A world apart

By ... Sam Merwin, Jr.

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Most men of middle age would welcome a chance to live their lives a second time. But Coulter did not.

It wasn't much of a bump. The shock absorbers of the liquid-smooth convertible neutralized all but a tiny percent of the jarring impact before it could reach the imported English flannel seat of Coulter's expensively-tailored pants. But it was sufficient to jolt him out of his reverie, trebly induced by a four-course luncheon with cocktails and liqueur, the nostalgia of returning to a hometown unvisited in twenty years and the fact that he was driving westward into an afternoon sun.

Coulter grunted mild resentment at being thus disturbed. Then, as he quickly, incredulously scanned the road ahead and the car whose wheel was gripped by his gloved hands, he narrowed his eyes and muttered to himself, "Wake up! For God's sake snap out of it!"

The road itself had changed. From a twin-laned ten-car highway, carefully graded and landscaped and clover-leafed, it had become a single-laned three-car thoroughfare, paved with tar instead of concrete and high-crowned along its center. He swung the wheel quickly to avoid running onto a dirt shoulder hardened with ice.

Its curves were no longer graded for high-speed cars but were scarcely tilted at all, when they didn't slant the wrong way. Its

crossings were blind, level and unprotected by traffic lights. Neat unattractive clusters of mass-built houses interspersed with occasional clumps of woodland had been replaced with long stretches of pine woods, only occasionally relieved by houses and barns of obviously antique manufacture. Some of these looked disturbingly familiar.

And the roadside signs—all at once they were everywhere. Here a weathered but still-legible little Burma-Shave series, a wooden Horlick's contented cow, Socony, That Good Gulf Gasoline, the black cat-face bespeaking Catspaw Rubber Heels. Here were the coal-black Gold Dust twins, Kelly Springfield's Lotta Miles peering through a large rubber tire, a cocked-hatted boniface advertising New York's Prince George Hotel, the sleepy Fisk Tire boy in his pajamas and carrying a candle.

And then a huge opened book with a quill pen stuck in an inkwell alongside. On the right-hand page it said, United States Tires Are Good Tires and on the left, You are 3½ miles from Lincolnville. In 1778 General O'Hara, leading a British raiding party inland, was ambushed on this spot by Colonel Amos Coulter and his militia and forced to retreat with heavy loss.

Slowing down because the high-crowned road was slippery with sun-melted ice, Coulter noted that the steering wheel responded heavily. Then he saw suddenly that it was smaller

than he'd remembered and made of black rubber instead of the almond-hued plastic of his new convertible. And his light costly fabric gloves had become black leather, lined with fur!

A gong rang in his memory. He had driven this road many times in years gone by, he had known all these signs as quasi-landmarks, he had worn such gloves one winter. There had been a little triangular tear in the heel of the left one, where he had snagged it on a nail sticking out of the garage wall. But that had been many years ago....

He looked and found the tear and felt cold sweat bathe his body under his clothes. And he was suddenly, mightily, afraid....

He hit another bump and this time the springs did not take up the shock. He felt briefly like a rodeo cowboy riding a bucking mustang. The car in which he rode had changed. It was no longer the sleek convertible of the mid-1950's. It was his old Pontiac sedan, the car he had driven for two years before leaving Lincolnville behind him twenty years ago!

Nor was he wearing the dark-blue vicuna topcoat he had reclaimed an hour before from the checkroom girl in the restaurant back in the city. His sleeves now were of well-worn camel's hair. He didn't dare pull the rear-view mirror around so he could see his face. He said again, fiercely, "Snap out of it! For God's sake wake up before you hit something!"

He didn't hit anything. Road, signs, car, clothing, all stayed the same. Fields abridged by wooded low hills fell away on either side of the road. The snow had been heavier away from the city and covered tillage, trees and stone walls alike with a tracked and sullen late-winter dark-white blanket.

He came to a hill and the obsolete engine knocked and panted. Once over the top of the hill, he thought with a sudden encouraging flash, he could prove that whatever was happening to him was illusion. At its foot on the other side had lain the Brigham Farm, a two-century-old house and barn converted into a restaurant by a pair of energetic spinsters. A restaurant where Coulter and his parents had habitually dined out on Thursday, the servants' night off.

He had heard a long while ago that the Brigham Farm had been struck by lightning and burned during August of 1939. If it were still there ...

