

*Ann saw Jim's quick glance up and down the street.
The thought hit her that she might be in trouble with
the police.*



Heart in Flight

By
VELDA JOHNSTON



Synopsis

BEAUTIFUL Ann Marleigh, daughter of a once wealthy New York family, has been worried and upset over her younger brother, Gordon, who drinks heavily. Things come to a climax one night when Ann goes to bring him home from a cheap Times Square Hotel. At the hotel she finds that he is sleeping, and she decides to spend the night there in order to be near him if he should awaken. That night, she has a particularly horrifying and vivid nightmare. She dreams that someone comes to her room and takes her off to a strange masquerade party. There are three people at the party who stand out—a green mermaid who wants to tell Ann something; a bear who tries to prevent her;

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♥

*A key that was a clue to
murder opened the door to
love for Ann.*

and a pirate with an S-shaped scar on his neck who helps Ann escape when the mermaid is killed with a pair of shears and her body hidden in a closet.

The next day Ann's terror mounts when she discovers a strange key in her purse and a vial of perfume that does not belong to her. Hysterically she begins to wonder—and then to be convinced—that somewhere in New York, locked in a closet, is the body of a woman whom she has killed!

In desperation she goes back to the hotel, determined to retrace her steps of the night before. In the lobby she meets *Larry Gretson*, whose father owns the hotel. Ann feels that Larry is curious about her presence there, but he asks no questions. There is a man who does ask, though—*Jim Hastings*, police reporter for the *New York Chronicle*. Ann had met and been attracted to Jim at a party given by her wealthy, eccentric friend, *Clyde Cavanaugh*.

Ann tells Larry about her nightmare, and he is so reassuring that she decides that she is being overly dramatic about it and should simply forget it. She is a little upset, though, by Jim Hastings, who has overheard her telling Larry, and shows a keen interest in the key and the perfume. She refuses to show them to him, however.

In the days that follow, Jim and she become good friends and he never again refers to her dream. But he does ask her about Gordon—how long he has been drinking and how friendly he is with Clyde Cavanaugh. Little by little, Ann falls in love with him, and they finally decide to get married. Then one day Ann comes home early and hears Jim and her brother Gordon fighting bitterly. Jim refuses to tell Ann what the quarrel is about, and angrily she accepts a date with Larry who has been calling her. From her brother, Ann learns that Jim had a sister whom Gordon had once loved. Jim's sister, Mary, had been involved in a hit and run automobile accident, but had wrecked the car and been killed before the police caught up with her. From certain letters he found among her things, Jim was convinced that Gordon had been with her the day of the accident, had actually been driving the car, and had abandoned the wreck in which Mary was killed in order to escape the blame. Heartsick, Ann realizes that it was from the date of the accident—four years before—that Gordon had started drinking. On top of this, she learned that Gordon has been cashing the bonds that they had both inherited and that there is little money left.

That night, still angry at Jim for not telling her this himself, and a little fearful that he had been deliberately pursuing her because of Gordon, Ann goes out with Larry. She is astonished to find him not his usual gay self. Instead, he is nervous, irritable and worried. After dinner he says there is something he must tell her and suggests that they find a quiet spot in Central Park where they will not be overheard. Ann's suspicion is aroused at this, and even more so when Larry acts fearful that someone might be following them. And then, in the park, he slips and falls. He has cut the back of his head. Ann, in an attempt to help him, loosens his collar. There on the back of his neck is a raised scar in the shape of an S! Instantly she is back in the horror of her nightmare. It was true—it had been no

dream! Before Larry can say a word to her, she turns from him in terror and runs. *Now go on with the story.*

Conclusion

SHE AWOKE at noon the next day after less than five hours sleep. Until nearly three the night before she'd kept calling Jim's apartment, needing desperately to pour out her confused fear, needing to hear him say, "Hold on, darling. I'll be right over."

But Jim hadn't answered his phone. At last, deciding that he was out covering some late-breaking story, she had gone to bed. She hadn't slept though. The darkness had been alive with the memory of that S-shaped scar on Larry Gretson's neck. She didn't try to decide what to do about her discovery that Larry had been the man in the pirate costume in her supposed nightmare. Jim would tell her what to do. Jim, she felt, was capable of handling anything. The thought brought her comfort, but even so she didn't fall asleep until after her dressing table mirror had reflected the first reddish rays of the sun.

Now, as she sat up in bed, her head began to throb. She got up, slipped on her robe, and went into the bathroom. The aspirin bottle in the medicine cabinet was empty. She stood there for a moment, fingertips against her throbbing temples. She wouldn't be able to even think straight until she got rid of this headache. Well, Gordon could go to the drugstore for aspirin.

She went back into the bedroom and opened the door into the hall. The door opposite stood open, revealing the empty room, the unmade bed.

In the downstairs hall the vacuum cleaner whined. She went to the bannister and looked down at the part-time maid's untidy head. "Mrs. Talbot!"

Shutting off the vacuum, the woman turned her surly face upward. Ann asked, "Do you know where my brother is?"

"Out. Went out half an hour ago."

"Then could you run down to the drugstore and get some aspirin. My head's splitting. And deliveries take so long."

"I'm paid to clean, not run errands."

Ann turned away from the bannister. She'd get the aspirin herself.

Fifteen minutes later she left the house, walked two blocks through the mid-day sunlight to the drugstore. She never did get the aspirin, though, because next to the drugstore was a little tobacco shop with the day's newspapers displayed on a rack outside. Automatically she glanced at them. One black headline covered the front page of the tabloid *Messenger*:

HOTEL TYCOON'S SON STABBED TO DEATH IN CENTRAL PARK

The letters seemed to dance before her eyes as she lifted the paper from the rack, turned to the first inside page.

IT HAD BEEN Larry, all right. A woman walking her dog at dawn in the park had glimpsed his body as it lay in some bushes at the edge of the Seventy second Street lake, and had screamed until she had attracted the attention of two of the park's patrolmen. Larry had been stabbed in the back, probably with a long-bladed pocket knife. His overcoat was found on a park bench nearby. There was no evidence of robbery, and no sign of a struggle, except for a slight cut behind his right ear, and a loosened tie and collar.

Dazedly she turned, her headache forgotten now, and started away. "Hey, Miss!" a voice hailed her from the shop doorway. "You didn't pay for the paper you took."

She turned back, reached automatically into her purse, laid a nickel in his outstretched hand, and turned toward home.

She felt a grinding sense of guilt. She had left Larry there in the park, half-dazed from his fall. And someone had crept up on him through the windy dark and plunged a knife into his back.

Why? Probably, she realized now, because someone feared that he was going to tell her the truth about the tenement flat of her nightmare. But he'd never had a chance to tell her, because as soon as she had seen the scar on his neck she had fled in terror and revulsion, leaving him at the mercy of his enemy.

What enemy? It must have been the person he was afraid of last night, the person for whom he had kept glancing over his shoulder, as if he feared he had been followed from the Chateau Yquem.

