What need had she to ask insurance payments or pension? With health, sufficient money, more beauty than a woman in her middle forties had a right to dare hope for, she already had everything—and nothing.

Now, after three years came this latest message from the War Department and her heart that she had thought wrung dry of sorrow refilled itself from memories. She laid the papers down, her slim white fingers smoothing them almost caressingly, and tears slipped in big jewel-bright drops down her cheeks. She didn't sob, not so much as a sigh escaped her; she just sat there in the big twilit room, her face like ivory, letting those big tears run down her cheeks. At last: "O God," she murmured, quoting something she had heard or read long, long ago, "turn back Thy universe and give us yesterday!"

Her lips, as naturally pink as pigeons' feet and needing no rouge to define their perfection, joined in a smile as she finished. Her flexible mouth widened and her cheeks lifted a little; a dimple dented the smooth flesh beside her mouth, her sensitive nostrils expanded—all the components of a smile appeared in her face. But there was no smile. It was, rather, a bitter grimace of derision. "But that would take a special kind of miracle, of course;" her voice seemed tired, so utterly weary it might have been that of an old woman, "and miracles like that, are out of date, aren't they? You gave them up after Capernaum and Bethany." Her acid laughter was a goading echo in the gathering dusk.

Something cool and black, faintly moist, insinuated itself into the hand she let trail idly beside her and a furred foot pawed her arm gently. "Oh!" she exclaimed, a little startled, then, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Chips," as she looked into the yellow eyes turned pleadingly to hers. "You want to go for your walk? Very well, go get the lead."

THE honey-colored cocker trotted off, nails clicking on the polished floor, and Angela rose half reluctantly, half eagerly to carry out the evening rite. Chips had come to them when he was a fist-sized bundle of soft fluffy fur about the shade of a Teddy bear. He had been Harold's dog, selected from a dozen sportive, friendly puppies at a pet shop on Fifth Avenue, and Harold had adored him, pampered him, looked after him from awkward, stumbling puppyhood to sedate middle age. When Harold went away to camp the duty of the daily run—which had slowed to a dignified amble with the years—devolved on Angela.

They made a circuit of the Square each evening just as dusk was deepening into dark. Chips strained at the lead, hanging back, investigating tree boxes, fire hydrants or the little bare spots of raw earth around the streetside trees with an interrogative black nose, giving vent to subdued snorts of approval or muted whimpers of disfavor at what he discovered. Angela indulged him for as long as seemed reasonable, then her sharp, "That's quite enough, Chips," brought him from his olfactory researches, and he would trot sedately beside her till fresh locations roused the latent archeologist in him again. In this way they effected complete encompassment of the

Square, each occupied with his own thoughts, each tolerant of the other's privacy, as became gentlefolk, whether canine or human.

The air that flowed through the French windows of the drawing room bore a faint mingled scent of flowers, new-mown grass and recently washed asphalt as she snapped the snaffle of the lead to the dog's harness and made for the street. Van Nostrand Square was like an etching in the July night. Inside the cast-iron grilles of the park cannas and geraniums bloomed, two fountains spurted jets of water which fell tinkling into iron basins, the freshly cut lawns smelt sweet and warm. Northward, over the elms bordering the pavement, rose the tip of St. Jude's tower with its lighted clock dial round and bright and yellow as a harvest moon, across from it an ancient Quaker meeting house stood demurely in its small graveyard, and round the plaza ancient mansions, red-brick, white-marble trimmed, stood like old veterans in a hollow square. For the most part they had been made into "maisonettes" for people in the upper-middle-income tax brackets, but outwardly they retained the air of hauteur they had worn when Oakey Hall was mayor and Boss Tweed a scandal in New York politics. The July moon hung low in the sky, a disc of scorched gold with the branches of the elms and sycamores on its face as if drawn with charcoal, and every park bench held its complement of lovers. Lovers strolled along the cement paths, each pair absorbed in themselves as if they had been the last people in the world; the tarnished moonlight was a mellow wonderland to them.