He breasted the hill and there it was, ancient timbers painted a neat dark red with white door and window-frames and shutters. He held his eyes carefully away from it after the one look, held them on the road, which was now paved with a hard-packed layer of snow.

He passed an ear-flapped and baa-baa-coated farmer who sat atop a pung drawn by a patient percheron whose nostrils emitted twin plumes of steam. A pung! How many times had he

and the other boys of Lincolnville ridden the runners of such utility sleighs on hitch-hiked rides through the by-ways of the lovely surrounding countryside!

Coulter maneuvered in his seat to take a quick look at this relic from the past—and caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror above the windshield. He said just one word—"Jesus!" Nor was he blasphemous in saying it.

He thought of Jurgen, of Faust—for in some miraculous way he had reclaimed his youth or been reclaimed by it. The face that looked back at him was fresh-skinned, unlined, unweathered by life. He saw with surprise, from the detachment of almost two decades, that he had been better looking than he remembered.

He looked down, saw that his body, beneath the camel's hair coat, was thin. The fat and fatigue of too many years of rich eating and drinking, of sedentary work, of immense nervous pressures, had been swept away without diet, without tiresome exercise. He was young again—and he almost ran the Pontiac into a ditch at the side of the road....

If it was a dream, he decided, it was a dream he was going to enjoy. He recalled what Shaw had said about youth being such a wonderful thing it was a pity to waste it on children. And he knew that he, at any rate, was no child, whatever the body that had so miraculously been restored to him.

The unhappy Pontiac cleared another hilltop and Lincolnville lay stretched out before Coulter, naked and exposed, stripped of its summer foliage. He had forgotten how dominated it was by the five church steeples—Unitarian, Episcopal, Trinitarian, Roman Catholic and Swedish Reform. There was no spire atop the concrete-and-stucco pillared building in which the Christian Scientists held their Sunday readings.

Half-consciously he dug for a cigar in his breast pocket, looked with mild surprise on the straight-stemmed pipe he found there. He had forgotten that he once smoked a pipe as completely as he had forgotten the churchly domination of his home town.

Even though Lincolnville remained fixed in his memory as it had looked twenty years ago—as it looked now awaiting his belated return—he was aware of many anachronisms while tooling the Pontiac slowly along Clinton Street. He had become used to the many outer changes of the past two decades, was unable completely to suppress surprise at not finding them present on his return.

For one thing there was the vast amount of overhead wiring. Coulter had forgotten how its lacework of insulation and poles took up space even in a comparatively small community. He had long since forgotten the English sparrows, erstwhile avian pest of America, that were to vanish so swiftly with the final abolition of the horse.

There were more horses than he recalled, parked here and there among the shoppers' automobiles. And the cars themselves looked like refugees from a well-aged television movie, all straight-up-and-down windshields and unbuilt-in fenders and wooden spoked or wire wheels. He suspected the Pontiac he was driving would look as odd to him once he got out and examined it.

A dark-overcoated policeman, lounging against the front of the Rexall store at the main intersection, lifted a mittened hand in casual salute. Coulter replied in kind, drove on through the Center, took the fork past the old library with the skeleton of its summer coat of ivy looking bare and chilly against the sunset breeze. The bit of sky he could see through the houses and leafless trees was grey and yellow and cold.

The house was there, just as he had left it. It was still a good-sized mansion in comfortable ugly space-wasting Reign-of-Terror Tuscan, standing ornate and towered and turreted behind a fence of granite posts connected by long iron pipes that sagged in the middle as the result of children walking them on their way to and from the public schools around the corner on Sheldon Street.

Coulter turned left and felt the crunch of ashes under his tires as he drove across the sidewalk, through the fence opening, into the driveway to the open-doored garage awaiting him. He

reminded himself to be careful of the jutting nail that had torn his glove.

The concrete floor of the garage felt cold against the soles of his shoes. Coulter stamped his feet as he turned on the heater and moved toward the door. It stuck—he had forgotten about that—and he swore lustily as he exerted strength he had forgotten ever possessing to yank it clear of the snag and across the front of the building.

He didn't want the Pontiac to freeze. Not when he had a date with Eve Lawton.... A date with Eve Lawton.... He hadn't thought of Eve in years, except on those occasional sleepless nights when he amused himself with seeking to visualize the women he had known in a Biblical sense of the word.