She stopped short there on the sidewalk, the paper clutched in her hand. Jim had known Larry would be at the Chateau Yquem. He had heard her making the date with Larry. And over dinner Larry had tried to warn her against Jim, had suggested that it was unwise of her to trust him. She had attributed his attitude to jealousy, but now . . .

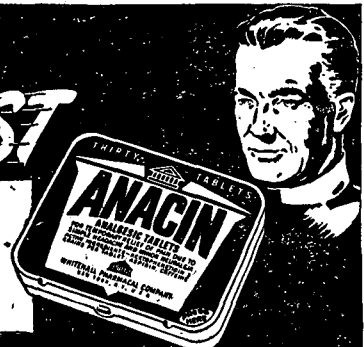
"No!" she said aloud. "Not Jim!"

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But even as she spoke she was remembering Larry's last, labored words to her. "Meant to tell you it wasn't a dream," he had said. "Decided I had to. That clipping . . ."

He could have meant only one clipping, the one he had shown her, the one through which he had learned that she was seeing Jim. The clipping had made him feel that she was in danger, so much so that he had decided to tell her the truth about her supposed nightmare, even though the truth would undoubtedly be to his own discredit.

A passing couple stared at her as she stood there, her face dazed and pale in the harsh sunlight, the paper crumpled in her hand. She walked on. Had it been only twenty minutes ago that she had taken comfort in the thought of Jim's love, of his arms around her and his voice soothing her, telling her what to do? Desperately she tried to hold onto her confidence in him and in his love. Jim, she told herself, just couldn't have had any connection with the events in that nightmarish tenement flat. But it was no use: She felt as she had the morning after her supposed dream—alone, unable to trust anyone, threatened by an evil whose nature she could not guess.

She turned in at her gate. As she climbed the porch steps, she remembered something else. Jim hadn't been in his apartment last night. Where had he been? She had a swift, sickening vision of him following her and Larry along the shadowed path, moving close to its edge so that he could slip behind a tree whenever Larry glanced back.

She opened the front door, stepped into the hall. The vacuum cleaner's whine came from the library now. Just as she reached the foot of the stairs, the telephone on the hall table rang.

SOMEHOW knowing whose voice she would hear, she picked up the phone. "Hello."

"Ann," Jim said, "I've got to see you."

She was surprised at the evenness of her own voice. "All-right."

"I just now woke up, but I can be there in twenty minutes."

"All right," she said again, and hung up.

She went into the library. Above the vacuum's whine she said, "Never mind finishing that, Mrs. Talbot. You can go now."

"Look. You promised me four hours work each time I . . ."

"I know. And it's not your fault you're not staying this time, so you'll be paid the full amount."

Mrs. Talbot looked long and curiously at Ann's stricken face, at the paper still clutched in her hand. Then, shrugging, she flipped the lever on the vacuum and walked over to disconnect the cord.

Mrs. Talbot had left the house by the time that Ann, watching from the living room windows, saw Jim's gray coupe stop at the curb. Her mouth dry, her heart pounding, she walked into the hall and opened the front door as he came up the steps.

His face looked tired in the bright sunlight, but his blue eyes were smiling. He said, "Hello, beautiful."

She swallowed to ease the dryness of her mouth. "Come in, Jim. We can talk in the den."

She walked ahead of him to the little room off the library, closed the door behind them. "Sit down, Jim."

He didn't seem to hear her. Looking down at her face, pale and strained as she sat in one of the leather arm chairs, he said, "You're still upset about my trouble with Gordon yesterday, aren't you?"

For a moment she didn't know what he was talking about. In her shock over Larry Gretson's death, she'd almost forgotten the quarrel between Jim and her brother yesterday afternoon.

Jim sat down in the armchair opposite her, leaned forward earnestly. "Listen, darling, I thought this thing out thoroughly

last night, and I decided that it was pretty stiff-necked of me not to tell you yesterday what the trouble was all about."

"You don't have to tell me," she said, her voice flat. "Gordon told me. Four years ago your sister killed a boy in a hit-and-run accident, and then smashed into a telephone pole and was killed. Somehow you got the notion that it was Gordon driving the car that night, just because you found some torn-up letters in her fireplace that might have been from him."

His face hardened a little. "I found one letter she *didn't* tear up, evidently the last letter she ever got from him. Want to see it?"

HE TOOK out his wallet, handed her a folded sheet of paper. As she opened it she noticed that the paper was slightly yellowed, and the creases worn. She read the brief, typewritten paragraph:

Dear Mary:

Received your letter. Since you insist, I'll drive up to New Haven Tuesday night, but don't see any point in it. As I told you over the phone four nights ago, I've been engaged for sometime to a girl here in New York. You and I've had a nice time together these past few months, and no harm done, so why try to drag the thing out? Why can't we part friends?

It was signed with a typewritten G. She read the brief, brutal note twice, and then handed it back to Jim. Silently she acknowledged that Gordon *could* have written such a letter. Like many weak and self-indulgent people, he could be ruthless with those whose love for him made them vulnerable to his cruelty. But that didn't mean Gordon *had* written it. Anyone could have typed that note. Jim could have done it for some purpose of his own. Don't trust him, she told herself.

Jim said, his voice tinged with bitter-

ness, "Perhaps you noticed that although he says he'd been engaged to another girl for some time, he hadn't bothered to tell Mary about it until four nights before he wrote this letter. And I suppose you noticed that the letter was dated the twelfth, which was a Sunday, and that he wrote that he'd see her Tuesday. The accident was Tuesday night.

"But that isn't my chief reason for believing that it wasn't Mary driving the car that night," he went on. "My chief reason is that I *knew* her. She never drove fast, and she was about the most tender-hearted person I've ever known. She would never have hit that boy and then just driven on. I figure that Gordon was driving—back to New Haven from some roadhouse where they'd gone to talk—and that he was driving fast because he was drunk or mad or both.

"But I thought the whole thing through last night, and I decided that nothing, not even the satisfaction of forcing Gordon to admit the truth, would be worth risking my happiness with you. I want to forget the whole thing. I've talked this much about it only because I want you to realize why I felt so bitter toward Gordon—and toward you, too, at first, until I found out that you weren't at all like him, and probably didn't know anything about him and Mary.

"She was such a nice kid, Ann. Gay and high-spirited and yet gentle. And she was only eighteen, just the age to fall hard for a handsome guy like Gordon. She never wrote to me about being in love. I had no idea that there had been anyone special in her life until I read those torn-up letters. I suppose he'd persuaded her that, for one reason or another, it was necessary to keep it a secret. She was just trusting enough to believe any sort of story he'd tell her."

He paused momentarily, and then burst out, "She was my sister, Ann, and she was a nice kid. If she had to die, she deserved to die clean, not with a coroner's verdict

that she'd killed a boy and then driven on."

She looked at him steadily. Did he really believe that Gordon had deceived his sister while she was alive, and after her death had shifted to her the responsibility for a contemptible crime?

YESTERDAY, even though she might not have been fully convinced of Gordon's guilt, she would have believed in Jim's good faith, and her understanding and sympathy would have gone out to him. But today everything had changed. Today there was that newspaper with the black headline hidden in the desk drawer a few inches from her hand. That headline made her distrust anything he might say.