Angela caught her breath with a small sad sound that was not quite a sob, but something not far from it. She had been a young wife, almost a bride, when Darcy died, but she had found some measure of solace in the knowledge that beneath her heart she bore that which would give him immortality:

"To die would not be dying quite,
Leaving a little life behind . . ."

And since she had been born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth she reared Darcy's son in a mellow atmosphere of ancestors, heirlooms and family tradition. All that came to him by nature had a chance to grow and develop and the final product was a slim brown man with curling hair and a quick friendly smile for whom the title "gentleman" seemed to have been hand-tailored and to whom clung the faint fragrance of gentle living.

She loved him for his sweet and winsome self, but more than that she loved him as his father's surrogate. In him the high hopes she and Darcy had dreamed in their short ecstacy of marriage were to be fulfilled, he would perpetuate the Logan name; born in a world cleansed of the curse of war by countless bloody sacrifices of his father's generation he would achieve the things that fate denied his father. Already he had shown a more than merely casual interest in the daughter of one of her classmates, and she had dreamed of being a grandmother before time had stolen strength and beauty from her.

Then December 7, 1941, the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums and streets responding to the pound of marching feet. Training camp . . . letters from England . the Normandy invasion . . . "the War Department regrets. . ."

THERE were tears in her heart that would not come to her eyes for relief as she heard a girl's low "Always?" and her lover's promised "Always and forever, dear," as a young couple passed her.

"There," a shrill, vindictive voice seemed whispering, "there but for some drop stitch of Fate go Harold and Geraldine." All at once she felt unutterably old. Old and tired. Her hands felt numb and in the hollows of her shoulders ached a fine pain. "Oh, Harold, my poor, sweet boy," she murmured hopelessly. Blinded with sudden tears, almost all life gone from her fine, pliant body, lost and forsaken as a derelict, she leaned against the park's iron fence, sobbing with short retching sobs like the breathing of a spent runner.

Mr. Chips strained at the leash, shrank fearfully into the shadow of a friendly tree, dropped upon his stomach with a terrified whimper. The pull upon the lead roused her, and she straightened, then stepped back with a short involuntary "Oh!"

Within arm's length of her stood a small neat gentleman in black mohair with a Panama hat set jauntily on one side of his head and a gold-headed black malacca stick swung jauntily from his hand. His dark, lined face and short white beard and mustache were those of an old man but his bearing was decidedly sprightly and his eyes very bright. They were unusual eyes, dark but not black, with little flecks of garnet in them.

They seemed to have no division between the irides and pupils and their habitual expression was one of heavy-lidded weariness, as though they had looked too closely at life for a long time. Just then, however, they were bent on her with a look of dispassionate irony which seemed more curious than malicious.

"You are in trouble, Madame?" He spoke with the slightest of slight accents, in the almost colorless tone of the perfect linguist. There was a suave, foreign-bred something in his words and manner, and the gesture with which he doffed his wide hat was somehow reminiscent of a Versailles courtier in the days when Bourbons sat upon the throne of France.

Angela gave back a step. Without quite knowing why she was afraid of this small harmless-looking gentleman with courtly manners, but the fear was natural and intuitive as that felt when we gazed into a snake-pit at the zoo. "There's nothing anyone can do to help," she answered shortly, tightened her hold on the dog's leash and stepped toward the curb to pass the little man.

"One moment, if you please." His voice, still soft, was mandatory in its even tone. "You are in trouble, yet you say no one can help you. Are you sure?"

She braced herself as for a physical assault. Instinctively she knew something was coming, something which might change the whole rhythm of life. She took a short breath, let it out soundlessly, then, "Of course, I'm sure." Her tone was razor-sharp with finality.

"There you make a mistake, Madame," the suave reply was compelling in its monotone. "There is nothing—understand me, *nothing*—which we cannot have if we desire it enough and are willing to pay its price."