Most of them were faceless units in a faceless and somewhat undignified parade. But not Eve. She wasn't pretty—not in the sense of the doll-faced creatures that adorned the movie magazines or even the healthy maidens with whom he occasionally rollicked since coming home from college.

Eve had a sensitivity of feature that was a sounding board for her emotions. Coulter paused against the garage door and thought about her. With the knowledge of twenty years he knew now that what Eve had, or had had twenty years ago, was the basis of beauty, the inner intangible which stamps a woman a woman above other women....

What in hell has happened to me, is happening to me? Coulter felt the chill of the evening wind stab deep into his bones. Then he looked down at his vanished embonpoint and patted with his gloves the flat hardness that had replaced it. It was all right with him as long as he didn't wake up too soon—before his date with Eve anyway.

Coulter walked around the house and in through the front with its extra winter doorway. There was the big square sapphire-blue carpet with the worn spot at the foot of the stairs. There was the antique cherry card table which, to his definite knowledge, should be standing in the front hall of his own house in Scarborough, more than two hundred miles and twenty years away.

His mother appeared in the door of the library, edged with light from the cannel-coal fire in the grate behind her. She said, "Oh, there you are, Banny. I'm glad you're back in time for ... Heaven's sake, Banny! What's all this for?"

Coulter felt himself grow hot with embarrassment. He and his mother had never been much given to outward show of affection. Yet, knowing she would be dead within the year, he had been unable to resist the urge to embrace her. He was going to have to watch his step. He said, fumbling a little, "I don't know, mother. I guess I just felt like it, that's all."

"Well—all right." She was mollified, patted the blue-white hair above delicately handsome features to make certain no strand had been disarranged. Then, "Did you remember to stop at MacAuliffe's and pick up my lighter?"

Feeling lost, Coulter felt in the pockets of his polo coat. To his relief he found a small package in one of them, pulled it out. It was wrapped with the city jeweler's tartan paper and he handed it to his mother. She said, "Thanks—I've missed it this last week."

He had forgotten his mother was a smoker. Coulter took off his coat and hat and hung them up, trying to remember details of a life he had long since allowed to blur into soft focus. She had taken up the habit about a year after his father died of a ruptured appendix while on a hunting trip down in the Maine woods.

He noticed the skis and ski-boots and ski-poles standing at attention in the back of the closet, wondered if he could still execute a decent Christie. Then, emerging, he said, "Just us for dinner tonight, mother?"

"Just us," she said, regarding him with a faint frown from over a fresh-lit cigarette.

"Good!" he said. "How about a drink?"

"Banny," said his mother with patient sternness, "you know as well as I that you're the family liquor-provider since your fa-

ther died. I'm not going to deal with bootleggers. And there's nothing but a little vermouth in the pantry."

"Snooping again," he said, carefully unsmiling. Good God, it was still Prohibition! Memory stabbed at him, bringing what had so recently emerged from past into present clearly into focus, technicolored focus. "I've got a little surprise upstairs in my closet."

He found himself taking the stairs two at a time without effort. Shaw had definitely been right, he decided when he discovered the exertion had not winded him in the slightest. He went into the big room overlooking the front lawn, now covered with much-trodden snow, that he had fallen heir to after his father died.

Karen, the Swedish-born second maid, was opening the bed. He had completely forgotten Karen, had to battle against staring at her. She was a perfect incipient human brood-mare—lush not-yet-fat figure, broad pelvis, meaningless pretty-enough face. Now what the devil had been his relations with her?

Since he couldn't remember, he decided they must have been innocuous. He said, "Hi, Karen, broken up any new homes lately?"

She said, "Oh—you, Mr. Coulter!" She giggled and fled, stumbling over the threshold in her hurry.

Coulter looked after her, his eyebrows high. Well, he thought, here was something he had evidently missed entirely. Karen's crush was painfully apparent, viewed from a vantage of two decades of added experience. Or perhaps he had been smarter than he remembered.

The gallon of home-made gin was stuck behind the textbook-filled carton on the back floor of his closet, where somehow he had known it must be. It was between a third and half full of colorless liquid. He uncorked it, sniffed and shuddered. Prohibition was going to take a bit of getting used to after two decades of Repeal.

Half an hour later he sipped his rather dire martini and listened to his mother talk. Not to the words especially, for she was one of those nearly-extinct well-bred women, brought up in the horsehair amenities of the late Victorian era, who could talk charmingly and vivaciously and at considerable length without saying anything. It was pleasant merely to sit and sip and let the words flow over him.

