

# Child by Chronos

by Charles L. Harness

This story copyright 1953 by Charles L. Harness. Reprinted by permission of Linn Prentiss. This copy was created for Jean Hardy's personal use. All other rights are reserved. Thank you for honoring the copyright.

Published by Seattle Book Company, [www.seattlebook.com](http://www.seattlebook.com).

\* \* \*

When my daughter Shan was a little girl and just starting to go to school I noted that she was developing (copying?) many of her mother's mannerisms: a certain charming lift of the shoulder, a disapproving clenching of the jaws, a beautiful grin. What do we have here, I wondered. Who's who? And so the story popped out of my Freudian toaster.

\* \* \*

You just lie here and listen. The sunshine will do you good, and anyhow the doctor said you weren't to do much talking.

I'll get to the point.

I have loved three men. The first was my mother's lover. The second was my husband. The third...

I'm going to tell you all about these three men-- and me. I'm going to tell you some things that might send you back to the hospital.

Don't interrupt.

As a child I never knew my father. He was declared legally dead several months before I was born. They said he had gone hunting and had never returned. Theoretically you can't miss what you never had. Whoever said that didn't know me. I missed my lost father when I was a brat and when I was a gawky youngster in pigtails and when I was a young lady in finishing school in Switzerland.

Mother made it worse. There was never any shortage of males when mother was around, but they wouldn't have anything to do with me. And that was her fault. Mother was gorgeous. Men couldn't stay away from her. By the time I was ten, I could tell what they were thinking when they looked at her. When I was twenty they were still looking at her in the same way. *That* was when she finally took a lover, and when I fled from her in hate and in horror.

There's nothing remarkable about a daughter hating her mother. It's just that I did more of it than usual. All the hate that I ever commanded, ever since I was in diapers, I saved, I preserved, and I vented on her. When I was an infant, so they said, I wouldn't nurse at her breast. Strictly a bottle baby. It was as though I had declared to the world that I hadn't been born in the way mortals are born and that this woman who professed to be my mother wasn't really. As you shall see, I wasn't entirely wrong.

I always had the insane feeling that everything she had really belonged to me and that she was keeping me from claiming my own.

Naturally, our tastes were identical. This identity of desire became more and more acute as I grew older. Whatever she had, I regarded as really mine, and generally tried to confiscate it. Particularly men. The irritating thing was that, even though mother never became serious about any of them (except the last one), they still couldn't see me. Except the last one.

Mother's willingness to turn over to me any and all of her gentleman friends seemed to carry with it the unrelated but inevitable corollary, that none of them (except that one exception) had any desire to *be* turned over.

You're probably thinking that it was all a consequence of not having a father around, that I

subconsciously substituted her current male for my missing father, and hence put claims on him equal to hers. You can explain it any way you want to. Anyway, except at the last, it always turned out the same. The more willing she was to get rid of him, the less willing he was to have anything to do with me.

But I never got mad at *them*; only at *her*. Sometimes, if the brush-off was particularly brusque, I wouldn't speak to her for days. Even the sight of her would make me sick to my stomach.

When I was seventeen, on the advice of her psychiatrist, she sent me to school in Switzerland. This psychiatrist said I had the worst Electra complex with the least grounds for it of any woman in medical history. He said he hoped that my father was really dead, because if he should ever turn up alive... Well, you could just see him rubbing the folds of his cerebrum in brisk anticipation.

However, the superficial reason they gave for sending me to Switzerland was to get an education. There I was, seventeen, and didn't even know the multiplication table. All I knew was what mother called "headline history." She had yanked me out of public school when I was in second grade and had hired a flock of tutors to teach me about current events. Nothing but current events. Considering that she made her living by predicting current events before they became current, I suppose her approach was excusable. It was her method of execution that made the subject utterly dull-- then. Mother wouldn't stand for any of the modern methods of history teaching. No analysis of trends and integration of international developments for mother. My apologetic tutors were paid to see that I memorized every headline and caption in every New York Times printed since Counterpoint won the Preakness in 1957-- which was even several months before I was born. That and nothing more. There were even a couple of memory experts thrown in, to wrap each daily pill in a sugar-coated mnemonic.