"Pay?" her voice rose almost to a scream. "Dear God, I'd pay anything—"

"Anything, Madame?" There was irony, perhaps a hint a malice in the echoed word.

"Anything!"

"Then listen carefully, Madame." He fumbled in the pocket of his jacket and brought out a little doll-like image scarcely longer than her thumb. "Take this for a talisman. Concentrate your thought—your wish—on it. If you are strong enough in your desire—and if you do not haggle at the price—you may attain your wish, though whether it will bring you happiness or not I should not care to say."

Mechanically her fingers closed round the little puppet, and as she thanked him with an inclination of her head the little gentleman added, "If you should need me again throw the charm away and call me."

Despite herself, Angela laughed. "How can I call you? I don't even know your name."

"You will know what name to call if the need comes, Madame." The little man made her another bow which would have been a credit to a dancing master at the court of Louis XV. Then he replaced his hat at its slightly rakish angle and swinging his black cane strode off into the shadows.

THREE times Angela made a gesture of casting the doll into the gutter as she walked back to her house, but each time, smiling mirthlessly at herself for her weakness, she refrained. Back in her drawing room she snapped on the desk light and examined it.

It was carved or molded of some hard substance, perhaps soapstone or pottery, which had a velvety smoothness and retained an almost reptilian coolness despite the heat of the night and the warmth of her hand. The maker had shaped it to represent a man, or the grotesque of one, dressed in a medieval costume which consisted of long, pointed shoes, tight hose bound round with cross-garters, a loosely-hanging gabardine or cloak with foliated edges and sleeve-openings, and a close-fitting hood upon the head through which two openings had been cut to leave the ears exposed. The figure made her think of Punchinello, wide-shouldered, hunchbacked, with exaggeratedly sharp nose

and chin, thick beetling brows above pop eyes, and a malicious, mocking grin. Somehow there was an air of hatefulness about it, an intimation of malevolence and animosity that repelled and yet fascinated her. The more she looked at it the more repulsive it seemed, and yet it had a certain charm like that which English bulldogs have by virtue of their very ugliness.

"He was an absurd little man," she told herself, "with all his foreign airs and graces, and his awful, deadly earnestness. . . ." Her voice trailed off, became mute, for another thought had crowded into her brain. "Use this as a talisman," he had said, "and concentrate your thought on it. If you are strong enough in your desire. ."

She rose, hands knotted into fists, and gazed at the small statuette. Her eyes were fixed, intense, half-closed, as if the violence of her gaze were too annihilating to be loosed direct; as if the substance of her soul and body would pour out of her set, staring orbs. "My boy," she whispered in a voice so low as to be hardly audible, but harsh as an abrasive scraped across metal. "Give back my son—put back the universe and give us yesterday!"

SOMEWHERE in the distance thunder rattled with a crackle like the sound of far-off musketry, into the heavy, humid air there crept a chill as tangible as smoke, and the sky shattered with a dazzling burst of yellow-green lightning.

She flinched from the flash as the telephone began ringing, at first querulously, then frantically, drilling at her. "Hello?" she greeted somewhat shakily, still startled by the lightning.

"Mother?" Her stomach suddenly felt stiff and empty, she could not fight down the weakness that chilled her with pulse-stopping cold. Weak-kneed as a rag doll from which the stuffing has been ripped, she dropped into a chair. What line, if any, divides sanity from madness, where does sanity end and madness begin? she wondered. Was this a trick of overwrought senses and gnawing desire, or was she the victim of an unspeakably cruel hoax?

"Who—who is this?" she contrived at last, and in the little interval of silence she could hear the pounding of her heart like a jazz-drummer's rataplan.

"Whom do *you* think?"

Another silence, one that hummed electrically. Then: "This joke's not in the best of taste," her voice was hard and gritty.

"Oh, *maman,* you'll be what the Heinies couldn't—the death o' me!" It was the well-remembered laugh that stirred her pulses like a long note on a trumpet.

