

SMOKY CELL

BY

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Smoky Cell

CHAPTER I

JOSEPHINE BRADY placed the telephone receiver against an undeniably well-shaped ear and said: "Hallo!" with a pair of lips in close proximity to which only a telephone mouthpiece could have remained unmoved.

"Is that you, Miss Brady?"

The voice was rich and deep, like a well-oiled purr; and, as she heard it, a little pucker appeared between Josephine's eyebrows.

"Miss Brady speaking."

"Good evening. It's Mr. Schnitzer this end."

The pucker definitely deepened.

"Oh yes, Mr. Schnitzer?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Miss Brady," continued Schnitzer. "I guess a stenographer hears enough of her employer's voice during office hours and won't be smiling with pleasure to hear it now, eh?"

She did not know what to say to that, so she murmured:

"That's quite O.K., Mr. Schnitzer," as pleasantly as she could.

"The fact is, Miss Brady, I'm in a bit of a fix," he went on, "and I'm counting on you to get me out of it. There's some correspondence I couldn't handle at the office, and it's urgent to dispatch it by tonight's mail. I'd be grateful if you'd come along here."

"Where are you, Mr. Schnitzer?"

"I'm speaking from home."

"Oh!"

"You know my apartment on Lincoln Avenue, don't you?"

"Oh yes—of course—I know it, but I don't think—"

"Now listen," he interrupted. "I'm aware I'm suggesting something unusual, but this is big business, and I'm asking you to forget for the moment what the office hours are and to come along here and take down a couple of letters for me. You can't say I'm exacting as a general rule, but in a matter of urgency like this I expect my stenographer to show willing—"

Josephine recognized the crack of the whip and hastily interrupted.

"Of course, Mr. Schnitzer," she said. "I'll be pleased to come along. If it will be soon enough in an hour's time."

"Fine!" replied Schnitzer. "I'll send the car for you." Before Josephine could protest that she did not want the car, he had rung off, and as she replaced the receiver the deep pucker in her forehead was joined by several others. She was wondering.

She had been stenographer to John P. Schnitzer for three months, and during that time had gathered a certain amount of information about him beyond what was comprised in the single word "Financier" that stood beneath his name on the office door. Within five minutes of her starting work in the office, the snub-nosed girl with the colourless hair who sat at the adjoining desk had given her the first hint.

"Say, kid," she had said, "you're too darned pretty for this outfit," and, thereafter, further information gradually accrued. She remembered, when taxed with the question, that, when she had applied for the post, Mr. Schnitzer had made only the most perfunctory inquiries as to her qualifications as a stenographer—which was, perhaps, just as well—and that fact lent colour to the rumour that the qualities which John P. Schnitzer sought in a stenographer were not so much speed and accuracy as good looks and complaisance. But she had been in other offices—more than she cared to remember—and had learned from experience that in this respect Schnitzer did not stand alone. She had discovered that, provided a girl was a "sport", she could spell "reference" with two "f's" and quote cents instead of dollars and still get away with it, and Schnitzer's reputed possession of this common commercial characteristic did not unduly worry her. She was confident that she was capable of dealing with any situation that might arise in the office.

The snub-nosed girl left her in no doubt as to the situations with which she would almost certainly be called upon to deal. In due course, she prophesied, Josephine would be invited to go out to dinner with Schnitzer—which was all right, she said, as long as she took with her a boy friend with an outsize in biceps; but as a general rule the Schnitzers of modern life wouldn't stand for boy friends, and she would probably have to choose between going without her boy friends or going without her job. Of the two alternatives the snub-nosed girl was of the opinion that the latter would be preferable.

There was a likelihood, too, Josephine learned, of her being asked to go along one evening to Schnitzer's apartment and take down some letters which could not be handled at the office. She couldn't take a boy friend on that trip, of course, but she could take a portable typewriter, with which, correctly used, it might be possible to make a still nastier mess of even Schnitzer's face. But she didn't recommend the visit, even with a portable typewriter. Schnitzer, she said, had a swell apartment on Lincoln Avenue,

but flowers died if you took them within a mile of it, and if Josephine valued her lily-white freshness she would keep outside the danger-zone. If a girl, she said, were seen with one foot on the bottom step of Schnitzer's apartment her reputation would look so bedraggled that no one would believe it hadn't been left out all night in the rain.

Josephine had been grateful for the warning and for the first few weeks had kept a wary eye on Schnitzer; but as time passed, and he showed no sign of lapsing from strictly business relations with her, she began to think that he was, perhaps, a much-maligned man. The snub-nosed girl, perhaps, had asked for an increase in salary and been refused.

And now, just when she was feeling secure, this telephone call! She suddenly remembered all the scraps of information she had gathered about Schnitzer, and when she had pieced them all together the picture they formed was not an attractive one. It was certainly not the likeness of a man whose apartment she would care to visit, even when armed with her portable typewriter. It looked as if Mr. Schnitzer were working to schedule, and that things would pan out much on the lines which her companion in the office had foretold. She said to herself very resolutely that she would not go.

But telling herself made no difference, because she knew very well that in an hour's time she would certainly be in Mr. Schnitzer's Lincoln Avenue apartment. Going without her job might be the lesser of two evils, but she just could not afford to allow herself any choice in the matter. She had vivid recollections of intervals that had occurred in the past between losing one post and finding another, and had no ambition again to plod along the pavements of the city in the company of hundreds of others in similar plight. She certainly had no real intention of losing her job without a struggle, for no better reason than that rumour held John P. Schnitzer to be not quite the gentleman he might be. He had never given her cause for the least complaint against him, and it would be foolish to throw away a good job on mere hearsay. Besides, she wasn't afraid of Schnitzer.