She looked remarkably well, he thought, for a woman who was to die within a year of galloping cancer. She seemed to have recovered entirely from the emotional aftermath of his father's death. So much so that he found himself wondering how deeply she had loved the man with whom she had spent some thirty-eight years of her life.

She was slim and quick and sure in her movements and her figure, of which she was inordinately proud, resembled that of a girl rather than the body of a woman nibbling late middle-age. Slowly he realized she had stopped talking, had asked him a question and was awaiting his answer. He smiled apologetically and said, "Sorry, mother, I must have been wool-gathering."

"You're tired, lamb." No one had called him that in twenty years. "And no wonder, with all that running around for Mr. Simms on the newspaper."

Mr. Simms—that would be Patrick "Paddy" Simms, his managing editor, the old-school city-room tyrant who had taught him his job so well that he had gone on to make a successful career of public relations and the organization of facts into words—at rates far more imposing than those paid a junior reporter during the Great Depression.

In his swell of memories Coulter almost lost his mother's question a second time, barely managed to catch its meaning. He sipped his drink and said, "I agree, mother, the burning of the books in Germany is a threat to freedom. But I don't think you'll have to worry about Adolph Hitler very long."

She misread his meaning, of course, frowned charmingly and said, "I do hope you're right, Banny. Nellie Maynard had a few of us for tea this afternoon and Margot Henson, she's tre-

mendously chic and her husband knows all those big men in the New Deal in Washington—not that he agrees with them, thank goodness—well, she says the big men in the State Department are really worried about Hitler. They think he may try to make Germany strong enough to start another war."

"It could happen, of course," Coulter told her. He had forgotten his mother's trick of stressing one syllable of a word. Funny, Connie, his wife—if she was still his wife after whatever had happened—had the same trick. With an upper-class Manhattan dry soda-cracker drawl added.

He wondered if he were going to have to live through it all again—the NRA, the Roosevelt boomlet, the Recession, the string of Hitler triumphs in Europe, the war, Pearl Harbor and all that followed—Truman, the Cold War, Korea, McCarthy ...

Seated across from her at the gleaming Sheraton dining table, which should by rights be in his own dining room in Scarborough overlooking the majestic Hudson, he wondered how he could put his foreknowledge to use. There was the market, of course. And he could recall the upset football win of Yale over Princeton in 1934, the Notre Dame last-minute triumph over Ohio State a year later, most of the World Series winners. On the Derby winners he was lost....

When the meal was over and they were returning to the library with its snug insulating bookshelves and warm cannel-coal fire, his mother said, "Banny, it's been so nice having this talk with you. We haven't had many lately. I wish you'd stay home tonight with me. You really do look tired, you know."

"Sorry, mother," he replied. "I've got a date."

"With the Lawton girl, I suppose," she said without affection. Then, accepting a cigarette and holding it before lighting it, "I do wish you wouldn't see quite so much of her. I'll admit she's a perfectly nice girl, of course. But she is strange and people are beginning to talk. I hope you're not going to be foolish about her."

"Don't worry," Coulter replied. Since when, he wondered, had wanting a girl as he wanted Eve Lawton been foolish. He added, "What's wrong with Eve anyway?"

His mother lit a cigarette. "Lamb, it's not that there's anything really wrong with Eve. As a matter of fact I believe her family is quite distinguished—good old Lincolnville stock."

"I'm aware of that," he replied drily. "I believe her great, great, great grandfather was a brigadier while mine was only a colonel in the Revolution."

His mother dismissed the distant past with a gesture. "But the Lawtons haven't managed to keep up," she stated. "Think of

your schooling, dear—you've had the very best. While Eve ..." With a shrug.

"Went to grammar and high-school right here in Lincolnville," Coulter finished for her. "Mother, Eve has more brains and character than any of the debs I know." Then, collecting himself, "But don't worry, mother—I'm not going to let it upset my life."

"I'm very glad to hear it," Mrs. Coulter said simply. "Remember, Banny, you and your Eve are a world apart. Besides, we're going to take a trip abroad this summer. There's so much I want us to see together. It would be a shame to ..." She let it hang.