So, even if the real reason for sending me to Switzerland was not to get an education, I didn't care. I was glad to stop memorizing headlines.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

One of the earliest memories of my childhood was a big party mother held at Skyridge, our country lodge. I was six years old. It was the night after James Roosevelt's re-election. Of all the public opinion diagnostics, only mother had guessed right, and she and the top executives of the dozen-odd firms that retained her prophetic services congregated at Skyridge. I was supposed to be upstairs asleep, but the laughter and singing woke me up, and I came down and joined in. Nobody cared. Every time a man put his arm around mother and kissed her, I was there clutching at his coat pockets, howling, "He's *mine!*"

My technique altered as the years passed; my premise didn't.

Do you think it bothered her?

Ha!

The more I tried to take from her, the more amused she became. It wasn't a wry amusement. It gave her real belly laughs. How can you fight *that*? It just made me madder.

You might think I hadn't a shred of justice on my side. Actually, I did.

There was *one* thing that justified my hatred: she didn't really love me. I was her flesh and blood, but she didn't love me. Perhaps she was fond of me, in a lukewarm way, but her heart had no real love in it for me. And I knew it and hated her, and tried to take everything that was hers.

We must have seemed a strange pair. She never addressed me by my name, or even by a personal pronoun. She never even said such things as, "Dear, will you pass the toast?" Instead it was "May I have the toast?" It was as though she considered me a mere extension of herself, like another arm, which had no independent identity. It was galling.

Other girls could keep secrets from their mothers. I couldn't hide anything important from mine. The more I wanted to conceal something, the more certain she was to know it. That was another reason why I didn't mind being shipped off to Switzerland.

I'm sure she wasn't reading my mind. It wasn't telepathy. She couldn't guess phone numbers I had memorized, nor the names of the twenty-five boys on the county high school football team. Routine things like that didn't generally "get through." And telepathy wouldn't explain what happened the night my car turned over on the Sylvania Turnpike. The hands that helped pull me through the car were hers. She had been parked by the roadside, waiting. No ambulance; just mother in her car. She had known when and where it would happen, and that I wouldn't be hurt.

After that night I was able to figure out all by myself that mother's business firm, Tomorrow, Inc., was based on something more than knowledge of up-to-the-minute trends in economics, science, and politics.

But *what*?

I never asked her. I didn't think she would tell me, and I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of refusing an explanation. But perhaps that wasn't the only reason I didn't ask. I was also afraid to ask. Toward the end it was almost as though we had arrived as a tacit understanding that I was not to ask, because in good time I was going to find out without asking.

Tomorrow, Inc., made a great deal of money. Mother's success in predicting crucial public developments was uncanny. And she never guessed wrong. Naturally, her clients made even more money than she did, because they had more to invest initially. On her advice they plunged in the deeply depressed market two weeks before the Hague Conference arrived at the historic Concord of 1970. And it was mother who predicted the success of Bartell's neutronic-cerium experiments, in time for Cameron Associates to corner the world supply of monazite sand. And she was equally good at predicting Derby winners, Supreme Court decisions, elections, and that the fourth rocket to the moon would be the first successful one.

She was intelligent, but hardly in the genius class. Her knowledge of the business world was surprisingly limited. She never studied economics or extrapolated stock market curves. Tomorrow, Inc., didn't even have a news ticker in its swank New York office. And she was the highest paid woman in the United States in 1975.

In 1976, during the Christmas holidays, which I was spending with mother at Skyridge during my junior year at college, mother turned down a three-year contract with Lloyd's of London. I know this because I dug the papers out of the wastebasket after she tore them up. There were eight digits in the proposed annual salary. I knew she was making money, but not that kind. I called her to task.