Nevertheless, while the big limousine bore her smoothly towards Lincoln Avenue, she was feeling far less at ease than she appeared as she lolled back against the cushions. There was something not altogether pleasant in being in Mr. Schnitzer's luxurious car. She thought of the flowers that died if they were taken within a mile of the house, and wondered if it were possible for Schnitzer's car to have become impregnated with the same unhealthy atmosphere; if, supposing he were all that rumour maintained, he might somehow have impressed his personality on his automobile.

Quite definitely she did not like the car, and its smooth, deep purr reminded her of Schnitzer's voice. And she did not like the diminutive Japanese

chauffeur perched at the wheel, who kept glancing back at her over his shoulder and showing his white teeth in a knowing grin. She wondered why he was grinning and what he knew, and if, after all, she had not better tap the window and tell him to stop the car, and keep clear of the whole business. Once she actually did lean forward and gently rap on the glass; but all that happened was that the car moved a little faster and the monkey-faced chauffeur grinned at her more broadly than ever.

When eventually the car pulled up outside Schnitzer's impressive-looking residence, the chauffeur sprang from his seat and flung open the door of the car before Josephine had time to sit upright, and, as she got out, he waved a hand towards the house in a gesture which was more a command than an invitation. Just for a moment she thought of turning away from the steps of the house and darting off along the pavement, but she got the impression that if she showed the least sign of attempting to escape the monkey-faced chauffeur would spring at her. So she went, with as self-possessed an air as she could; muster, up the steps and rang the bell; and a few moments later she was in Schnitzer's library, and he was heaving himself from a low armchair to greet her.

"This is good of you, Miss Brady," he purred in that smooth voice of his, as he took her hand.

Regarding him with eyes more critical than usual, Josephine agreed that it was good of her. As to whether it was equally good for her, she had her doubts. He fitted very well the picture of him, which she had pieced together. He was a powerfully built, prosperous-looking man in the early fifties, broad in the shoulders, black-haired and red-faced. According to her informant in the office, he had been born with the black hair, but had acquired the red face with considerable pleasure to himself and considerable profit to his wine merchant. He gave the impression that nature, when fashioning him, had tried to draw attention to too many points and had overdone the emphasis. His forehead was too low and his nose too long; his eyes were too small and his permanently out-thrust lower lip too full. As regards his girth, Josephine's desk-mate had said that there was no need to remark on the obvious.

"I guess you're feeling pretty sore with me, eh, Miss Brady?"

"Sore?" she echoed.

"Breaking in on your evening like this. I dare say you had a date with some nice young fellow—"

He was still holding her hand, and Josephine withdrew it sharply.

"Not at all," she said. "I was quite free this evening."

He regarded her from under lowered lids and half smiled.

"Lonely little girl, eh? Well, now, that's too bad. Chester County must be full of blind guys to leave a little girl like you sitting at home and knitting."

This, Josephine reflected, was no doubt all according to schedule. In a few moments he would probably try to kiss her. She wondered which would be the best spot to hit.

She took out her notebook, opened it, seated herself on a chair and glanced at him expectantly, her pencil poised.

"Yes, Mr. Schnitzer? Just a couple of letters, isn't it?"

"Sure," he replied. "But we don't have to hurry. There's plenty of time for the letters. Take a comfortable chair and have a cigarette."

"Thanks, but I'd rather get the letters done if you don't mind. I'm in rather a hurry; I want to get home as soon as possible—"

"Sure," he said again. "Of course you do, and I won't detain you five minutes longer than is necessary. But there's nothing against your having a cigarette while we're waiting."

He offered her his case.

"Genuine imported Egyptian," he told her. "I've never yet known a little girl who didn't fall for a genuine imported Egyptian."

She hesitated a moment and then took a cigarette, Schnitzer supplying her with a light.

"Thank you, Mr. Schnitzer," she said. "But what are we waiting for?"

"There's certain information I want from my agent on the coast before I can dictate the letters," he told her. "He's to speak to me on the 'phone, but he's not through yet. He'll be on the wire any minute now, and then we can go right ahead."

Josephine closed her notebook with a snap and got up from her chair.

"In that case, Mr. Schnitzer," she said firmly, "I'd better come back later."

She took a step forward, but Schnitzer, standing between her and the door, did not move.

"That's not very sociable. Miss Brady, is it?"

She shrugged a shoulder.

"I didn't understand on the telephone that this was to be a social call."

"No?" He smiled. "Well, there's no reason why it shouldn't turn that way, but you're making it difficult. It's kind of discouraging when a nice little girl thinks you're such poor company that she'd rather take a walk around the

block than spend ten minutes with you while a 'phone call comes through." He laid a hand on her shoulder and urged her towards an armchair. "Sit down, my dear, and take off your hat and enjoy your cigarette, and I'll find you a glass of wine—"

Josephine spun round and faced him.

"Mr. Schnitzer, I came here to take down some letters, and if you're not ready to dictate them now I'd much rather go and come back when you are ready. I don't want a glass of wine."

"Maybe you don't," replied her employer. "But I'm telling you that you need one. You're looking pale, and paleness doesn't suit you. Pretty hair like yours needs a touch of colour to show it off. I guess lots of young fellows have told you you've got pretty hair, eh, honey?"

The next instant he had no cause to complain of her pallor. Her cheeks were crimson and her eyes blazing as she faced him defiantly.

"Please understand, Mr. Schnitzer," she began furiously, "that I didn't come here to discuss my hair, and if you've no letters to dictate—"

"Haven't I told you," interrupted Schnitzer plaintively, "that I'm waiting for my agent on the coast to come through on the wire? Come now, my dear, there's no call for you to be awkward about things. A nice little girl like you—"

"I'm going," she announced suddenly. Again she took a step forward, trying to brush past him, and this time he deliberately stepped in front of her. His smile had vanished and his mouth grew grim.

"Sure you're going—just as soon as I say so," he snapped. "But not before, Miss Brady. When I pay a girl twenty dollars a week, I guess she's going to do as I say or" He stopped abruptly, and his smile returned.