She said crisply, "I'm sorry about your sister's death. And I'm sorry for Gordon's part in it—if he really did have a part in it. But as you say, all that happened a long time ago. We have something of more immediate importance to discuss." She paused. "Have you seen this afternoon's paper?"

There was puzzlement in his eyes. "Why, no. I'd just woke up when I called you, and I hurried over here so fast I had no time for anything but a cup of coffee. What is it, Ann?" he asked, his voice sharpening. "What's happened?"

For answer she opened the desk drawer, handed him the newspaper. He looked at the headline, lifted startled eyes to her face, and then turned to the inside page. She watched him as he read. Either he was a very good actor, or until now he had known nothing of Larry Gretson's death, because his face reflected only shocked, troubled surprise.

He said, foreboding in his voice, "Are you mixed up in this, Ann? Were you with him when it happened?"

"No. I left him in the park last night and came home alone." She paused, and then said swiftly, "Where were you last night?"

"Ann!" His voice sounded stunned. He

reached over and covered her hand with his. "What are you driving at?"

His touch, reminding her of how last night she had counted so much on his love, his reassurance, made her feel weak. She jerked her hand away from his. "I want to know where you were! I called your apartment half a dozen times between midnight and three o'clock."

"I was at a bar! Several bars, if you must know. It wasn't until I left the last one, along about four o'clock closing time, that I decided to hell with trying to get even with Gordon, to hell with anything that could come between me and my girl. Ann, you can't believe I had anything to do with Gretson's death! Why should I want to kill him?"

"I don't know. I just know that while we were having dinner he tried to warn me against you. He said he didn't think it was a good idea for me to see so much of you."

"Of course he didn't. He wanted you to see a lot of him."

"It wasn't just that. He was afraid of something. When we walked through the park he kept looking back over his shoulder. He was going to tell me something. And I think he was killed to keep him from telling me."

Jim's voice was sharp. "To keep him from telling you what?"

"That it wasn't a nightmare I had at the Sayville Hotel that night. It was real!" Her voice was high and fast now. "I know it was real, because I saw the scar on his neck, the same scar that the man in the pirate costume had in my dream. It was . . ."

"Take it easy!" Then, more quietly: "Tell me exactly what happened last night."

SHE TOLD HIM. The dinner at the Chateau Yquem. Larry's uneasy manner. Their walk through the park. Her discovery of the scar on his neck, and then

her wild flight back over the shadowed path to the safety of Central Park West.

"He was going to tell me the truth about that night at the Sayville. I know he was because after I'd seen the scar on his neck and blurted out that I knew it hadn't been a dream, he said, 'I meant to tell you. I decided I had to. That clipping . . .' And then I jerked away from him and ran."

Jim said, in that same sharp voice, "What clipping did he mean?"

"A clipping about you. A clipping from a gossip column saying you and I had been going around together. It was because I was seeing you that he felt he had to tell me the truth. But someone killed him to make sure he wouldn't. Maybe someone who followed us from the Chateau Yquem." She paused, and then said swiftly, "You knew I was meeting him there."

His face was very pale now. He said, his voice grim, "I haven't the slightest idea why finding out that you and I have been seeing each other would make Larry want to tell you the truth about that night at the Sayville. And as for my knowing where you were to meet him last night, others could have known, too, including your brother."

"Gordon? He didn't know. I didn't tell him."

"He was alone here in the den when you made the date with Gretson over the hall phone. And there's an extension phone right there on the desk."

Her eyes darted to the phone, then to his face. She said, her voice shaking, "Are you accusing my brother of doing anything so . . ."

"You're the one who started the accusing. I'm just showing you how easy it is. And it would be a lot easier to hang this on your brother than on me. Newspapermen can throw a lot of weight in this town, when they want to. And Gordon hasn't been exactly a solid citizen these past four years."

She stared at him bitterly. "Larry once called you a bully and a blackmailer. He was right. You don't want me to go to the police, and so you're threatening to involve Gordon in all this."

"You bet I don't want you to go to the police! Do you know who would be the first suspect? You! You were alone with him there in the park. And if you say he was still alive when you ran away, they'll ask why you ran. Then you'll either have to lie, or to tell them you were afraid because of another murder you and Gretson were involved in a week ago. And there *was* a murder a week ago. The fact that Gretson was killed last night makes me sure of it."

He paused and then said, "Don't you see you're up to your ears in trouble? It won't take the police long to find out there was a girl with Gretson last night. The waiters at the restaurant will notify the police as soon as they see his picture in the paper."

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So will the cab driver who took you to the park. You're going to let me try to straighten this thing out before the police get hold of you. You're going to do just as I say, and if it takes what you call bullying and blackmail to make you do it, then that's what I'll use." After a moment he added, "Now I want you to tell me all over again everything you can remember about the dream you had at the Sayville that night."

FOR A LONG moment she looked at his hard, determined face. Could she trust him? Suddenly she realized she had no alternative. As he had said, a newspaperman, particularly one connected with the politically powerful *Chronicle*, had a lot of influence. He knew enough about her to have her behind bars in twenty minutes, if he chose to. Nor would there be any point in refusing to discuss that nightmarish party in the coldwater flat. If he were involved in the case, he already knew the details better than she did. And if he weren't, if he were really trying to protect and help her now, then together they might uncover some significant point she had overlooked.

He said, "Talk fast, Ann. We haven't much time."

Hands clasped in her lap, she went over the story, from the time she had opened the door to see the shadowy figure in the turned-down hat brim standing in the hall at the Sayville, to the time the man in the pirate costume had led her through tenement flat's kitchen door to the fire escape.

At last Jim said flatly, "You must have been drugged."

"But I couldn't have been! I was all right when I went to the hotel that night, and I didn't eat or drink anything after I got there."

"Just the same, you must have been drugged. Otherwise you'd never have left the hotel in the middle of the night, with a man whose face you couldn't even see. Now think, Ann. Haven't you left out

something? We know now that the man in the pirate costume was Larry Gretson, but can't you remember anything that might tell us who the others were, or where that coldwater flat is?"

Tensely she shook her head. "I've told you everything. No, wait. The next day, when I went over the whole thing in my mind, I had the feeling that I'd done something, something important, just before I went to bed, but try as I would I couldn't remember what it was. And another thing. In my purse the next morning, along with that key, I found a small glass vial with a glass stopper. It was empty, but it had had perfume in it. A kind of perfume I never wore in my life."

"What did you do with the vial?"

"It's in the drawer of my dressing table."

"Get it. And get that key, too."

She stood up, left the room. When she came back in a few minutes later she silently handed him the small bottle. He took out the stopper, sniffed. "Do you recognize this perfume?"

"No, and I know most of the leading brands."

He said, staring at the vial, "This is where the drugs came from, Ann. Out of this bottle, probably in capsules. You swallowed them before you went to bed that night at the Sayville. That's the important thing you did, but couldn't quite remember."

"But why should I have taken drugs I didn't even know I had? And if I took them, why can't I remember it?"