"I can't take a three-year contract," she explained. "I can't even take a year's contract. Because I'm going to retire next month." She was looking away from me, out over the lodge balcony, into the wood. She couldn't see my expression. She murmured, "Did you know your mouth was open rather wide?"

"But you *can't* retire!" I clipped. And then I could have bitten my tongue off. My protest was an admission that I envied her and that I shone in her reflected fame. Well, she had probably known it anyhow. "All right," I continued sullenly. "You're going to retire. Where'll you go? What'll you do?"

"Why, I think I'll stay right here at Skyridge," she said blithely. "Just fixing up the place will keep me busy for a good many months. Take those rapids under the balcony, for instance. I think I'll just do away with them. Divert the stream, perhaps. I've grown a little tired of the sound of running water. And then there's all that dogwood out front. I've been considering cutting them all down and maybe putting in a landing field. You never know when a copter might come in handy. And then there's the matter of haystacks. I think we ought to have at least one somewhere on the place. Hay has such a nice smell, and they say it's so stimulating."

"Mother!"

Her brow knitted. "But where could I put a haystack?"

Just why she was using such a puerile method of baiting me I couldn't understand. "Why not in the ravine?" I said acidly. "It'll be dry after you divert the rapids. You'd be famous as the owner of the only ground-level haystack in New England."

She brightened immediately. "That's *it!* What a clever girl."

"And what happens after you get him in the haystack?"

"Why I guess I'll just keep him in there."

"You *guess!*" I cried. (I'd finally trapped her!) "Don't you *know?*"

"I know only the things that are going to happen during the next six months-- up until the stroke of midnight, June 3, 1977. As to what happens after that, I can't make any predictions."

"You mean you *won't.*"

"*Can't.* My retirement is not arbitrary."

I looked at her incredulously. "I don't understand. You mean-- this ability-- it's going to leave you-- like *that?*" I snapped my fingers.

"Precisely."

"But can't you stop it? Can't your psychiatrist do something?"

"Nobody could do anything for me even if I wanted him to. And I don't want to know what is going to happen after midnight, June 3."

With troubled eyes I studied her face.

At that moment, just as though she'd planned it, the clocks began to chime, as if to remind me of our unwritten agreement not to probe into her strange gift.

The answer was only six months away. For the time being, I was willing to let it ride.

The epilog to our little conversation was this:

A couple of months later, after I was back at school in Zurich, a friend of mine wrote me (1) that the rapids had been diverted from the stream bed; (2) that just below the balcony the now dry ravine contained ten feet of fresh hay; (3) that the hay was rigged with electronic circuits to sound an alarm in the lodge if anyone went near it; (4) that the dogwood trees had been cut down; (5) that in their place stood a small landing field; (6) and on that field there stood an ambulance copter, hired from a New York hospital, complete with pilot and intern.

"Anility," wrote my friend, "is supposed to develop early in some cases. You ought to come home."

I was having fun at school. I didn't want to come home. Anyway, if mother was losing her mind, there was nothing anybody could do. Furthermore, I didn't want to give up my plans for summering in Italy.

A month later, early in May, my friend wrote again.

It seems that the haystack alarm had gone off one night, two weeks previous, and mother and the servants had hurried down to find a bloody-faced one-eyed man crawling up the gravelly ravine bank. In one hand he was clutching an old pistol. According to reports, mother had the copter whisk him to a New York hospital, where he still was. He was due to be discharged May 6. The next day, by my calculations.

There were details about how mother had redecorated to bedrooms at the lodge. I knew the bedrooms. They adjoined each other.

Even before I finished the letter I realized there was nothing the matter with mother's mind and never had been. That witch had foreseen all this.

The thing that was the matter, and which had apparently escaped everyone but me and mother, was that mother had finally fallen in love.

This was serious.

I canceled the remainder of the semester and the Italian tour and caught the first jet home. I didn't tell anyone I was coming.

So, when I paid off the taxi at the gatehouse, I was able to walk unannounced and unseen around the edge of the estate, and then cut in through the woods toward the ravine and lodge just beyond it.