"Forget it, my dear," he said. "I talk that way sometimes when things don't go just as I want them to, but it doesn't mean a thing. Still, there's no sense in you running away and walking round the block. That kind of hurt me. It looks like not trusting me, and if a girl can't trust John P. Schnitzer to treat her right, I'd like to know who she can trust. Well, forget it!"

He crossed to the heavy tapestry curtain that hung across the archway which led into an adjoining room, and beckoned her to him. She hesitated, and then, as he smiled at her reassuringly, crossed slowly to him. After all, there was no sense in losing her job if she could possibly keep it, and Schnitzer might be all right....

He pulled aside the curtain, switched on the light and drew her into the room.

Josephine glanced round. It was a dining-room, richly furnished, with a thick soft carpet and concealed lighting, rose-tinted, that gave it an air of warmth, softness, intimacy. The oval table in the centre was laid for dinner. Josephine noticed that places were laid for two.

"Sort of cosy, eh, honey?" purred Schnitzer.

She glanced at him quickly.

"I was expecting a friend to dinner," he went on to explain, "but he has let me down at the last minute. Still, as things have turned out, I guess I'm not feeling particularly sorry. What do you say, my dear, to a nice little dinner while we're waiting for my man to 'phone?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Schnitzer," she began, "but I can't possibly—"

"I'm saying you can." The snap was back in his voice now.

"But I'd much rather not—"

"And I'm telling you you're going to." He was between her and the curtain, and his mouth was ugly Job or no job, she must get out of this.

"Do you get my meaning?"

She nodded.

"Perfectly, thanks," she replied calmly. "And now see if you can get mine, will you? I'm not dining with you; I'm going—now. And I'm going because I don't believe there's any 'phone message to wait for or any letters to write, and that being so, I'd sooner eat peanuts on the sidewalk than stay here and dine with you."

His hand shot forward and gripped her arm. And then suddenly he seemed to check himself and stood rigid, listening. Josephine heard footsteps in the corridor. The door of the adjoining room was opened, and then came the sound of men's voices.

"Not here, boys. But he'll be somewhere around." Schnitzer's hand released her arm and he turned and went quickly between the parted curtains.

"Hallo, boys!" she heard him exclaim. "Glad to see you again—"

"Sure you are!" came the drawling reply. "Put your hands up, Schnitzer, and get over there by the arm-chair. I guess you'll be wanting something soft to fall on."

Josephine, scarcely daring to breathe, and with her heart thumping furiously, carefully drew the curtain an inch aside and peeped through the opening. She saw Schnitzer at the farther end of the room. His plump, white hands were held above his head, shaking violently; his face was a ghastly grey; his heavy lips were working, and his eyes staring, wide-open, at the

two men standing just inside the door. One was a tall thin man with a face like a ferret's, and he had a gun held loosely in his hand. The other, who was not unlike Schnitzer in appearance, had his hands thrust deep in his pockets and was staring at the financier with an expression of sneering malevolence on his face.

"Say, boys, listen!" babbled Schnitzer. "You've got no cause—Perryfeld, I never did you any harm" The shorter man, whose name seemed to be Perryfeld, drew a hand from his pocket and made a gesture of impatience. He turned towards his companion and took the gun from his hand.

"I guess I've a better title than you to give him the works, Mike," he said, and turned again towards Schnitzer, gun in hand. "I reckon you should feel darned honoured, Schnitzer," he said. "I've taken the trouble to come here in person—at great inconvenience—to blow you to hell—"

"Perryfeld—for God's sake—listen—"

"Money talks," replied Perryfeld coolly, "and you're behind with your payments, Schnitzer. You've been dumb for so long now that I reckon the sooner you're dumb for good the better."

He raised his gun and deliberately pointed it at Schnitzer. Josephine released the curtain and crouched against the wall, her hands over her face.

There came a muffled report and she bit into her thumb to stop herself screaming.

"O.K., Perryfeld," drawled a voice. "We'd better be quitting."

The sound of the door being closed—footsteps in the corridor—and then silence. Josephine's hands left her face. With an effort she forced herself to part the curtains and look into the room. Schnitzer no longer stood where she had last seen him, but there was a huddled mass beside the armchair....

She went slowly forward and paused beside the shapeless thing that had been John P. Schnitzer. She saw a small red stain slowly spreading on his shirt-front. She remembered screaming, and the room reeling round her, but remembered no more.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN "TRICKS" O'REGAN, of the Chester County Police, was a man of strong convictions, and not the least of these was a conviction that, since he was expected to provide the citizens of Chester County with the sense of security which made it possible for them to sleep comfortably at night, it was up to Chester County to provide him with an office in which he could work comfortably by day. And the outcome of this conviction was the large bright room which he occupied at Police Headquarters. With its high windows, dull silver radiators, substantial furniture, busily ticking tape machine, and glass-windowed service office, commonly termed the "glass-house", it suggested rather the sanctum of a prosperous stockbroker than a place devoted to the discomfort of criminals, in comparison with whom, as O'Regan put it, stockbrokers were the merest amateurs.

Sergeant Jackson sauntered from the glass-house and began to pace the room restlessly.

"I wish somebody would do something," he grumbled. "This place is getting on my nerves."

Sergeant Geissel, absorbed in watching the tape machine, glanced up and grinned.

"Good policemen shouldn't have nerves," he remarked sententiously. "And anyway, it'll never be as quiet as I want it." He crossed slowly to the window, looking down at the almost deserted street below. "Do you know, Jack," he went on, "I've a feeling that there is something doing."

"Ain't you always? And, say, everybody in the station-house is feeling that way tonight. A while ago I cracked a nut and the station sergeant jumped out of his chair."

"This nerve business must be catching," grinned Geissel.