He slipped the vial into his pocket. "I don't know."

Going to the desk, he picked up the phone. As he dialed, Ann asked, "Who are you calling?"

"The lab at police headquarters." Then, into the phone: "Is that you, Al?— This is Hastings, of the *Chronicle*. Say, Al, if I brought you a bottle that had had perfume in it, could you give me an idea of

the ingredients just by the smell?— Cut the wisecracks. This is important.—Well, do you know anyone who could?” He pulled a memo pad toward him, scribbled on it. “Thanks, Al,” he said; and hung up.

He stood there for a moment more, then lifted the phone again and dialed. “Doc?” he said finally. “This is Hastings, of the *Chronicle*. Any unidentifieds in the last few days?—No, women.—Yesterday, huh? Well, what’s the dope so far?—Okay, Doc. I’ll call you back later for a full report.”

H HE HUNG up and turned to Ann. His face was pale, but his voice was quiet, controlled. “I’m going to call this chemist who specializes in perfume. The police lab says he may be able to tell us where it came from. While I’m telephoning, you’d better get your coat. We’ve got to get out of here before you have callers.”

When she came downstairs a few minutes later, her face whiter than ever above her dark coat, he was waiting in the hall. “The man I want to see isn’t in his office right now,” he said. “I’ll park you someplace and then go and wait for him.”

They left the house. As Jim opened the gate she saw his quick glance up and down the street. For the first time the thought that she might be in serious trouble with the police really hit her. She imagined the official car stopping at the curb; the men with the noncommittal faces walking up to the front door.

Jim handed her into the gray coupe. For several blocks they drove in silence. Then she burst out, “What if I killed that woman in the mermaid costume?”

His voice was rough. “Don’t talk nonsense.”

“But what if I did? Those scissors were in my hand.”

“Someone put them there. You were drugged. You didn’t know what was happening.”

“But that’s just it. If I were drugged, I might have done it.”

He said quietly, after a long moment, “All right, maybe you killed her. Cocaine or heroin can do funny things to people. But let’s not cross that bridge until we come to it.”

He drove in silence for another few blocks. Then he said worriedly, “I wish I could figure out a safe place to leave you. My apartment’s no good. If your brother happens to be home when the cops come he’ll tell them you may be out with me, and so my apartment will be the first place they’ll look.”

Ann said sickly, knowing for the first time in her life what it felt like to be hunted, “How about some café?”

“No. Even after the chemist gets back to his lab it may take him some time to give his report. You’d be conspicuous, waiting alone in a restaurant for an hour or more. And in the meantime the later editions of the papers may come out with your picture.”

His voice trailed off. Then, as he waited for the traffic light at Forty-second Street to change, he said, “Got it! The public library. Go in the genealogy room. The people in there are too busy tracing dead ancestors to notice anyone who’s walking around alive.”

He drove over to Fifth, stopped before the broad steps with their flanking marble lions. “Wait for me and keep your chin up,” he said.

FIVE MINUTES later she sat at a long table in the genealogy room, head bent over a copy of *History of Bucks County*. The only other person at the table, a dried-up little man with a pince-nez, had given her an annoyed look as she sat down, and then returned his attention to the charts and periodicals spread out before him.

She read automatically with no idea of what she read. She felt physically sick with inner conflict. Desperately she wanted to trust Jim, wanted to believe that he loved her and was racing against time to discover

the truth before she fell into the hands of the police. But her doubts of him remained. Where was he going now? She couldn't be sure he had even telephoned a chemist because she had been upstairs putting on her coat when he supposedly made the call. And was it for her sake or his own that he had been so anxious to keep her away from the police?

The minutes dragged past. Sometimes, when she remembered to, she turned a page. Once she got up, replaced *Bucks County*, and took down another book at random. Outside the long windows the light of the brief November afternoon was beginning to fade. The little man with the pince-nez replaced his charts in his briefcase, returned the periodicals to the desk, and left the room.

The overhead lights came on. Ann felt a cold, despairing certainty. Jim wasn't coming back. Long since he had taken a train from Grand Central or a plane from La Guardia Field. And she would sit here until some strange man with a hard, controlled face should tap her on the shoulder and say, "Ann Marleigh? Come with me."

Someone was walking toward her chair. Her head jerked up. Jim looked down at her with a smile which only emphasized the tension in his blue eyes.

Her relief was so great that she wanted more than anything in the world to throw herself in his arms and raise her lips for his kiss. Instead she got up silently, replaced the book on the reference shelf, and walked with him from the room.

AS THEY went down the wide front steps into the early dark, Jim said, "I'm sorry I was gone so long. It didn't take the chemist five minutes to give an opinion after he got there, but I had to wait two hours for him. He says that the base of the perfume that was in the bottle isn't French. It's Arabic. And there's only one man in New York who imports that particular base and blends perfume from it."

He opened the door of the gray coupe. Ann asked, "Where are we going?"

"Down to the importer's, a Mr. Christopolous. His place is on Hester Street on the lower East Side."

The car moved down Fifth Avenue, past the jewel-like windows of the fashionable shops, to where Fifth Avenue crosses Broadway. Following Broadway east, they stopped, finally, just a stone's throw from the Bowery.

Mr. Christopolous' shop, a tiny place with a long counter displaying bottles of perfume, was two doors from the corner. As they entered, a short, swarthy man appeared from behind a curtain at the rear of the room. "I'm not taking any more orders tonight," he said.

"We're not customers," Jim answered. "We just want some information. Are you Mr. Christopolous?"

The man's dark eyes regarded them warily. "I am."

Jim took the glass vial from his pocket, held it out. "Did you blend this perfume?"

Mr. Christopolous unstopped the bottle, bent his dark head over it. "Yes, I blended this for one of my customers."

"Would you mind telling us who?"

"Sorry. I don't divulge information concerning my customers."

Jim took a bill from his wallet, creased it, and held it on the counter between his first two fingers. "Would this change your mind?"

"Mrs. Irene Vilnos, eighteen East Sixty-first Street," he said. He had deftly picked up the bill and pocketed it before he added, "But you won't find her there. I think she went to Europe six months ago."

Taking Ann's arm, Jim led her out to the sidewalk. "Do you know this Vilnos woman?" he asked.

"I met her once at Clyde Cavanaugh's. She looked like the sort of woman who'd wear a perfume like that—you know, dark, exotic, lots of jewelry."

"Come on."

He led her to the tobacco store on the corner and went into the phone booth. When he emerged he was frowning. "Maybe she is in Europe. Her phone has been disconnected."

"Clyde might know where she is."

"We'll try him, anyway."

TWENTY minutes later, they stopped before Clyde's tall brownstone on the upper East Side. As usual, the house was blazing with lights from top to bottom. Horace, Clyde's houseman, opened the door as soon as they rang.

"Hello, Horace. Is Mr. Cavanaugh in?" Ann asked.

"Not at the moment, Miss Marleigh." As always, Ann was struck by the contrast between his villainous visage, with its flattened nose and small, squinty eyes, and the polite precision of his speech. "I expect him back shortly, though."