The first thing I saw emerging from the trees along the ravine bank was the famous bargain basement haystack. It was occupied.

The sun was shining, but it was early in May, and not particularly warm. Still, mother was wearing one of those new sun briefs that-- well, you get the idea. I guess haystacks generate a lot of heat. Spontaneous combustion.

Mother was facing away from me, obstructing *his* one good eye. I hadn't made a sound, but I was suddenly aware of the fact that she had been expecting me and knew I was there.

She turned around, sat up, and smiled at me. "Hi there! Welcome home! Oh, excuse me, this is our good friend, Doctor... ah... Brown. John Brown. Just call him Johnny." She picked up a sliver of hay from her hair and flashed a grin at "Johnny."

I stared at them both in turn. Doctor Brown raised up on one elbow and returned my stare as amiably as the glaring black patch over his right eye would permit. "Hello, honey," he said gravely.

Then he and mother burst out laughing.

It was the queerest sound I'd ever heard. Just as though nothing on earth could ever again be important to either of them.

That summer I saw a lot of Johnny. Things got on an interesting basis very quickly. It wasn't long

before he was giving me the kind of look that said, "I'd like to get involved-- but..." And there he'd stop. Still, I figured that I was making more headway with him than I ever had with any of mother's previous friends.

Finally, though, his "thus far and no farther" response grew irritating. Then challenging. Then...

I guess it was being around him constantly, knowing that he and mother were the way they were, that made things turn out the way they did. In the process of trying to reel him in for closer inspection, I got pulled in myself. Eventually I became quite shameless about it. I began trying to get him off to myself at every opportunity.

We talked. But not about *him*. If he knew how he'd had his accident, and how he'd got here, he apparently never told anybody. At least he would never tell me.

We talked about magnetrons.

Don't look so surprised.

Like yourself he was an expert on magnetrons. I think he knew even more than you about magnetrons. And you thought you were the world's only expert, didn't you?

I pretended to listen to him, but I never understood more than the basic concepts-- namely, that magnetrons were little entities sort of like electrons, sort of like gravitons, and sort of like I don't know what. But at least I grasped the idea that a magnetronic field could warp the flow of time, and that if you put an object in such a field, the results could be rather odd.

We talked a lot about magnetrons.

I planned our encounters hours, sometimes days, ahead. Quite early, I started borrowing mother's sun briefs. Later, at times when he *theoretically* wasn't around, I sunbathed *au naturel*. With no visible results except sunburn.

Toward the last I started sneaking out at night into the pines with my sleeping bag. I couldn't stand it, knowing where he probably was.

Not that I gave up.

He was building a magnetronic generator. The first in the world. I'd been helping all one day to wire up some of his equipment.

He had torn down the balcony railing and was building his machine out on the balcony, right over the ravine. He could focus it, he said. I mean, there was a sort of "lens" effect in the magnetronic field, and he was supposed to be able to focus this field.

The queer thing was, that when he finally got the lens aligned, the focus was out in thin air, just beyond the edge of the balcony. Directly over the ravine. He didn't want anyone stumbling through the focus by accident.

And through this lens you could hear sounds.

The ravine had been dry for months, ever since mother had diverted the rapids. But now, coming through the lens, was this endless crash of water.

You could hear it all over the house.

The noise made me nervous. It seemed to subdue even *them*.

I didn't like that noise. I hauled my sleeping bag still further out into the pines. I could still hear it.

One night, a quarter of a mile from the house, I crawled out of my sleeping bag and started back toward the house. I was going to wake him up and ask him to turn the thing off.

At least, that was my excuse for returning. And it was perfectly true that I couldn't sleep.

I had it all figured out. Just how quietly I'd open his door, just how I'd tiptoe over to his bed. How I'd bend over him. How I'd put my hand on his chest and shake him, ever so gently.

Everything went as planned, up to a point.

There I was, leaning over his bed, peering through the dark at the blurry outlines of a prone figure.

I stretched out my hand.