Coulter looked at his mother, remembering hard. He had been able to stymie that trip on the excuse that he'd almost certainly lose his job and that new jobs were too hard to get in a depression era. He thought that his surviving parent was, beneath her well-mannered surface, a shallow, domineering, snobbish empress. Granted his new vista of vision, he realized for the first time how she had dominated both his father and himself.

He thought, I hate this woman. No, not hate, just loathe.

He glanced at the watch on his wrist, a Waltham he had long since lost or broken or given away—he couldn't recall which.

He said, "All the same, mother, a date's a date. I'm a little late now. Don't wait up for me."

"I shan't," she replied, looking after him with a frown of pale concern as he headed for the hall closet.

It took a few minutes to get the Pontiac warmed up but once out of the driveway Coulter knew the way to Eve Lawton's house as if he had been there last night, not two decades earlier. The small cold winter moon cast its frigid light over an intimate little group of apple tapioca clouds and made the snow-clad fields a dark grey beneath the black evergreens that backed the fields beside the road.

As he slowed to a stop in front of the old white-frame house with its graceful utilitarian lines of roof and gable, he found himself wondering whether this were the dream or the other—the twenty years that had found him an orphan. That had given him enough inherited money to strike out for himself in New York. That had seen him win success as a highly-paid publicist. That had seen him married to wealthy Connie Marlin and a way of life as far from that of Lincolnville as he himself now was from Scarborough and Connie.

Eve opened the door before he reached it. She was as willowy and alive as he remembered her, and a great deal more vital and beautiful. She put up her face to be kissed as soon as he

was inside and his arms went around her soft angora sweater and he wondered a little at what he had so cavalierly dismissed and left behind him.

She said, "You're late, Banning. I thought you'd forgotten."

He kept one arm around her as they walked into the living room with its blazing fire. He said, "Sorry. Mother wanted to talk."

"Is she terribly worried about me?" Eve asked. Her face, in inquiry, was like a half-opened rose.

Coulter hesitated, then replied, "I think so, darling. She was afraid your stock had gone to seed. I had to remind her that your great, great, great grandfather outranked mine."

The odd, in her case beautiful, blankness of fear smoothed Eve's forehead. She said, her voice low, her eyes not meeting his, "Yesterday you'd never have noticed what she was thinking."

"Yesterday?" He forced her to look at him. "Yesterday I was another man—a whole twenty-four hours younger." He added the last hastily, so as not to rouse suspicion. Eve, he both knew at once and remembered, was highly sensitive, intuitively brilliant.

"I know," she said simply, and for the second time since the amazing transformation of the afternoon he felt the tight grip

of terror. Watching her as she turned from him and began to stoke the fire, he wondered just what she did know.

The album rested on the table against the back of the sofa in front of the fireplace. It was a massive leather-and-parchment tome, with imitation medieval brass clasps and hinges. He opened it carelessly, seeking reassurance in idle action.

He flipped the pages idly, in bunches. There was Eve, a lacy little moppet, held in the arms of her drunkard farming father. A sort of local mad-Edison whose inventions never worked or, if they did, were promptly stolen from him by more profit-minded promoters. Her brother Jim, sturdy, cowlicked, squinting into the sun, stood at his father's knee. He wondered what had happened to Jim but didn't dare ask. Presumably he should know since Jim shared the house with his sister and an ancient housekeeper, doubtless long since asleep.

He flipped more pages, came to a snapshot of Eve in a bathing suit at Lake Tahoe. Bill Something-or-other, Lincolnville High School football hero of five years before, had an arm around Eve's slim, wool-covered waist. Two-piece suits and bikinis were still a long way in the future. He said, "What's become of Bill?"

She said, "Don't you remember? He was killed in that auto crash coming home from the city last year." There was an odd questing flatness in her voice.

Coulter remembered the incident now, of course. There had been a girl in the car, who had been disfigured for life. Plastic surgery, like bikinis, still lay well ahead. He and Eve had begun going together right after that accident....

Something about Eve's tone, some urgency, disturbed him. He looked at her quickly. She was standing by the fireplace, watching him, watching him as if he were doing something important. The fright within him renewed itself. Quickly he turned back to the album, flipped further pages.

He was close to the end of the album. What he saw was a newspaper clipping, a clipping showing himself and Harvey MacIlwaine of Consolidated Motors shaking hands at a banquet table. The headline above the picture read, AUTHOR AND AUTO MAGNATE CELEBRATE BIOGRAPHY.