"Do you mind if we wait in the den?"

He hesitated momentarily, glancing at Jim, and then said, "I suppose that would be all right, Miss Marleigh."

With Jim she climbed the two flights of stairs to the huge, brilliantly-lighted room which Clyde called his den. Jim said, looking about him curiously, "If he isn't home, why are all the lights on?"

"It's one of his phobias. He can't stand walking into a darkened room. He's never been to the movies because of it."

"Are you sure? If I ever saw a room that was early Cecil B. De Mille, this is it. Chinese chairs, Persian rugs, African masks on the walls, crimson silk curtains, jade elephants . . ."

Abruptly he broke off, saying "What's outside those windows?"

Her pulses quickened in response to something in his face. "A balcony."

Striding across the room, he opened one of the long French doors hidden by the crimson silk draperies and closed it behind him. When he came back in a moment later his face looked hard and grim.

"Jim! What is it?"

"I think I know where your tenement flat is."

She whispered sickly, "Where?"

"Come on. We'll see if I'm right."

They went down the long flights of stairs. Horace stood in the library doorway, his ex-pugilist's face upturned to watch their descent. "You've decided not to wait, Miss Marleigh?"

Jim answered for her. "We've forgotten something. We may be back, though."

They went down the steps and got into the car. At the corner Jim turned right, drove half a block, and then, to her surprise, eased the car into the curb. "We can walk from here," he said.

Ann didn't answer. Her mouth felt dry, her throat constricted. They walked to the drugstore on the corner, turned right along the street one block south of Clyde's. As often happens in New York, where slum children play stickball within sight of swankily uniformed apartment house doormen a few hundred feet away, this street was very different from the one a block north. Garbage cans stood at the curb. Scrawled words and chalked pictures defaced the brownstone tenement fronts. An occasional man or woman, sitting on worn front steps, gazed at them silently as they passed.

Jim stopped before one of the houses. "Three-nineteen," he said. "This ought to be it."

On legs that felt numb, Ann walked with him up the steps. In the dirty little foyer Jim pushed the bell marked "Superintendent."

A slatternly woman with frizzy brown hair opened the door. "Well?" she demanded.

LOOKING past her into the ill-lighted hall, Ann felt dizzy and cold. This was the house of her nightmare. The same poisonous green walls, the same narrow stairs leading upward.

Jim said, "Is your third-floor rear apartment vacant?"

"No, it ain't!" she said, and started to close the door.

He blocked the door with his foot. "Who lives there?"

"None of your business. And get your foot out of my door."

"Are they home now?"

"I ain't talking! Now beat it."

Obviously she wasn't talking. This was no Mr. Christopolous, alert for the proffered bill. This woman, evidently, had found that silence in the long run was more profitable than speech.

Taking out his wallet, Jim extracted a card, held it out to her for a second, and then replaced it. He said, "We want to inspect that apartment."

The woman's face blanched. "I don't want no trouble," she babbled, opening the door wide. "I just rent apartments. A man comes along, says he won't be using the place often, and offers me a little money on the side. I don't know what goes on. If people who look like they belong on Park Avenue want to come to parties in a dump like this, is it my business?"

He said grimly, "Do you have a pass key?"

"Sure, sure!" She fumbled in the pocket of her dirty apron. Bringing out a bunch of Yale keys, she detached one and handed it to him. "It's apartment 3-D. And whatever the trouble is, just remember I didn't know nothing about it."

Jim took Ann's arm. They climbed the stairs to the second floor. As they walked along the narrow corridor, between the green walls of her nightmare, it seemed to her that again they leaned smotheringly close. When she spoke it was less out of curiosity than out of the need to reassure herself that this time she was not dreaming or drugged, and that it was Jim who walked beside her, not the faceless man with the turned down hat brim. She asked, "What frightened that woman?"

"My police pass. I was pretty sure she wouldn't recognize it as the kind every reporter carries. She just saw the word 'Police,' and my picture, and jumped to the conclusion that I was a cop."

They had reached the third floor now. He fitted the key in the lock of 3-D, swung the door back. His fingers, groping along the wall just inside the door, found the light switch. A naked overhead bulb glared down on a room she dimly remembered. An upright piano. Two floor lamps. Chairs and a divan and scattered tables. Without a radio or books or magazines, it looked strangely impersonal. Not a living room, but just a room in which to give parties.

Her heart a sick, frantic drum within her, she walked with him across the living room, down a narrow hall. To the left a door yawned blackly. She whispered, "Here."

HE REACHED inside the door, flipped on that light. Instantly her gaze shot to the closet door at the foot of the narrow, khaki-blanketed cot.

Jim said quietly, "Give me that key."

Fingers numb, she opened her handbag and held out the key. "Stay here," he said. Walking across the room, he fitted the key in the lock. She heard a click, and the door swung back.

For a moment he stood there, tall form hiding the closet's interior. Then he said, "Don't be afraid. Come on over."

On shaking legs she crossed the room and stood beside him. There was nothing in the closet, not even a coat hanger. Then Jim jerked the light string dangling from the closet ceiling. They looked down at the gray, shining paint of the closet floor.

Jim said, "The floor's as clean as a whistle. People don't scrub a closet floor and leave the others dirty unless they've got a good reason—like bloodstains."

Abruptly he got down on one knee. "Have you got a bobbie pin?"

Taking a bobbie pin from her hair, she held it out to him. With the pin in his right hand he deftly removed something from between the baseboard and the wall, and let it fall into his left hand. He got to his feet. She looked down at the two silver-green sequins glittering on the palm of his hand.

He said, "Your mermaid was in that closet, all right."

Her lips felt numb. "Where . . . ?"

"Where did they take her? The East River, I'm almost sure. Remember that second phone call I made at your house this afternoon? I was calling the morgue. They pulled an unidentified woman out of the river late yesterday. They think she'd been in the water about a week. Their autopsy wasn't finished this afternoon. When we leave here I'll call them for a full report."

He turned off the closet light and closed the door. Ann said thinly, "But how did you find this place?"

He stepped to the window and drew back the flimsy curtain. "Remember telling me that you saw a wall of fire outside this room that night? Well, at Cavanaugh's a few minutes ago it suddenly hit me that to a drugged person a solid expanse of color like that, with light shining through it, might seem to shimmer and throb, like a sheet of flame."

She looked at the huge rectangle of scarlet light suspended in the darkness outside. But now it was no longer a pulsating wall of fire, but only the floor-to-ceiling silk curtains of Clyde's den a hundred feet away, with the lights blazing brightly behind them.

She said dazedly, "When I was at Clyde's yesterday I was within a few feet of this place, and yet I never dreamed . . ."

Taking her arm, Jim led her from the flat and down the narrow stairs. There was no sign of the slatternly woman in the hallway. Outside the house they turned toward the street where they had left the

car. When they reached the drugstore on the corner he said, "I'm going to call the morgue and check on that autopsy."

SHE WAITED in the drugstore until he emerged. "I guess she was the one, all right," he said, walking with Ann toward the car. "Not that they can tell much when they've been in the water that long. She was a blonde, probably between twenty-five and thirty. She was wearing just a dress, and there were no labels or dry cleaning tags in it. But there were traces of green polish around the cuticle of her fingernails."