There was silence for some minutes, the one man continuing his pacing, the other staring, broodingly and unseeing, through the window. Then:

"I wouldn't be on patrol for a whole lot of money," Geissel remarked quietly.

Jackson stopped short in his striding.

"Say, what's eatin' you, Geissel? It's not like you to get jumpy."

Before the older man could reply, the door burst open and a short, thick-set, square-shouldered man appeared.

"Hallo, Reil!" greeted Jackson. "What's the hurry?" Detective-Sergeant Reil, ignoring the question, asked: "Where's the Chief?"

"Down at the City Hall," Geissel told him. "Why? Anything wrong?"

The newcomer's naturally stern features looked grimmer.

"I should say there was! I got my third quitter in a month."

Jackson whistled.

"You don't say! A patrolman?"

"Yeah—a patrolman. Can you beat it? Found him like that." He gave a ludicrous caricature of a man shaking with fear. "Corner of Brandt and Washington Avenue—couldn't even hold up his motor-cycle."

"Who was he?" asked Geissel.

"Connor."

"You don't say!"

"The Chief's at the City Hall, is he? Well, where's the Lieutenant?"

"He's around somewhere," said Geissel. "Find him, Jack."

When his subordinate had disappeared, Geissel turned a grave face to the other.

"Connor, eh? Well...."

He shrugged his shoulders, walked across the room to the wall on which hung a wooden frame which displayed a number of police badges. He stood for several moments in gloomy contemplation.

Red's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"I ought to take a stick to him and beat him up!" he said savagely.

Geissel half turned, his left hand pointing towards the frame.

"There's your answer!" he said. "One-two-three-four-five-six-seven" counting with outstretched forefinger.

"Yeah," Reil assented.

"Seven patrolmen found slumped on the sidewalk!" went on Geissel, fierce indignation in his tone. "Seven murders that don't seem to matter a damn to anybody! Has anyone gone to the chair? Has anyone even been pulled in? Why, the murderers, whoever they are, haven't even been inconvenienced I Only three quitters? I guess you're lucky—"

"What's the trouble?" It was a harsh, authoritative voice that asked the question.

Reil stiffened to attention and saluted smartly. Lieutenant Edwin Lavine was a stickler for military discipline amongst his subordinates. A man of medium height, the breadth of his shoulders and his general bearing were eloquent of a former athletic build. The years, however—he was well into middle age—

had done their work, and his figure, once lithe and vigorous, now showed a suspicious fullness. Lavine may have assisted the years; his tastes were sybaritic; he was a man who did himself well, and if, as a result, his liver wreaked its vengeance upon his temper, it didn't much matter to anybody, for Lieutenant Lavine's temper had always been his weak point.

"Connor refused duty, sir," reported Reil tersely.

The Lieutenant made an impatient noise with his lips.

"Refused duty, has he?" he repeated between his teeth.

"Yes, sir. Can you imagine? And he's been twelve years a policeman!"

"Did he come in?"

"No, sir. I found him when I was making my first round."

"Where is he?"

"Outside, sir."

"Bring him in."

When the other had gone, Lavine stood thoughtfully for some moments, and his thick lips were curved in an ugly expression as he muttered to himself:

"Connor... yellow, eh?"

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," Geissel ventured to put in: and Lavine turned round on him with a snarl.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know that I'd call Connor yellow. He's the bird who got that Polak family out of their shack when it burned—you remember? No yellow guy would have done what Connor did then."

The other grunted.

"Here he is," he said as the door opened to admit Reil and a patrolman. "We'll hear what he has to say. Now, Connor," as the man advanced across the room and stood rigid in front of him, "what's the big idea? Refusing duty!"

Connor gulped. It was evident that he was labouring under strong emotion and making tremendous efforts to regain his self-control. At last:

"Well, Lieutenant—" he began, and gulped again.

Lavine snorted.

"Well, Lieutenant!" he mimicked. Then, turning fiercely upon the patrolman: "Say, what's the matter with you?" he stormed. "What sort of a policeman do you call yourself? Afraid of the dark, huh? You make me sick!"

His contemptuous tone stung the man into at least temporary mastery of his feelings. He drew himself up and spoke jerkily, but more calmly.

"It was this way, sir. I was up on Washington Pike—there ain't a house there in a mile, and I got scared, that's all. You see, a man came up to me—a stranger—and asked me what I was doing so far off my patrol." Lavine broke in sharply.

"Oh! You were off your patrol, were you?"

"Yeah—just a little way."

"And why?"

"I saw some men get out of a car about a hundred yards farther on—and I went up to see what it was all about. One of 'em came back to me."

"And you beat it, huh? Got yellow—just because a man asked you why you were off your patrol! I suppose you didn't ask him for his badge or anything? He might have been a Federal officer."

"He was a stranger to me," Connor muttered sullenly. The corners of the Police Lieutenant's mouth curved in a contemptuous grimace which gave him an evil expression. His eyes raked the unfortunate Connor with a scorn that stung.

"I suppose you haven't got a gun?" he said icily. "I say you haven't got a gun, have you, you poor yeller rat! You get right back, sister!"

The patrolman drew himself up, his eyes flashing.

"I'm not going back!"

"Oh, no?" Lavine turned to Reil. "Where did you find him?"

"On his way to the station, sir."

The Lieutenant surveyed Connor coldly for some moments before he spoke.

"Now listen, you! You'll go right back to your patrol—"

"I tell you I'll do nothing of the sort!" almost yelled Connor. He was furious now. "Three officers have been killed on that pike since the New Year. Shot down like dogs—for nothin'. Seven officers in three months! I got a wife and three kids—"

"Why, you're nothin' but a kid yourself—a poor, whining, snivelling kid—afraid of the dark—afraid—"

Connor took a step forward and pointed a shaking hand towards the frame on the opposite wall.