Above the headline was the date: January 16, 1947.

With hard-forced deliberation, because every nerve in his body was singing its song of fear like a banjo string, Coulter closed the album. The honeymoon, if that was the right term for it, was over. He knew now which was the dream, which the reality.

He said, "All of this is your doing, Eve." It was not a question.

She said quietly, "That's right, Banning, it's my doing." She looked at him with a cool detachment that added to his bewilderment—and to his fright.

He said, "Why, Eve? Why have you done this?"

She said, "Banning, do you know what a Jane Austen villain is?"

He shook his head. "Hardly my pitch, is it?"

"Hardly." There was a trace of sadness in her voice. Then, "A Jane Austen villain is an attractive, powerful, good-natured male who rides through life roughshod, interested only in himself, completely unaware of his effect on those unlucky souls whose existences become entangled in his."

"And I am a Jane Austen villain?" He was puzzled, disturbed that anyone—Eve or anyone—should think of him as a villain. Mentally he began to search for kindnesses, for unselfishnesses. He found generosities, yes, but these, he supposed with sudden dreadful clarity, had been little more than balm to his ego.

"You are perhaps a classic example, Banning," she told him. Her face, in shadow, was exquisitely beautiful. "When you left Lincolnville twenty years ago, without seeing me, without letting me see you, you destroyed me."

"Good God!" Coulter exclaimed. "But how? I know it was rude, but I did mean to come back. And when things moved differently it seemed better to keep a clean break clean." He hesitated, added, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry that you destroyed me?" Her tone was acid-etched.

"Dammit, do you want me down on my knees?" he countered. "How the devil did my leaving destroy you?" Anger, prodded by fear, was warming his blood.

"I was sensitive—aware of the collapse of my family, of my own shortcomings, of my lack of opportunity," she said, staring with immense grey eyes at the wall behind him. "I was just beginning to feel I could be somebody, could mean something to someone I—liked—when you dropped me and never looked back.

"I took a job at the bank. For twenty years I've sat in a cage, counting out money and putting little legends in bank-books. I've felt myself drying up day by day, week by week, year by year. When I've sought love I've merely defiled myself. You taught me passion, Banning, then destroyed my capacity to enjoy it with anyone but you. You destroyed me and never even knew it."

"You could have gone out into the world," he said with a trace of contempt. "Other girls have."

"Other girls are not me," Eve replied steadily. "Other girls don't give themselves to a man as completely as I gave myself to you."

"What can I do now?" Coulter asked, running a hand through his newly crew-cut hair. Recalling Eve at dinner, seeing her in

the doorway, holding her briefly in his arms—he had almost decided that in this new life she was the partner he would carry with him.

Now, however, he was afraid of her. It was Eve who had, in some strange way, brought him back twenty years for purposes she had yet to divulge. One thing he knew, logically and intuitively—he could never endure life with anyone of whom he was frightened.

She was no longer looking at the wall—she was looking directly at him and with curious intensity. She said, "Do you have to ask?"

She was testing him, of course. Sensitive, brilliant, she might be—yet she was a fool not to have judged the effect of his fear of her. He walked around the table, took hold of her shoulders, turned her to face him, said, "What has this particular evening to do with bringing me—us—back?"

"Everything!" she said, her eyes suddenly ablaze. "Everything, Banning! Can't you understand?"

He released her, lit himself a cigarette, seeking the calmness he knew he must have to keep his thinking clear. He said, "Perhaps I understand why—a little. But how, Eve, how?"

She got up and walked across the wide hearth, kicked a fallen log back into place. Its glowing red scales burst into yellow

flame. She turned and said, "Remember my father's last work? His efforts to discover the secrets of Time?"

"I remember he threw away what should have been your inheritance on a flock of crackpot ideas," he told her.

"This wasn't a crackpot idea," she said, eyeing him as if he were another log for the fire. "His basic premise that Time is all-existent was sound. Time is past, present and future."

"I might have argued that with you—before today," he replied.

"It was like everything else he tried." She made an odd little gesture of helplessness. "He went at it wrong-end-to, of course. Not until after he died and Jim got back from M.I.T. did we get to work on it. I was merely the helper who held the tools for Jim. And when we completed it he lacked the courage to try it out." There was the acid of contempt in her voice at her brother's poltroonery.

"I don't blame him," said Coulter. "After all ..." He changed the subject, asked, "Where is Jim?"