"But—but—you're—you were—"

"No, I'm not, I assure you. Officially or not, I'm still alive and likely to be kickin' if you don't snap out of it. The report of my death was greatly exaggerated, old dear. I did have a tough time, and spent a tour of duty in hospital *sans* memory, *sans* dog-tags, *sans* everything but life. But here I am like the proverbial bad penny, safe and moderately sound. Be with you in a little while—just landed at the airport."

SHE was radiantly, arrogantly happy. Like one who wakens from a long dream-haunted night to find a morning with cool, limpid air and sunlight sparkling over everything. The twitterings of sparrow in the park seemed like a canticle: *For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.* Her face was transfigured by happiness as by a halo. The sunshine had a brighter gold, even when it rained the drops fell brightly, gleaming, jewel-like on the trees and window panes.

At first she did not notice the small, subtle changes in him, the absence of the little niceties which had been as inherent as his breath. When he did not hold her chair at dinner or rise when she came into the room she overlooked it. War was dirty, dull, dangerous and degrading, small wonder it had rasped the rococo of refinement from him. He had been meticulously neat, physically and mentally, now he was slovenly about his room, with clothes left carelessly on floor or chair or bed; in place of his alert, attentive manner he seemed oddly distraught. He would sit for minutes staring endlessly at nothing, his eyes strange, far-away, almost filmy with ennui, his shoulders slumping, as if nothing really mattered. Small blame to him, she thought. He had been to the very gates of hell, could she expect him to come back unmarked?

Even when he showed no interest in employment she made excuses. A man who had had death for a bedfellow and boon companion could hardly be expected to take interest in a desk job, or grow enthusiastic over selling things. No matter, she had plenty for them both.

But had she? When he asked her for five hundred dollars for "a deal" she was delighted. He had determined to launch out for himself, not take an underling's position. When the deal fell through and he asked for a thousand she was more puzzled than worried. She had neither aptitude for nor experience in business, and knew only that men made or lost money in it. Harold, it appeared, was one of those who lost, for in a month he needed more, then more. Her income was derived from funds invested by the trust department of her bank, and earnings had not been as great this year as last. One morning came a notice from the bank that she was overdrawn. She made the necessary arrangements, sold off some bonds, and—had another notice of an overdraft within six weeks.

SHE knew she had not drawn five thousand dollars in one check, and went down to the bank to see about it. There it was, payable to Harold Logan, made out in her own handwriting, signed with her own signature. But the signature was not hers.

"Oh, yes, now I remember," she told the cashier, and embarrassment brought a quick flush to her face. "I had forgotten—this."

The complete absence of expression in the banker's face voiced skepticism sharper than his words. "That's your signature, Mrs. Logan?"

"Why, yes, of course," she spoke with more than necessary emphasis. "Of course, it's mine. Why do you ask?"

"Our teller was a little doubtful, but the check's entirely in your writing, and the payee is your son—"

"I don't think you need make yourselves uneasy over any check my son presents." She spaced her syllables precisely, so they sounded clipped and hard.

The visitor was not the sort of person she was used to entertaining. He was something less than middle height, dark-skinned, black-haired, curly-haired. His light-gray, almost white suit had been pressed into knife-sharp creases, from the breast pocket of his jacket spilled a gray-silk handerchief, he had been freshly shaved and manicured and exuded a faint odor of brandy, garlic and lilac perfume. His brown skin shone as if it had been rubbed with oil, his eyes danced with a light more sinister than merry, his full, too-red lips framed a smile more nearly contemptuous than good-humored.

He did not, however, lack directions. "You're Logan's old lady?" he asked.

"I am Mrs. Logan."

"Uh-huh," He looked at her, a little puzzled, just a little uneasy. His eyes swept up and down her as if they had been adding a column of figures and were not entirely satisfied with the answer. At last: "You love 'im, don't you?"

"I'm sure you didn't call to ascertain the strength of my maternal affection, Mr.—" she paused interrogatively, and the cold, slightly amused contempt of her gaze seared him as an early frost withers a row of larkspur.