Ann remembered the mermaid's green talons reaching out, grasping her arms.

Jim said, as they got in the car, "When we get back to Cavanaugh's don't let that houseman see you're upset."

Horace was longer in answering their ring this time. When he opened the door he was not in his white jacket but in street clothes, with a soft felt hat in his hand.

He said, "Oh, Miss Marleigh. Mr. Cavanaugh hasn't returned, and I'm just leaving. This is my night off, you know."

She said, trying to keep her voice steady and natural, "May we wait for him?" Then, as the houseman hesitated: "You know Mr. Cavanaugh wouldn't mind. Not in my case."

Something flickered in Horace's eyes. "Yes, I know he's always glad to see you, Miss Marleigh."

He opened the door wide and they stepped past him into the hall. "Good-night," he said politely, and closed the front door behind him.

Jim asked, moving toward the stairs, "Where's Cavanaugh's bedroom?"

"Just off his den."

On the third floor they walked through the room with the scarlet curtains and entered the bedroom. Here the furnishings were luxurious but far more restrained. Shaded lamps on each side of the low, modern bed shone on the white pine bureau

and the handblocked curtains, on the big wardrobe with its sliding doors. Jim went straight to the wardrobe and slid the doors back.

Standing up in one corner at the end of the row of neatly hanging suits, was a huge white box with the words "Inter-Borough Costumers" printed on the lid. As Jim dragged it from the wardrobe the lid fell off and a mass of dark fur tumbled out onto the beige carpet, the glass eyes of the bear's head fixed in their insane glare, the tusks of the open mouth glistening in the lamplight.

Ann's self-control broke completely. She gave a thin little wail, the back of her hand pressed to her teeth. And then Jim's left arm was holding her close and his right hand was drawing her hand away from her mouth. "Baby, baby! Don't!"

She said brokenly, "I never stopped loving you, not for a minute. And yet I distrusted you. I thought maybe it was you who—and it was Clyde. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Honey! What do you mean, forgive you? I love you."

He tilted her chin and his mouth came down on hers, warm, tender, infinitely reassuring. Her hands locked tightly around his neck. For a moment there was no terror, no bewilderment, nothing but the blessed certainty of their love.

A slight sound came from the doorway. Breaking free, Ann whirled around. Clyde stood in the bedroom doorway, an odd, old-fashioned looking gun in his hand.

A LUDICROUS expression of surprise and relief crossed his face. He lowered the gun, pressed a plump hand to his heart, and said, "Ann! You gave me a dreadful turn. I thought you were burglars!"

He laid the gun on the bureau. Ann recognized it as an Eighteenth Century duelling pistol, probably completely useless, from his collection in the third floor hall. "Whatever are you doing?" he asked, his

gaze dropping to the mass of dark fur on the carpet. "Are you on a treasure hunt?"

Ann said, in a strained, high voice, "Clyde, what is that on the floor?"

"Well, it won't bite you, sweetie, if that's what you're afraid of. It's a costume. I wore it to a masquerade costume last week. I was an enormous success."

She stared at him, feeling a bewildering sense of unreality. There was no guilt or alarm in his face. It looked, as always, plump, complacent, and completely candid.

He was looking at Jim. "Don't I know you?"

"I'm Hastings, of the *Chronicle*."

"Oh, yes. One of the reporters who came to my party to see that Hindu do his rope trick. And then the wretch didn't even show up. I couldn't have been more humiliated. But come into the den, you two, and tell me how it is that I find you smooching in my boudoir. And please make the explanation amusing. I've had a dull day."

Puzzled and uncertain, Ann went with the two men into the den. Fussily Clyde seated her and Jim in low chairs beside one of the Chinese tables.

"Now stay right there while I pour out some of that perfectly sensational North African wine." He walked to the liquor cabinet, opened the doors. Back turned, he chattered on. "I was going to give you a taste of it the other day, Ann, remember? And then that phone call came, and I had to shoo you out."

Carrying a silver tray, he came back across the room and set three fragile-stemmed glasses on the lacquered table. Pulling a hassock close to the table, he sat down. "There!" he said. "It begins to look like a party." He opened a pearl-inlaid cigarette box. "Cigarette, anyone?"

Ann took one of the cork-tipped cigarettes, leaned toward the gold lighter Clyde held out to her. "Thank you," she said automatically. Then, as she leaned back in her chair, the cigarette slipped from her

unsteady fingers to the oriental carpeting.

MY RUG!" Clyde shrieked. Instantly he was off the hassock and down on his knees. Ann too bent over, picking up the cigarette, brushing at the carpet with her fingers.

"I'm sorry, Clyde. But see, it isn't burned, really it isn't?"

"No," he said, getting to his feet, "I guess there's no damage. But do try to be more careful, darling."

Ann's sense of bewilderment increased. Clyde was the same as always—talkative, hospitable, but old-maidishly concerned about his possessions. There was some mistake. He couldn't be the one who had dragged a dead or dying woman across the floor and locked her in a closet.

Seated on the hassock once more, Clyde sipped his drink and then waited, eyes bright with anticipation, for their reaction. "It tastes very good," Ann said.

"Strong," Jim commented. "More like a liqueur than a wine."

"Exactly!" Clyde beamed. "And it cost me only fourteen dollars a case. But now, my dears, tell Uncle Clyde how you happened to be rummaging through his wardrobe."

"First," Jim said evenly, "we have some questions for you, Mr. Cavanaugh. How is it that your masquerade party was held in a tenement flat?"

"Well, we all thought it an amusing idea. Sybaritic revels among the proletariat, and all." He broke off abruptly. "How did you know where the party was? It's supposed to be a secret."

Jim said, "Guessed it when Ann and I were here earlier this evening." He got to his feet and walked over to the scarlet curtains. "You oughtn't to leave your lights on, Mr. Cavanaugh. These windows are in a direct line with those of the flat opposite." He jerked a tasseled cord, and the curtains parted slightly. "Yes, in a direct line."

He stood there for a moment, back turned, looking out into the darkness. Then raising his wine glass, he tilted his red head. He made a choking sound. "Good lord! That stuff is strong."

"You're supposed to sip it," Clyde said, with some asperity, "not gulp it down as if it were beer. But how was it, Mr. Hastings, that you and Ann were here earlier this evening?"

Jim turned and came back to the table. "We came to see you about a certain perfume bottle. We learned that it had once held perfume blended for a friend of yours, a Mrs. Irene Vilnos."

Clyde smiled. "Ah, yes. Dear Irene and that suffocating perfume of hers. She brought me a vial of it to put in a steam brazier one night when I was giving an Ancient Egypt party. But why all this interest in perfumes?"

"We'll get to that. But first, what did you mean when you said 'we' thought it would be an amusing idea to hold parties in a coldwater flat? Who is 'we'?"