It was not a male chest that I touched.

"What do you want?" mother whispered.

In the length of time it took me to get my breath back I decided that if *I* couldn't have him, *she* couldn't either. There comes a limit to all things. We were racing towards the showdown.

He always kept his old pistol on the table ledge, the one he'd brought with him. Soundlessly I reached for it and found it. I knew it was too dark for mother to see what I was now pointing toward her.

I had a clairvoyant awareness of my intent and its consequences. I even knew the place and time. Murder was building up in Doctor John Brown's bedroom at Skyridge, and the time was five minutes of midnight, June 3, 1977.

"If that goes off," whispered my mother calmly, "it'll probably wake your father."

"My-- *who?*" I gasped. The gun butt landed on my toe; I hardly knew I'd dropped it.

I heard what she said. But I suddenly realized it didn't make any sense. They'd have told me long before, if it had been true. And he wouldn't have looked at me the way he did, day after day. She was lying.

She continued quietly: "Do you really want him?"

When one woman asks this question of another, it is ordinarily intended as an announcement of a property right, not a query, and the tone of voice ranges from subtle sardonicism to savage gloating.

But mother's voice was quiet and even.

"Yes!" I said harshly.

"Badly enough to have a child by him?"

I couldn't stop now. "Yes."

"Can you swim?"

"Yes," I parroted stupidly. It was obviously not a time for logic or coherence. There we were, two witches bargaining in life and death, while the bone of our contention slumbered soundly just beyond us.

She whispered: "Do you know when he is from?"

"You mean *where?*"

"*When.* He's from 1957. In 1957 he fell into a magnetronic field-- into my 1977 haystack. The lens-- out there-- is focused-- "

"-- on 1957?" I breathed numbly.

"*Early 1957,*" she corrected. "It's focused on a day a couple of months prior to the moment he fell into the lens. If you really want him, all you've got to do its jump through the lens, find him in 1957, and hang on to him. Don't let him fall through into the magnetronic field."

I licked my lips. "And suppose he does anyway?"

"I'll be waiting for him."

"But you already have him. If I should go back, how can I be sure of finding him in time? Suppose he's on safari in South Africa?"

"You'll find him right here. He spent the spring and summer of 1957 here at Skyridge. The lodge has always been his property."

I couldn't see her eyes, but I knew they were laughing at me.

"The matter of a child," I said curtly. "What's that got to do with him?"

"Your only chance of holding him permanently," she said coolly, "is the child."

"*The child?*"

I couldn't make any sense out of it. I stopped trying.

For a full minute there was silence, backgrounded by the gentle rasp of Johnny's breathing and the singing water twenty years away.

I blinked my eyes rapidly.

I was going to have Johnny. I was going back to 1957. Suddenly I felt jaunty, exhilarated.

The hall clock began to chime midnight.

Within a few seconds, June 3, 1997 would pass into history. Mother would be washed up, a has-been, unable to predict even the weather.

I kicked off my slippers and pajamas. I gauged the distance across the balcony. My voice got away from me. "Mother!" I shrieked. "Give us one last prediction!"

Johnny snorted violently and struggled to sit up.

I launched my soaring dive into time. Mother's reply floated after me, through the lens, and I heard it in 1957.

"You didn't stop him."

\* \* \*

His real name was James McCarren. He *was* a genuine Ph.D., though, a physics professor. Age, about 40. Had I expected him to be younger? He seemed older than "Johnny." And he had two good eyes. No patch.

He owned Skyridge, all right. Spent his summers there. Liked to hunt and fish between semesters.

And now, my friend, if you'll just relax a bit, I'll tell you what happened on the night of August 5, 1957.

I was leaning over the balcony, staring down at the red-lit tumult of the rapids, when I became aware that Jim was standing in the doorway behind me. I could feel his eyes sliding along my body.

I had been breathing deeply a moment before, trying to slow down the abnormal surging of my lungs, while simultaneously trying to push Jim's pistol a little higher under my armpit. The cold steel made me shiver.