"I ain't havin' my badge in that frame and that's a fact!" His tone was openly defiant now.

Lavine's eyes glinted.

"You're not having your badge in that frame, aren't you?" he breathed, slowly and quietly. Then in sudden fury: "I'll say you're not, you rat!"

Taking a quick step forward, he seized the patrolman's badge and wrenched it from his coat.

"I'll say you're not," he repeated. "I'm dumping it in the ash-can and you're going inside, where you belong! I'll have that coat off your back and I'm going to give you a number in the penitentiary! That's what I'll do with you! And I'll tell you something else—"

"Tell me!"

Lavine broke off short and turned round sharply, to meet the scrutiny of a pair of cold steel-blue eyes, whose owner had come into the room unnoticed.

There were stories told in the underworld about the eyes of Captain Patrick John O'Regan; how, for instance, Jake Sullivan had gone to the chair simply because, when he was being questioned, he hadn't been able to stand the penetrating stare of O'Regan's eyes, and had come clean with all the details of his crime; and how Jim Woolmer, as tough a guy as ever worked a racket, suddenly jumped to his feet and shouted: "For God's sake, Captain, don't look at a fellow that way!" It was generally agreed by those who had had the misfortune to come beneath their scrutiny that they made a man feel it was no use lying because O'Regan already knew every little detail which the wrongdoer was trying to conceal. "Tricks" O'Regan, they called him, because he was plumb full of tricks and you never could tell for certain whether he was kidding or not. Usually, it was said, it was safe to assume that he was. However much the devotees of crime in Chester County might dislike the tall, broad-shouldered young man with the keen blue eyes and obstinate jaw, they had to hand it to him that he had been instrumental in seriously thinning their ranks, and that he had not reached the rank of police captain at the early age of thirty-two for nothing.

"What's happening?" O'Regan asked.

Lavine, almost reluctantly it seemed, drew himself up and saluted.

"Patrolman Connor refused duty. Chief. He got scared up on the Washington Pike."

O'Regan walked across the room, hung up his hat and coat and seated himself at his desk.

"Refused duty, eh?" he said at length. "Refused duty—in this happy land where nobody gets killed but policemen! Say, that's too bad!"

He shot a swift glance towards the patrolman—a glance keen yet understanding; a glance that took in every aspect of the situation. Connor had been an exemplary officer for twelve years, with never a bad mark against his name. Yet here he was, his face white, his mouth working nervously, his hands clenching and unclenching, quite obviously in the grip of some very powerful emotion—so powerful as to force him to commit the almost unforgivable offence of refusing duty and of disobeying his superior's commands. O'Regan's glance took in the significance of this immediately; it also embraced every detail of the patrolman's appearance.

The Police Captain pointed to the man's coat.

"You mustn't go out like that, Connor. Your coat's torn. Make a note, Geissel."

"I did that, Chief," explained Lavine complacently.

"I took off his badge" holding up his right hand, which still held the symbol of Connor's office.

O'Regan held out his hand for the badge.

"On yes? Very interesting—very dramatic," was his quiet comment. "Now we will put it back." He suited the action to the words, pinning the badge on the bewildered policeman's coat. "Now then, Connor, just tell me all about it, will you? You were frightened?"

"Yes, sir."

O'Regan sat down at his desk, rested his elbows on the surface and looked up encouragingly at the other.

"Where?"

"Up by the meadow, sir, where Brandt crosses the Pike."

"Where Patrolman Leiter was killed?"

"Yes, sir," was the eager response. "You remember Leiter, Captain? I found him. He said that a man came up to him and asked him what he was doing off his patrol—and shot him. Just what this feller asked me tonight." The words came in a torrent.

"Oh, rats!" The contemptuous interjection came from Lavine. He would have said more, but the cold scrutiny of O'Regan's eyes kept him silent.

The Police Captain turned again to Connor.

"A man came up to you and asked you that, eh?"

"Yes, sir." His voice was tremulous as he went on: "You know, sir, there's a racket around here—a racket nobody understands. Chester County is full of killers."

Lavine's harsh laugh interrupted him.

"Killers, eh? Sure—they frighten policemen to death!"

Again O'Regan silenced him, this time with an imperious gesture.

"Let Connor tell me his story, please. Go on, Connor—I think I understand, my lad."

"Living in this county," continued the man, "is like living in a haunted house. There's always something behind you—something you can't see and you can't hear. You're walking all the time with a gun in your back."

"Uh-huh!" grunted O'Regan. "You only saw one man?"

"Four, sir. They got out of a car—near the meadow."

"Whose meadow is that?"

It was Lavine who answered.

"I guess that's Mr. Perryfeld's," he drawled.

"Thank you." Then, turning again to Connor: "And you got scared?"

The patrolman nodded.

"I certainly did, sir. You think I'm a poor yeller—"

O'Regan cut him short.

"No, no, no, I think nothing of the sort. You simply got scared. It is quite understandable. Personally I have never known what fear is, but I understand it exists—maybe one day I'll make its acquaintance. I've never been to the moon, but I know there is such a place." He sat for a moment or two in thought, his chin cupped in his right hand. Then he turned to Lavine. "Relieve Connor," he ordered. "Put him on the South patrol."

The Lieutenant looked his astonishment. He could hardly believe his ears. Here was a patrolman guilty of the most heinous offence in the police code, and the Chief was talking about "relieving" him! He could not have heard aright.

"Did you say 'relieve Connor', Chief?"

"Sure."

"But you'll be suspending him, won't you?" O'Regan rose, and flicked an invisible speck of dust from his jacket as he replied:

"No, I shall not be suspending him. Do you mind?"

"Very good, sir." Lavine's tone was sullen and the shrug of his shoulders almost offensive. Then, turning to Connor: "Come on, you," he ordered harshly.

"Just a moment." O'Regan held up a detaining hand. "Connor, you'd never seen these four men before, had you?"