"Huh? Oh—" He fumbled for a word, then brought his reply out, and with it an oblong of green paper. "I'll tell th' cockeyed world I didn't. I come here to get gelt for this." He held the slip out, a check made payable to Joseph Lanzilotti in the sum of seven hundred dollars, signed with her name.

"I don't remember making any check to you, Mr. Lanzilotti."

"Don't, huh? Then it's just too bad for your kid. That's all I gotta say."

"I don't think I quite understand—"

"Lemme fill you in, lady. He rolled me Saturday night in a crap game, your kid, that is, an' when I took 'im for a half gran' he give me his I.O.U. Nex' day he come and gimme this"— he indicated the check —"an' got two hun'nert fish in change for it. See? Then when I goes to th' bank this mornin' they reneges on th' signature. Says they gotta have your O. K. 'fore they'll lemme have th' money. Come clean, lady. Slap your O. K. on it, or little Harold goes to th' pokey. See?"

"You make it very clear, Mr. Lanzilotti."

She took the check, endorsed it, "O. K. Angela Logan," and returned it. "In future I'd advise you not to play games with my son," she cautioned as she went with him to the door. "I might not see your point so readily next time."

Joe Lanzilotti knew when he was outclassed. Also, from long frequenting of race courses, he knew a thoroughbed when he saw one. "Sure, lady," he agreed as he tipped his pearl-gray Homberg with more than customary flourish, "I won't never let th' bum come in my jernt ag'in, an' I'll top all th' other mugs to give 'im th' shoo-fly if he comes buzzin' round th' gallopin' dominoes."

SHE had just the sort of dinner that delighted him that night, steak two inches thick, the tenderloin charred on the outside, pink as a poodle's tongue inside, lyonnaise potatoes, chicory salad and a chocolate graham pie. Since he no longer cared for sherry as an apéritif she chilled a shaker of Manhattans and had a bottle of Nuites St. Georges brought up from the cellar. But when he came in, so late the steak was ruined and the cocktails little more than ice water, he was slightly tipsy and more than a little truculent. "Got here soon as I could," he explained rather than apologized. "That dam' subway—"

She noted that he made no move to kiss her, and was stung by the omission. "Oh, that's all right, son. If you can stand cold steak I'm sure the steak and I don't mind waiting—"

"Good Lord, steak again? I swear to God I'm getting so I daren't look a cow in the eye—" His nonchalance was poorly worn as he dropped into his chair.

She filled their glasses, tasted hers, then stared silently into its ruddy depths. "A friend of yours was here today, Harold. A Mr. Lanzilotti—quite a character."

"Eh?" She saw his eyes go suddenly wide, startled and questioning, a little frightened. "What'd he want?"

"You ought to know—"

His chair crashed on the floor as he rose, glaring at her. "Well, what're you going to do? Send me up for forgery—"

"Harold!"

"All right, you needn't be dramatic about it." There was a morose recklessness about his pose as he stalked from the room, but at the doorway he came to a halt and in the courtly way he bowed his head before he left there was an echo of the old, aristocratic elegance that marked his every move in former days.

She lit a cigarette, snubbed out its fire before it had a chance to glow, then lit another. In her chest by her heart there was a dull ache and her knees felt weak and unsubstantial. She wasn't sure she could stand. Any moment, she knew, she might be sick.

The shrilling of the doorbell wakened her from her trancelike misery, and the tap-tap of high heels that followed was like a tonic. Geraldine Macfarland! Mightn't Gerry be the answer to her problem? Harold had been more than casually interested in her before he went away; she'd done everything she could to throw them together since his return. She was only nineteen years older than her son, but they were of different generations, just the same. She was not one of those fatuous fools who boasted she and her offspring were "pals," but Gerry—perhaps romantic love could work a reformation where maternal affection failed.

"Gerry, dear," she greeted, holding out slim bare arms to the girl, "I'm so glad you—why, what's the matter, darling?"