It was too bad. For during the past two months I had begun to love him in a most interesting way, though, of course, not in the much *more* interesting way I had loved Johnny. (A few weeks with mother can really change a man!) In 1957 Johnny-- or Jim-- was quaintly solicitous, oddly virginal. Almost fatherly. It was too bad that I was beginning to love him as Jim.

Still, there was mother's last prediction. I had thought about it a long time. So far as I could see, there was only one way to make sure he didn't "go through" to her.

"Come one out," I said, turning my face up to be kissed.

After he had released me, I said, "Do you realize it's been exactly two months since you fished me out of there?"

"The happiest months of my life," he said.

"And you still haven't asked me how I happened to be here-- who I am-- anything. You're certainly under no illusion that I gave the justice of the peace my right name?"

He grinned, "If I got too curious, you might vanish back into the whirlpool, like a water nymph."

It was really sad. I shrugged bitterly. "You and your magnetrons."

He started. "*What?* Where did you ever hear about magnetrons? I've never discussed them with anyone."

"Right here. From you."

His mouth opened and closed slowly. "You're out of your mind!"

"I wish I were. That would make everything seem all right. For, after all, it's only after you get to thinking about it logically that you can understand how impossible it is. It's got to stop, though, and now is the time to stop it."

"Stop *what?*" he demanded.

"The way you and I keep jumping around in time. Especially you. If I don't stop you, you'll go through the lens, and mother will get you. It was her last prediction."

"Lens?" he gurgled.

"The machine. You know, the one with the magnetrons."

"Huh?"

"None of that exists yet, of course," I said, talking mostly to myself. "At least, not outside of your head. You won't build the generator until 1977."

"I can't get the parts now." His voice was numb.

"They'll be available in 1977 though."

"In 1977...?"

"Yes. After you built it in 1977, you'll focus it back to 1957, so that you *could* jump through, now, into 1977, that is. Only, I'm not going to let you. When mother made her last prediction she couldn't have known to what lengths I'd go to stop you."

He passed his hand plaintively over his face. "But... but... even assuming that you're from 1977, and even assuming I'll build a magnetronic generator in 1977, I can't just jump into 1977 and build it. I

certainly can't move forward in time to 1977 through a magnetronic field that won't be generated and beamed backwards to 1957 until I arrive in 1977 and generate it. That's as silly as saying that the Pilgrims built the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock. And anyway, I'm a husband who'll soon be a father. I haven't the faintest intention of running out on my responsibilities."

"And yet," I said, "if the sequence proceeds normally, you will leave me... for *her*. Tonight you're my lawful husband, the father of our child to be. Then-- bing! You're suddenly in 1977-- wife-deserter, philanderer, and mother's lover. I *won't* let this happen. After all I've been through, I won't let her get you. My blood goes into a slow boil just thinking about her, smiling way up there in 1977, thinking how she got rid of me so she could eventually have you all to herself. And me in my condition." My voice broke in an artistic tremolo.

"I *could* age normally," he said. "I could simply wait until 1977 and *then* build the generator."

"You didn't though-- that is, I mean you *won't*. When I last saw you in 1977 you looked even younger than you do now. Maybe it was the patch."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If your presence *here* is a direct consequence of my presence *there*, then there's nothing either of us can do to change the sequence. I don't want to go through. And what could happen to force me through I can't even guess. But we've got to proceed on the assumption that I'll go, and you'll be left stranded. We've got to make plans. You'll need money. You'll probably have to sell Skyridge. Get a job, after the baby comes. How's your shorthand?"

"They'll use vodeographs in 1977," I muttered. "But you don't have to worry, you cheap two-timer. Even if you succeeded in running off to my mother, the baby and I'll get along. As a starter, I'm going to put the rest of your bank account on Counterpoint to win the Preakness next Saturday. After that-- "

"But he had already switched to something else. "When you knew me in 1977, were we-- ah-- intimate?"

I snorted. "Depends on who 'we' includes."