"No, Chief. I didn't see 'em rightly, anyway. I told the Lieutenant what I thought."

"Yeh—what you thought!" snorted Lavine. "What do you think with?"

It was O'Regan who answered.

"His brains, which were so nearly blown out tonight." Then, tapping the man on the shoulder: "O.K., Connor."

Lavine and the patrolman paused as they reached the door, giving way to the man who was at that moment entering the room. Walking up to the desk at which O'Regan had again seated himself, the newcomer jerked his head in the direction of the departing pair.

"Trouble, sir?" he asked laconically.

O'Regan nodded. He liked the tall, fair-haired Lieutenant Spellman, his second-in-command at Police Headquarters, as much for his economy of words as for the integrity and loyalty which he had always displayed. He relied a great deal upon Spellman and the handsome-featured young lieutenant had proved that such reliance was never misplaced.

"Refused duty," O'Regan told him.

The other whistled.

"Another, eh? Where?"

"At the corner of Brandt and Washington."

"You've had three men bumped off on that same point," Spellman recalled.

"That's so—and all for the same reason—seeing people who thought they might be identified."

"And three other patrolmen have turned in their badges," went on the lieutenant reflectively. "It looks healthy for Chester County!"

O'Regan rose from his desk with a weary gesture and walked to the wall where hung the frame displaying the seven badges.

"Look at that, Spellman. Those badges belonged to seven men—seven living men, with beds to go to, seven men who went to the pictures at nights and played pinochle and wished they were Rockefeller. And they're dead! Last Thanksgiving they were alive, eating turkey and making dates with girls."

Spellman nodded grimly.

"It's certainly tough, Chief; but that's how it goes."

The Captain turned round sharply.

"Why should it?" he demanded. "What had these boys done to deserve death? They did nothing but patrol on their flat feet and watch out for citizen's homes. Seven policemen murdered in three months," he went on, half to himself. "And today I've been at the City Hall receiving the congratulations of the Citizens' League for keeping Chester County free of crime!" He gave a short, derisive laugh. "Maybe they don't think it's a crime to shoot policemen. Free of crime—no rackets, no hold-ups—and here, right here, is the biggest racket and the biggest hold-up this country has known. Isn't it marvellous?"

He turned round, to find Lavine, who had re-entered the office, standing by his desk.

"Don't you agree, Lavine? Isn't everything grand?"

"Why, yes, Chief. But then, we've got a pretty good class of people livin' around here."

"Uh-huh. That's so—and a pretty good class of policemen dying around here. Don't forget that, Lavine—"jerking his head towards the frame.

The Lieutenant shrugged.

"I guess we've still got a force good enough to deal with rackets," he said complacently.

O'Regan swung round on him, his eyes alight with the intensity of his emotion.

"So they have in Chicago!" he exclaimed. "So they have in New York—but the rackets go on. The people of Chicago pay a hundred million dollars a year for protection. There isn't a trade that hasn't a grand union attached to it—Butchers' Protection—Baker's Protection! You pay to be a member or you're bombed and your trucks thrown over in the street. If you squeal you're beaten, and if you fight you're bumped. You talk about a handful of Bolsheviks holding down a hundred million people—why, Russia's a girls' school after this country!"

"Oh, say," protested Lavine, "Chester's clean! There hasn't been a booze murder in years."

O'Regan raised his eyebrows.

"That's so. But there have been seven coppers and John Harvey since Thanksgiving!"

"Harvey?" Lavine wrinkled his forehead as if in an effort of recollection. "Oh yes, I remember—but there was a woman in that—"

"Nobody said so," put in Spellman from his desk in the far corner of the room.

"I got the low-down on it, see?" retorted Lavine. "There was no woman concerned," O'Regan declared. "John Harvey was killed because he wouldn't pay blackmail. That's the racket. Somebody in Chester County is putting the dollar sign on fear." His right arm shot out in a minatory gesture to some invisible enemy. "I'm going to get that somebody into the Smoky Cell. If my badge goes into that frame I'll get him!"

"I wonder," said Spellman, "why these swell families never come to this office? What have they got to be scared about?"

"That's easy," O'Regan told him. "They're afraid that somebody will think they're squealing. And all the people who aren't calling are paying."

"Why?"

"Because they've got to pay if they want to live. That's the big racket. That's why no other racket can live around here. I've seen it coming for a long time. Capitalizing fear—that's a grand racket. No rent to pay, no samples to carry, no booze to run. Fear's worth money—big money. The fear of death! Spell, you'd sooner pay money than die, wouldn't you? I wouldn't, but you would. Death means nothing to me—the O'Regans have always been like that."

There was a simplicity about Tricks O'Regan's boastfulness which robbed it of all offence. It was perfectly true, as he said, that he did not know the meaning of fear, and his simple reiteration of this fact, which, made by any other man, would have been nauseating, gave added charm by reason of its naiveté and obvious honesty.

"But who's to kill 'em, Chief?" persisted Spellman. "There's no gang in town—never been a report of any strangers."

Tricks smiled.

"Suppose they don't live in town? Suppose they come just when they're wanted? Who could report? The patrolmen? What could they report? the arrival of suspicious-looking strangers, that's all." He paused for a moment and into his face came a look of grim sternness as he continued, a shade more slowly: "And the men who could have reported it are dead—seven of 'em! There isn't a patrolman working outside town who doesn't come off his beat looking like the last ashes of hell.... What is it, Geissel?"

The sergeant's head had appeared round the door of the glass-house.

"Murder up at 203A Lincoln Avenue, Chief," he reported tersely. "Guy named Schnitzer—John P. Schnitzer. Shot through the heart."

"Schnitzer, eh? Now who the deuce is Schnitzer?"

"He's that rich financier fellow," supplied Spellman. "We've had an eye on him for some time—all sorts of funny stories about him.... Girls," he added succinctly.