Clyde glanced at his guests' almost empty wine glasses, but made no move to refill them. "Well, the cult members, mainly. Perhaps you've heard about our cult? It's ideals are high, really, very high. But sometimes some of the members get the wrong ideas, and act upon them. In such cases it's very easy to get proof of their—regrettable activities. And that, of course, helps me in my business."

JIM ASKED, "Just what is your business, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

Clyde sipped his drink before replying. "Shakespeare, quite accurately, once referred to this as a 'naughty world,' Mr. Hastings. In one way or another, I learn of people's naughtiness. Now I don't like to be a gossip, and so I'm always able to be persuaded to keep quiet."

Ann stared at him unbelievably. Jim said, "In other words, you're a black-mailer."

Clyde shrugged. "I have expensive tastes, Mr. Hastings, and the money I inherited ran out long ago. Besides, people *will* confide in me." He turned to Ann. "Your brother, for instance. Did you know that Gordon ran down some yokel in a Connecticut village four years ago? It would have been manslaughter if they'd caught him. Gordon, though, got away with it. Fastened the blame on the girl he was with. Not that it mattered to her, because she was dead. But after Gordon had been so very clever, he had to succumb to remorse and alcohol. One day he came to me, very much in his cups, and babbled out the whole story."

Ann said, feeling sick, "So that's where all of the money from Aunt Julia's bonds went. He's been paying you blackmail."

She turned, face white, to Jim. Silently her eyes said, Try to forgive Gordon for what he did to your sister. And try to forgive me for doubting you when you told me about it.

Jim said, almost as if she had spoken aloud, "It's all in the past, Ann. And Gordon's had to pay for it."

Yes, she agreed silently, thinking of what her brother's life had been these past four years, Gordon had paid for it.

Turning to Clyde, she asked in that same sick voice, "And you were the one who played that monstrous trick on me, weren't you? How did you do it? How did you have me brought to that party?"

Clyde smiled. "Your Mr. Hastings seems so clever. Maybe he's figured that out, too."

"I think I have," Jim said evenly. "The afternoon of the masquerade party, you had her look at the flashing light behind that miniature idol over there until, as she phrased it, she almost went to sleep. I think she *did* go to sleep. You hypnotized her, and by post-hypnotic suggestion you induced her to take some sort of drugs at a certain hour that night, drugs in capsule form you'd placed in the perfume vial."

CLYDE said appreciatively, "You *are* good, Mr. Hastings. I salute your perception."

Ann said, her voice low, "Then I suppose it wasn't an accident that I was called to that awful Times Square Hotel that night."

"Of course not, darling. I knew Gordon was there, fighting one of his three-day bouts with guilt and alcohol. And poor Larry Gretson, of course, was managing the place. I suppose that's why Gordon hid out there so often. Since Larry was another—er—client of mine, they had something in common. Do you want to know how Larry became my client? Well, I found out that while he was at Yale . . ."

"I don't want to hear about it!" Ann cried. "I just want to know how you got me to that hotel."

"Why, I just phoned Larry—it was his night off—and told him to call the desk clerk and give him orders to call you, on the grounds that Gordon was getting out of hand. Once you were there, everything worked beautifully. You took the drug right on schedule, evidently, and then forgot about it completely, just as I'd told you under hypnosis that you would do. Then Horace knocked at your door and brought you to the party."

"Horace!" So it had been Clyde's houseman who, hat pulled low over his face, had driven her through the dreamlike streets to the terrors of the masquerade party.

"Yes, Horace. He's not only a servant, but a friend and confidant as well. In fact, he's the one who rented our party flat from that untidy harridan on the next street."

"But why? Why did you want me brought there?"

"Several reasons. First, I wanted to test my ability at post-hypnotic suggestion. It's only recently that I've been experimenting with that sort of thing. Too, I thought it

a good way of managing the problem of how to get you to take cocaine for the first time. And also, it amused me to have the upright Ann Marleigh to a party she would have walked out on immediately if she had been in her normal state."

He was smiling, but his eyes were cold. She thought, He hates me; he's always hated me, because I'm not corrupt like him, or sick and wretched like Gordon.

Clyde continued; "Everything went beautifully until my dear, dear ex-wife showed up. She took it into her head to divulge all my clever little plans to you. I lost my head, I suppose, or maybe it's just that she's irritated me so dreadfully all these years. Anyway, I picked those scissors up off the dresser and stabbed her. Almost immediately, of course, I was in complete control of myself again, and so I put the scissors into your hand."

Jim said, his voice hard, "On the theory that if she did remember any of it the next day, and if she couldn't bring herself to dismiss it as a dream, she'd be afraid that *she* was the one who'd committed murder. You figured that that would be enough to keep her quiet."

EXACTLY," Clyde said.

Through her sick horror Ann felt a certain relief. At least she knew for sure now that she hadn't stabbed Geraldine . . .

"Geraldine!" she said aloud. "Did you say it was Geraldine? But it couldn't have been. She telephoned you just yesterday while I was here."

"No, dear," Clyde contradicted smilingly, "I merely said it was Geraldine. As a matter of fact it was Larry Gretson, all in a swivet. About you. He was terribly smitten with you, poor lad, from the night of the masquerade party onward. For instance, after I'd put Geraldine in the closet that night, his first thought was to get you out of that tenement house. He took you down to the car, then came back for his overcoat to put over his costume, and then

drove you to the back entrance of the hotel and told you to go up to your room and go to bed. But Larry told me you didn't remember that part of it."

"No," Ann said, "I didn't remember that part of it."

"We couldn't leave poor Geraldine there in the closet, of course," Clyde went on chattily, "so after Larry took you away, I shooed the guests out of the flat. They were so addled that probably they wouldn't have noticed even if Horace and I had carried Geraldine right through the living room, but I thought it best to take no chances. After they'd gone, Horace and I carried Geraldine down the fire escape and through the back entrance to this house. I substituted for that absurd mermaid costume one of the dresses from a trunk she'd left here when she decided to divorce me. Then Horace and I drove her down to the East River. And so, I've cleared up your little mystery," he finished brightly.

"Not quite," Jim said evenly. "There's Larry Gretson. You killed him, didn't you?"

Clyde shrugged. "I had to. As I told you, the poor boy had fallen hard for Ann. In fact, to keep him from doing something utterly mad, such as reporting me to the police, I'd had to promise him to call off my little plan to keep introducing her to the delights of cocaine until she would want to make the acquaintance permanent.

"Then he learned that Ann was seeing a lot of you, Mr. Hastings. He was afraid that you were investigating that 'nightmare' of hers. The infatuated boy wanted to spare Ann the shock of finding out that she'd been present at a murder. He called yesterday afternoon and insisted on coming here to talk to me about it. Unfortunately, just as he turned the corner into this street, he saw you, Ann, leaving the house. He suspected me of not keeping my promise, of intending to put something into your wine—the same wine which both of you have found so enjoyable this evening.

Larry became extremely upset, threatened to tell you the truth no matter what the consequences to himself, and so on. Naturally I had to follow him last night. I had a gun, but luckily when I found him alone on that park bench he was in a dazed condition, evidently from some kind of fall, and so I was able to use a knife, a far quieter weapon."