Gerry's pretty pink-and-white face was ravaged as a garden following a savage storm, and the hands that seized hers were cold while the cheek that pressed against hers burned as if with fever. "Aunt Angela," the passionless, cold little voice went into her like a dentist's drill, "I've got to talk to you—and Harold—right away."

"Of course," she led the way to the drawing room and dropped down on a love seat, pulling the girl down beside her. "Now, what is it, dear?"

Gerry's slender fingers wreathed and unwreathed, twisting blindly, futilely as worms. "It's about Harold—me—us, Aunt Angela. I've been feeling miserable for some time, nauseated nearly every morning, nervous as a cat, pains in my chest. Today I called on Dr. Christy. He says I'm—we're—going to have—"

The world seemed suddenly to have stopped, and breathing with it. The silence was so overpowering she could hear the

blood pound in her throat. Then, like a gallant boxer, beaten, but determined to fight to the final knockout, she rallied. *"Autres temps, autres moeurs,* dear," somehow she contrived a smile which was a reasonable facsimile of the real thing. "In my day this would have been a scandal, but you and Harold can be married quietly—"

"That's just it! He won't—"

"Oh, *no-o!"* stark, utter misery made her voice quaver. "He couldn't be such a cad. Not—"

His footsteps, slightly unsteady, came down the stairs. He was humming:

"The minstrels sing of a jovial king;
A wonderful king was he ."

HE HALTED at the doorway. "Goin' out, Mom. Goin' to give the gals a treat— Hi, Gerry," he waved an indifferent greeting to the caller. "Be seein' you around sometime—"

"Harold!" How she kept her voice from breaking, kept from screaming, Angela had no idea. "Come here—sit down—I want to talk—"

"Eh?" He shot a sharp glance from her to the girl. "Oh, I see, she's told you—"

"Yes, she's told me—"

"And just what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I think that you're the one to answer that."

"Do, eh? Well, I can answer in one word: Nothing. How does she know that it was I—how do I know—"

"Oh, Harold!" Geraldine's voice was pitched shrill, but controlled. "Oh, how could you—and I loved you so!"

He laughed, and Angela felt everything inside her shrivel as if touched with live flame.

This was no laugh of bravado, no brazen attempt to face indecency. He was amused —that was the devilish, unbelievable thing about it.

She had risen to face him, now she took a step back. Her lips opened, then shut again. With apocalyptic clarity she saw him as if for the first time. She could look through him distinctly as if using a spiritual X-ray. And he was bad. Bad. Rotten clear through as maggot-bitten fruit is rotten.

Raw misery was stark in her eyes as they swept round the room and came to momentary rest upon the figurine the little foreign gentleman had given her the night Harold came home. "Saint Punchinello," she had called the thing affectionately, the patron who had brought her dead back to her. Now her gaze hardened, froze like water into a sudden zero temperature. In three quick, almost stumbling steps she crossed the room and snatched the statuette from the desk. Something deep inside herself—or perhaps a thing outside—put the words she had never heard before in her mouth. *"Barran-Sathanas!"* she called in a voice that was like a dissonant chord. *"Barran-Sathanas!"* She hurled the image from her as if it had been a loathsome reptile.

Outside the November night was still as ice and bitter cold, the moonlight struck chill fire from frost-encrusted paving stones, the stars shone with a crystalline brightness, and not a cloud showed in the smalt-blue sky, but as the little figure struck the baseboard and shattered as if it had been blown glass there came a distant cannonade of thunder and a zigzag lance of lightning slashed through the sky like a sword through flesh. The front door—she knew that it was latched and chained!—swung open and a step sounded in the hall.

"Eh bien, Madame," said the small gentleman as he bowed in the doorway leading from the hall to drawing room, "it seems you have repented of your bargain. You find the price too high?"