"He was killed at Iwo Jima," she told him.

"What's to keep him from walking in here tonight—or to keep you from walking in on us?" he asked.

"Jim's in Cambridge, studying for exams," she replied. "As for my meeting myself, it's impossible. It's hard to explain but in

coming back here I became reintegrated with the past me. Just as you are both a present and a past you. You must have noticed a certain duplication of memories, an overlapping? I have."

"I've noticed," he said. "But why only we two?"

"I'll show you," she said. "Come." She led him down rough wooden cellar stairs to a basement, unfastened with pale and dexterous fingers a padlocked wooden door behind the big old-fashioned furnace with its up-curving stovepipe arms, under which he had to stoop to avoid bumping his head.

The sharp sting of dead furnace-ashes was in his nostrils as he looked at the strange device. The strange cage-like device, the strange jerry-built apparatus was centered in a bizarre instrument panel that seemed to hang from nothing at all. He said, eyeing a bucket-seat for the operator, "It looks like Red Barber's cat-bird seat, Eve."

"And we're sitting in it, just you and I, darling," she replied. "Just you and I out of all the people who ever lived. Think of what we can do with our lives now, the mistakes we can avoid!"

"I'm thinking of them," said Coulter. Then, after a brief pause, "But how in hell did you manage to get me into the act?"

She stepped inside the odd cage, plucked things from a cup-like receptacle that hung from the instrument panel, showed

them to him. There were a lock of hair, a scarf, what looked like fingernail parings. At his bewilderment her face lighted briefly with the shadow of a smile.

She said, "These are you, darling. Oh, you still don't understand! Lacking the person or thing to be sent back in Time, something that is part of the person or thing will work. It keys directly to individual patterns."

"And you've kept those things—those pieces of me—in there all this time?" He shuddered. "It looks like voodoo to me."

She put back the mementos, stepped out of the cage, put her arms fiercely around him. "Banning, darling, after you left me I did try voodoo. I wanted you to suffer as I suffered. But then, when the Time machine was finished and Jim was afraid to use it, I put the things in it—and waited. It's been a long wait."

"How did it reach me while I was still miles away?" he asked.

"Jim always said its working radius was about five miles," she said. "When you drove within range, it took over.... But let's go back upstairs, darling—we have our lives to plan."

To change the subject Coulter said, when they emerged from the basement, "You must have had a time picking the right moment for this little reunion—or was it hit or miss?"

"The machine is completely accurate," she said firmly. She stood there, the firelight making a halo of her dark hair. There was urgency in her, an expectation that the remark would mean something to him. It didn't.

Finally she burst out with, "Banning, are you really so forgetful? Don't you remember what tonight was ... don't you?"

Coulter did some hasty mental kangaroo-hopping. He knew it was important to Eve and, because of the incredible thing she had accomplished, he felt a new wave of fright. From some recess of his memory he got a flash—Jim was in Cambridge, the housekeeper asleep in the rear ell of the old farmhouse, he and Eve were alone.

He drew her gently close to him and kissed her soft waiting lips as he had kissed them twenty years before, felt the quiver of her slim body against him as he had felt it twenty years before. He should have known—Eve had selected for their reunion the anniversary of the first time they had truly given themselves to each other.

He said, "Of course I remember, darling. If I'm a little slow on the uptake it's because I've had a lot of things happen to me all at once."

"The old Banning Coulter would never have understood," she said, giving him a quick hug before standing clear of him. Her

eyes were shining like star sapphires. "Banning, you've grown up!"

"People do," he said drily. There was an odd sort of tension between them as they stood there, knowing what was to happen between them. Eve took a deep unsteady breath and the rise and fall of her angora sweater made his arms itch to pull her close.

She said, before he could translate desire into action, "Oh, I've been so wrong about so many things, darling. But I was so right to bring you back. Think of what we're going to be able to do, you and I together, now that we have this second chance. We'll know just what's going to happen. We'll be rich and free and lord it over ordinary mortals. I'll have furs and you'll have yachts and we'll ..."

"I'm a lousy sailor," said Coulter. "No, I don't want a yacht."

"Nonsense, we'll have a yacht and cruise wherever we want to go. Think of how easy it will be for us to make money." Her eyes were shining more brightly still. "No more standing in a teller's cage for me. No more feeling the life-sap dry up inside me, handling thousands of dollars a day and none of it mine."