"What? You mean... *I*... and your *mother really*...?" He coughed and ran his finger around his collar. "There must be some simple explanation."

I just sneered at him.

He giggled. "Your mother-- ah-- in 1977-- a good-looking woman, I gather?"

"A wrinkled, painted harridan," I said coldly. "Forty, if she's a day."

"Hmph! *I'm* forty, you know. Contrary to the adolescent view, it's the best time of life. You'll feel the same way about it in another twenty years."

"I suppose so," I said. "They'll be letting me out of the penitentiary about then."

"He snapped his fingers suddenly. "I've got it! Fantastic!" He turned away and looked out over the balcony, like Cortez on his peak. "Fantastic, but it hangs together. Completely logical. Me. Your mother. You. The child. The magnetrons. The eternal cycle."

"This isn't making it easier for me," I said reproachfully. "The least you could do would be to remain sane until the end."

He whirled on me. "Do you know where *she* is-- now-- tonight?"

"No, and I spent two-thirds of our joint bank account trying to locate her. It's just as though she never existed."

His eyes got bigger and bigger. "No wonder you couldn't find her. You couldn't know."

"Know what?"

"What your mother is."

I wanted to scream at him. "Oh," I said.

But he was off on another tangent. "But it's not entirely without precedent. When a cell divides, which of the resultant two cells is the mother? Which the daughter? The answer is, that the question itself is nonsense. And so with you. The cell divides in space; you divide in time. It's nonsense to ask which of you is mother, which is daughter."

I just stood there, blinking.

He rambled on. "Even so, why should I want to 'go through'? That's the only part that's not clear. Why should I deliberately skip twenty years of life with you? Who'd take care of you? How could you earn a



living? But you must have. Because you didn't have to sell Skyridge. You stayed here. You educated *her*. But of course!" He smacked his fist into his palm.

"Simplest thing in the world," he howled happily. "Counterpoint at the Preakness. You'll become a professional predictor. Sports. Presidential elections. Supreme Court decisions. All in advance. You've got to *remember*. Train your ability to recall. Big money in it!"

My mouth was hanging open.

"Isn't that what happens?" he shouted.

"I know all the headlines already," I stammered. "Only that's the business *mother* started... predicting for a living..."

"Mother... mother... *mother!*" he mimicked. "By the great Chronos, child! Can't you face it? Does your mind refuse to accept the fact that you and your 'mother' and your unborn daughter are iden-- "

I screamed, "No!"

I pulled out the pistol.

I raised it slowly, as though I had all the time in the world, and shot him through the head.

Even before he hit the floor I had grabbed his right hand and was flexing his fingers around the handle.

A moment later I was out the door and racing toward the garage.

I thought it would be best to "find" his body on returning from a shopping expedition in the village, where I had happened to pick up a couple of friends. The only thing wrong with this plan was that he wasn't there when I returned home with my witnesses.

\* \* \*

It was generally agreed that James McCarren had become lost in the woods while hunting. Poor fellow must have starved to death, they supposed. Neither he nor the pistol were ever found. A few months later he was declared legally dead, and I collected his insurance.

The coroner and the D.A. did give me a bad moment when they discovered some thin smudges of blood leading toward the edge of the balcony. But nothing turned up, of course, when they dragged the whirlpool. And when I informed them of my condition, their unvoiced suspicions turned to sympathy.

From then on, I had plenty of time to think. Particularly during the first lean months of Tomorrow, Inc., before I landed my first retainer.

And what I thought was this: what other woman had ever had a man who loved her so much, even after she had shot him through the eye, that he would willingly drag himself after her, through twenty years, to claim her again, sight unseen? The very least I could do was to drain the ravine and break your fall with this haystack.

Do you honestly like my new sunbrief? The red and green checks go nicely with the yellow hay, don't they? Do you really want me to come over and sit by you? Oh, don't worry about interruptions. The servants are down in the village, and she won't come sneaking around the woods for an hour yet...

Ooooh, *Johnny!*