"That's right," Geissel agreed. "There's a girl in this. Byrne's on the wire—he's taken charge of the case—and they're pulling her in. Apparently she was there when it happened."

CHAPTER III

THE first impression that seeped back into Josephine's consciousness was of a continuous steady drone. It was rather soothing than otherwise, and for some time she listened to it without making the effort to speculate on what might be its cause. She felt terribly tired, and the least mental or physical exertion seemed too stupendous a task to be attempted. She had a vague idea that something unpleasant had occurred, and the longer she could postpone the moment when she would remember what it was the better. Her head was aching appallingly.

There came a strident screech. She recognized that, anyway; it was the screech of a motor klaxon. That steady, continuous hum, she supposed, was the sound of an engine. She imagined that she must be in a car. But whose car? And where was she going? She could remember getting into a car—oh, yes, of course—Mr. Schnitzer's car—with the funny little monkey-faced chauffeur. She was going to Mr. Schnitzer's apartment on Lincoln Avenue. There were some letters to be dictated which couldn't be done at the office. But she had an idea that she had already been to Mr. Schnitzer's apartment. She must have been there, because she remembered the room quite distinctly. But she hadn't taken down any letters; she was quite sure of that. It was all very muddling. She made a tremendous mental effort. There had been something about a curtain—a heavy tapestry curtain. She remembered standing close to it—pulling it aside ever so carefully—peeping through....

Memory returned with a rush: Mr. Schnitzer, terribly scared, with his hands above his head—the two men standing by the door—the muffled report—and then that horrible shapeless heap on the floor, with the red stain that was spreading....

She shuddered and tried to open her eyes, but her eyelids only fluttered feebly. She felt that she must open them. She must know at all costs where she was. She was in a car, of course—travelling very fast by the sound of it—and there was a smell of tobacco smoke; a cigar, she thought....

"She's coming round, Mike."

The voice cut sharply into her consciousness. She would know that voice anywhere—never be able to forget it.... "I guess I've a better title than you to give him the works."... The fat man with the gun, pointing it at Schnitzer.... Pennyfeld or Perryfeld or something like that....

She heard another voice, which she recognized as belonging to the thin man with a face like a ferret's.

"I'm all for the milk of human kindness, Perryfeld," said the voice. "You may as well do the job before she comes to."

"No hurry," grunted Perryfeld.

"If she comes round and sees the gun she'll yell, and she's got a voice that'll carry here to Police Headquarters and back again."

"I guess we ought to be grateful," replied Perryfeld. "If she hadn't let out that yell we'd not have known she was there. She's seen too much to be left lying about where the police can find her."

"Sure. We'll get the job done quick and leave her where the police won't find her."

"I'll do it in my own time," snapped Perryfeld. "If you're so darned keen on getting it done, why don't you do it yourself?"

"I'm driving, ain't I?"

There were several moments of silence, and then Perryfeld's voice came again:

"Say, Mike!"

"Hallo!"

"She's a swell kid!"

"Trust Schnitzer."

"Maybe there's no need, after all—"

"No need? Say, Perryfeld, what's bitten you? Not going all soft and lovesick, are you? You're right she knows too much to be left to go squealing to the police, an' she's not going to be left. If you're looking for a swell kid to comfort you in your loneliness, you've got to keep on looking, because you haven't found her yet."

"Huh!" grunted Perryfeld.

"What I mean is, don't get toying with the idea of a honeymoon, because this kid's booked for a different sort of trip. She'd prefer it, I shouldn't wonder. Shut your eyes, sweetheart, and turn your head away, and let her have it."

Very cautiously Josephine opened her eyes—just wide enough to enable her to make out the shadowy figure of Perryfeld sitting on the opposite seat of the car. She watched the red tip of the cigar as he raised it to his mouth, and in the glow as he drew at it she caught a glimpse of his other hand resting on his knee. There was no gun in his hand yet, anyway. They meant, of course, to shoot her. She did not feel particularly frightened—not nearly so frightened as she had felt when she had seen Mr. Schnitzer standing with his hands above his head. If they intended shooting her, there was nothing that she could do to prevent them. Screaming wouldn't be of the least use; they were out in the country somewhere, travelling very fast, and nobody

would hear her. Besides, if she started screaming they would certainly shoot....

She noticed that the car was slowing down. It stopped and she heard the man who had been driving get out of his seat. The door was opened and she could see the outline of his head and shoulders as he stood in the opening. Her heart began pounding. They were going' to do it now, she supposed. It would be of no use struggling; they'd only hurt her all the more if she struggled. She would just lie still and close her eyes.

"Say, what's the game?" inquired Perryfeld.

"I'm asking you," replied the man called Mike. "You've been playing it long enough, anyway, Perryfeld. Been holding her hand and stroking her hair, I shouldn't wonder, and I'm through with that sort of stuff—see? If you can't brace yourself up to do the job, then I'm doing it myself—"

Josephine saw a quick movement of Perryfeld's hand. There was a gun in it now. She had just caught the gleam of metal for an instant and she could make out his white hand grasping the butt.

"Get to hell out of this!" There was suddenly a rasping snarl in Perryfeld's voice. "Do the job yourself, will you? Like hell you will! Who's running this outfit, me or you? Not you, Alike Osier, and the sooner you lay hold of that fact, the better. Now then, back to the wheel and get going."

"Listen, Perryfeld, there's no sort of sense—"

"I'm telling you there's going to be no shooting—see? This is my show and I'm running it my way. If you don't like it, you can quit." The gun moved a few inches nearer. "But you'll quit my way. Get that?" Alike did not move.