HE WORE a faultless dinner kit, black pearls glowed dully in his shirtfront, the thick white hair that sloped up from a widow's peak on his forehead was brushed back sleekly in a pompadour, his little white mustache and beard were neatness personified, but there was that in his lined face that bludgeoned her with horror. His features were not so much old as ancient, yet they seemed ageless, too; he seemed to be a part of that which had been, was, and was to be.

Somehow she found her voice, forced throat and tongue and lips to function. "The price?" she echoed, and her whisper was a queer small ghost of sound. "Dear God, yes, it's too high! I would not call my boy—my fine, clean, gentle boy—back from his hon-

ored grave to be a thing like this. I would not slake the thirst of my sorrow if quenching it means misery to Geraldine—"

"Your sentiments do you great credit, Madame, but should you not have thought of all that when you asked that the universe be turned back?"

"How could I know—"

"True, Madame, how could you? But you were warned the price might be exorbitant—"

"Take me!" she broke in between chattering teeth. "Kill my body, rend it, tear it—burn my wretched soul for all eternity in your hell, but put my dear, brave son back where he belongs with the honored dead who died for decency and freedom. Let him lie in the earth hallowed by his blood, and by the blood of other mother's sons—"

"Your soul, Madame?" He brushed his wisp of white mustache with the knuckle of a bent forefinger. "You put extraordinary value on a bit of rather trumpery *bijouterie*, don't you? Besides, what need have I for more souls? From Rome, Berlin and Tokyo, from Moscow and Madrid—" He waved a deprecating hand. "Really, I suffer an embarrassment of riches. Sometimes I think I'll have to set a quota on the importations."

She dropped to her knees, inched toward him, held up empty, supplicating hands. "Barran—great Barran-Sathanas—Lord and Master—"

"Don't be a fool," he said as casually as if refusing a second cup of coffee.

"Take me, take me, mighty Lord of the World, do with me as you will, only give my boy back to the earth made sacred by his blood—"

"You annoy me, Madame. Once every thousand years or so it pleases me to strike a bargain, then remit the *quid pro quo*. Think well; there is no turning back this time. You would not have your son restored to life; you are willing that he go down to the grave again—"

"I beg you, I beseech you; I entreat you—"

"So be it. Have it as you wish." His sharp dark eyes bored into hers, and in them the small garnet speckings seemed to glow to incandescence. "Have your wish, mother. And this"—he bent above her, laid two fingers on her bowed head—"this is for remembering."

Only once before had Angela felt anything like it. That was when as a child she had held the electrodes of a galvanic battery while a playmate ground the generator. Every nerve seemed suddenly knotted, all her muscles twisted into ropes of pain, a light as dazzling as aurora borealis flared before her eyes, her throat closed in quick, agonizing contraction, her breath stopped and she wilted to the floor with no more life in her than a dead thing.

SLOWLY consciousness returned. The big room echoed small sounds hollowly, like an empty auditorium. Outside she heard the splashing of the fountains and the distant gleeful shouts of children romping under street-showers. Somewhere not far away two cats indulging in illicit romance split the air with feline love calls and the big clock in the hall ticked with deliberate decorum. A little breeze stirred the scrim curtains at the front windows, and over all was the soft, clinging sultriness of a July night.

She sat up, pressed the back of her hand to her forehead a bewildered moment, and got slowly to her feet. "I dreamed it," she told herself tremulously. "How horrible!" Yet had it been only a dream? In olden days the Lord spoke to Jacob and Samuel, giving them a vision past their waking senses. Might she not have been vouchsafed such a boon? If Harold had come back and—"Dear Lord, I thank Thee for this mercy," she murmured. "He's safe where he is, safe always and forever, secure in honored glory—"

She tottered to the desk, took up the Army form, wrote acceptance of the first option in a firm hand. Let the young oak lie where it had fallen; let him lie beside his comrades with his white cross above him, and over all, triumphantly, the flag he died to serve. . . Some little spot of earth that is forever home. . . .

She glanced up. In the glass above the desk she saw her reflection. Across the dark hair waved above her forehead was a double line of startling white, as if two fingers lightly dipped in flour had been laid on it.