She stepped to him, gripped him tightly, her fingernails making themselves felt even through the heavy material of his jacket. She kissed him fiercely and said in a throaty whisper,

"Darling, I'm going upstairs. Come up in ten minutes—and be young again with me."

She left him standing alone in front of the fire....

Coulter filled his pipe and lit it. His mother had said we when she talked of her plans, as if her son were merely an object to be moved about at her whim. Pick up my lighter at MacAuliffe's ... going to take a trip abroad this summer ... not going to be foolish about her.... He could see the phrases as vividly as if they were written on a video teleprompter.

And then he saw another set of phrases—different in content, yet strangely alike in meaning. Nonsense, we'll have a yacht ... lord it over ordinary mortals ... a long wait. He thought of the voodoo and the fingernail parings, of the savage materialism of the woman who was even now preparing herself to receive him upstairs, who was planning to relive his life with him in her image.

He thought of his wife, foolish perhaps, but true to him and never domineering. He thought of the Scarborough house and the good friends he had there, hundreds of miles and twenty years away. He wondered if he could go back if he got beyond the five-mile radius of the strange machine in the basement.

He looked down with regret at his slim young body, so unexpectedly regained—and thought of the heavier, older less vibrant body that lay waiting for him five miles away. Then

swiftly, silently, he tiptoed into the hall, donned coat and hat and gloves, slipped through the front door and bolted for the Pontiac.

He drove like a madman over the icy roads through the dark. Somehow he sensed he would have to get beyond the reach of the machine before Eve grew impatient and came downstairs and found him gone. She might, in her anger, send him back to some other Time—or perhaps the machine worked both ways. He didn't know. He could only flee in fear ... and hope....

At times, in the years that had passed since his abrupt breaking-off of his romance with Eve Lawton, he had wondered a little about why he had dropped her so quickly, just when his mother's death seemed to open the path for their marriage.

Now he knew that youthful instinct had served him better than he knew. Somehow, beneath the charm and wit and beauty of the girl, he had sensed the domineering woman. Perhaps a lifetime with his mother had made him extra-aware of Eve's desire to dominate without its reaching his conscious mind.

But to have exchanged the velvet glove of his mother for the velvet glove of Eve would have meant a lifetime of bondage. He would never have been his own man, never....

He could feel cold sweat bathe his body once more as he sped past the Brigham Farm. According to his wristwatch just eight

and a quarter minutes had elapsed since Eve had left him and gone upstairs. He felt a sudden urge to turn around and go back to her—he knew she would forgive his attempt to run away. After all, he couldn't even guess at what would happen when he reached the outer limit of the machine's influence. Would he be in 1934 or 1954—or irretrievably lost in some timeless nowhere at all?

He thought again of what Eve had said about yachts and world traveling and wondered how she could hope to do so if the radius of influence was only five miles. Eve might be passionate, headstrong and neurotic, but she was not a fool. If she had planned travel on a world of two decades past she must have found a way of making his and her stay in that past permanent, without trammels.

If she had altered the machine ... But she wouldn't have until he was caught in her trap when, inevitably, he returned to look at the scenes of his childhood. He tried to recall what she had done, what gestures she had made, when she demonstrated the machine. As nearly as he could remember, all Eve had done was to pluck out his nail parings, the bit of hair and scarf, then return them to their receptacle.

Voodoo.... She was close to mad. Or perhaps he was mad himself. He wiped his streaming forehead with a sleeve, barely avoided overturning as he rounded a curve flanked by signboards....

He felt a bump....

And suddenly he was in the big convertible again, guiding it over to one of the parking lanes at the side of the magnificent two-laned highway. He looked down at his sleek dark vicuna coat, visualized the rise of plump stomach beneath it, reached in his breast pocket for a panatella.

He noticed the tremble in his hand. No, no cigars now, he thought. Not with the old pump acting up like this. Too much excitement. He reached for the little box of nitroglycerin tablets in his watch-pocket, got it out, took one, waited.

Maybe his life wasn't perfect, maybe there wasn't much of it left to live—but what there was was his, not his mother's, not Eve's. The unsteadiness in his chest was fading. He turned on the ignition, drove slowly back through the housing developments, the neon signs and clover-leaf turns and graded crossings toward the city....

When he got back to the hotel he would call Connie in Scarborough. It would be heavenly, the sound of her high, silly little voice....