ANN stared at him in numb disbelief. How was it that she had never glimpsed the evil in Clyde Cavanaugh until tonight? Suddenly she had the answer. Clyde had always taken pains to make himself ridiculous. It is hard to suspect the presence of evil in a man everyone laughs at.

She said, her voice low, "But why? Why did you want to make me into an addict? Just because you've always disliked me?"

"Of course not," he said scornfully. "I had a very practical objective. I want that Shakespeare folio."

She said incredulously, "You mean the one that was supposed to be hidden somewhere in my house? Clyde, you're insane! It isn't there. My aunt had the entire house gone over by experts. The whole thing is just one of those legends that grow up about old families and old houses."

"I disagree," Clyde said stiffly. "I've made some investigations of my own, and I know that a Marleigh bought the folio secretly in Europe over a hundred years ago and brought it home with him, and I believe it's hidden in that house. If your aunt had left the house to your brother rather than you, I'd have had possession a long time ago. But you persist in keeping that sentimental promise to your aunt about not selling it. If my plans had worked out, however, you'd have sold me the house. You'd have done anything I asked, just as Gordon does."

"But Clyde! Even if the folio were there—and it isn't—you'd never have been able to offer it for sale publicly, not without a

lot of difficult questions being asked."

"I wouldn't have sold it publicly. I had a buyer lined up, a multi-millionaire who would pay a staggering price for it and keep it for his own personal enjoyment."

Ann said steadily, "I don't know why you've told us all this, but you realize, don't you, that we're going straight to the police?"

Clyde smiled, "Ann, Ann! You underestimate me. Do you think I'd have told you my little secrets if there were any chance of your repeating them? The cord of the telephone in this room is cut. The door leading into the hall is locked, and the key is hidden. Of course your Mr. Hastings is a husky fellow, and in time would be able to batter down the door. But long before that you will both have fallen flat on your faces. A little something I put in your wine. Not poison. It would be awkward to have you die here. Just something which induces unconsciousness for several hours." He glanced at his watch. "Yes, you should be feeling the effects about now. It never takes more than twenty minutes at the most to work."

She felt it then, the icy cold creeping upward from her hands and feet, the sick pounding of her heart, the constriction of her throat.

"Horace will be back soon," Clyde was saying. "It shouldn't be difficult for us to get two apparently drunken people into your car, Mr. Hastings. Horace will drive your car, and I will follow. Upstate I know of a wooden bridge which crosses a narrow but deep stream. Your car will plunge through the railing, and eventually you will be found in it, beneath fifteen feet of water. Autopsies in that particular county are not as thorough as those in New York City. The chances are overwhelming that the presence of the drug will never be discovered, and that the verdict will be accidental drowning. A very sad thing, a couple so young, so attractive, and with . . ."

HER HEARTBEATS were a steady thunder in her ears now, and she seemed to see Clyde's plump face and the tapestry on the wall behind him through a thickening mist.

And then, rising above the sound of her heartbeats, she heard Jim's voice. "You're the one who's done the underestimating, Cavanaugh. Just as you're the one who's going to fall flat on his face. Over-confidence is your trouble. You're too used to easy victims—alcoholics and near-psychotics and what not. Do you think I'd have drunk anything you served us, or let Ann drink it? When she dropped her cigarette I had the chance to switch her drink with yours, but if she hadn't given me the opportunity, I'd have found some other way to do it. As for my drink, if you'll look closely, you'll find a wine stain on those scarlet curtains of yours. While I was facing the curtains you saw me tilt my head back and raise the glass, and then you heard me cough. But that didn't mean I'd drained my glass, Cavanaugh. You just thought it did."

Clyde's pallor had a greenish tinge. The fingers of his right hand flew to his pulse, rested there. Then, grasping the table's edge, he drew himself up from the hassock and moved uncertainly across the room. Jim rose and followed, keeping a step or two behind the plump, unsteady figure.

As Clyde fumbled in the pocket of his checked vest, sweat was visible on his face. He brought out a tiny key. Stooping over a rosewood table, he turned the key in the lock of a drawer. He pulled the drawer out, pawed frantically inside it. Then, left hand pulling the drawer down with him, he crumpled to the thick carpet.

Jim stepped over the plump figure, lying there in the litter from the overturned drawer, and picked up a door key from the carpet. He fit the key into the lock, turned it, and opened the door into the hall.

Less than ten minutes later Jim and Ann stood in the cool darkness outside Clyde

Cavanaugh's house. Clyde still lay behind the locked door of the den upstairs. A call had been made from the downstairs telephone, and at any moment green and white police cars would be turning the corner.

Drawing the fresh, crisp air deep into her lungs, Ann looked at the lighted windows of a tall apartment house on the East River Drive, and at the frosty glitter of Autumn stars above.

She turned her face up to Jim's. "We're going to be so rich," she said, and she knew that he would understand she didn't mean money. "We're going to be so happy. And I love you so very much."

He didn't answer with words. He held her close in his arms, his lips warm on her soft, responding ones. For a timeless interval even the memory of terror and confusion were gone, and they were just two more lovers, locked in each others arms on a tree-shadowed street.



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Speak for Yourself, John

By
IBBIE ELLIGET

... but when John did speak, it was to the wrong girl!

ON THE MORNING after Lane Enterprises moved to their new offices, the secretary to the president did not sit admiring the unaccustomed splendor. Neither did she attack her work with her usual vigor.

What Rosie Malloy did do was indulge in a flight of fancy. Pointed chin tucked in her palm, she sat there at her desk and dreamed herself all the way to Bermuda. On a honeymoon, no less. She was lying on the beach with John beside her and a big, round tropical moon caressing them, when her practical side stepped in.

It reminded her scornfully, that John Lane had never so much as looked at her with a gleam in his eye. But her willful heart had an answer all ready and waiting. Until now, John hadn't had time for romance. He had been too busy making money. Besides, look at the way he depended on her. He never tackled a problem without first discussing it with her. Hadn't she helped fight all of his battles and celebrate all of his triumphs?

At this point her brand new buzzer purred gently. The polite summons made her smile. All along, she had been certain he'd go right on bellowing, "Rosie," at the top of his lungs. She pushed back her chair

and stood up—a small, neatly made girl with short red hair and gray-green eyes that held both humor and intelligence.

Snatching up notebooks and pencils, she crossed over and pushed open the heavy pickled pine door of his office. But right there, she stopped and began to laugh.

NEW OFFICES or not, John was so completely John.

Coatless, shoes off, feet propped up on a mahogany desk that was almost as big as some of the offices they had worked in, he was leaning back comfortably in his chair. His bright red tie had worked around to a spot just below his left ear, and his dark hair looked as though it had fought a losing battle with a garden rake.

His heavy brows shot up. "Now, what the hell's the matter?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she said when she could catch her breath. "Not a thing. I was just thinking that if one of your new vice-presidents walked in here right now, he'd probably have apoplexy."

To her utter amazement, he jerked his feet off the desk and sheepishly began fumbling for his shoes. She waded across a mile or so of carpet and settled herself in the deep leather chair across from him.