"Listen," he said again. "You just can't afford it. All this blue eyes and golden hair stuff—it's not worth it. You can't chance letting this kid go blabbing to Tricks O'Regan—"

"She won't," snapped Perryfeld. "Not my way. I reckon she'd be more helpful to Tricks O'Regan dead than alive, and there's no sense in presenting him with an extra bit of evidence. You've got no foresight, Mike; that's your trouble—no brains, no imagination. If it hadn't been for me, Tricks O'Regan would have got you a dozen times, and you know it. O'Regan will get busy on the Schnitzer trail, but it won't lead him anywhere so long as this kid's still breathing. But if we stop her breathing... Sure, Mike, you've no brains. That'd be another trail for O'Regan, wouldn't it? And sooner or later the two trails would cross, and that's the spot where he'd find you and me standing."

Mike seemed to hesitate.

"I'm not saying you're not clever, Perryfeld—"

"Sure I'm clever."

"But we don't want her waking up and yelling just when we're passing a cop. There's no trusting women to keep quiet when you want them quiet. You'd best shove something in her mouth to damp it down a bit if she starts yelling. I'd feel kind of safer."

"O.K.," replied Perryfeld.

Josephine saw the flutter of a white handkerchief and realized that Perryfeld was folding it on his knees. She felt certain that if he started to tie it across her mouth she wouldn't be able to help screaming; and if she began screaming it was ten chances to one that Mike would shoot her. She saw Perryfeld lean forward, saw the white bandage approaching her mouth.

"It's all right, Mr. Perryfeld," she said quietly. "I'm not going to scream."

Perryfeld sat back suddenly in his seat.

"If I promise not to scream there's no need to tie up my mouth, is there?"

"Huh!" grunted Perryfeld. "So you're awake, are you?"

"What did I tell you?" began Mike excitedly. "You'd much better have—"

Perryfeld silenced him with a gesture.

"Now listen, Miss Brady," he said. "You are Miss Brady, aren't you? You're Schnitzer's secretary?"

"I was," replied Josephine significantly.

"I guess we won't split hairs. You just listen to what I'm saying, because if you should happen to forget some little thing I'm telling you you'll be spared the trouble of remembering anything. You were in Schnitzer's apartment this evening, eh?"

"I went there to take down some letters," she explained. "Mr. Schnitzer came through on the wire and asked me to go, and sent his car for me—"

"The point is, you were there, and people knew you were there—the chauffeur, for instance—and, that being so, it's no kind of use pretending you weren't. If anyone asks you—the police, for instance—you'll say you were there—tell them just what you've told me. Got that?"

"Yes, Mr. Perryfeld."

The man scowled.

"Where were you, eh?"

"In the dining-room, behind the curtain."

"And when you were there behind the curtain, you saw something, eh?"

"Sure," she nodded.

"You don't have to beat about the bush, Miss Brady. What did you see?"

Josephine took a deep breath.

"I saw—saw you—shoot Mr. Schnitzer."

"Did you hell!" exclaimed Perryfeld. "Now listen, Miss Brady, and I'll tell you what you saw. You saw just nothing at all. Nothing, d'you hear? You heard voices, and you heard a gun go off, and when you went into the other room and found Schnitzer on the floor there was nobody else there. You didn't see me, nor Mike here, nor anybody. Is that clear?"

"Ye-es, Mr. Perryfeld."

"And my name isn't Perryfeld," he went on. "You don't know my name see? You've never heard of a fellow called Perryfeld. If anyone should ask you, you just know nothing more than I've told you. You fainted—see? And the next thing you remember is finding yourself lying on the grass by the side of the road somewhere."

Josephine began to breathe more easily. After all, they weren't going to shoot her. They were going to dump her by the roadside.

"And don't go running away with the idea you can double-cross me," added Perryfeld, "because you can't do it. I'll know. I'd sure hate to see you all messed up like Schnitzer was, but if you try any funny business that's what's coming to you. Just say one word more than I've told you and you'll see. We'll be watching you. All the time. If Tricks O'Regan pulls you in, don't fancy I won't know what you're telling him, because I'll know every word you say; and if you say things I don't care about a dozen Tricks O'Regans aren't going to save you. Just remember, wherever you are, there's a gun not many inches away from you—even at Police Headquarters. If you don't think you can keep your mouth shut—"

"I can," she interrupted breathlessly. "You can trust me absolutely—on my word of honour—"

"Perhaps," interrupted Perryfeld. "But I'm not proposing to trust you. I'm keeping an eye on you all the time—and a gun. Any moment I want you I'll know where to get you. I suggest you bear that in mind, Miss Brady, or you'll be losing your good looks. And now you'd better get started; you've a longish walk in front of you."

She got hurriedly out of the car, and, as she did so, the man called Mike jumped into the driving-seat, and a moment later the high-powered car was roaring away.

For a time Josephine stood still, watching the tiny red glow of the rear-lamp as it grew fainter and fainter. She felt dazed, and her head was still throbbing painfully. So much had happened, and she couldn't remember anything very clearly. All that seemed to matter at the moment was that she had been terribly close to death and by some miracle had escaped. She might have been lying on the roadside now, looking like Schnitzer had looked. She shuddered, and glanced around her. She had not the slightest idea where she was, but she knew that at all costs she must get away quickly. Perryfeld might change his mind and come back. But she must remember not to call him Perryfeld—even to herself. She didn't know his name, had never seen him, had seen nothing and nobody. The least little slip and that gun which was always within a few feet of her would go off. She knew that it had been no idle threat; things like that were common enough these days.

She turned and glanced back along the road. There was a glow in the sky in that direction, and that way lay home. She began walking, walked, faster and faster, and then broke into a run.

For some minutes she ran on, pausing now and then to recover her breath, but only for a few seconds. She had a feeling that all the time out here on the road she was being watched, that she must get back home quickly, that she wouldn't be safe until she was in her own room with the door shut and locked.

There came a blaze of light, and a powerful car, travelling fast towards the city, swept past her. She started violently. But it wasn't Perryfeld's. This was a light green car, and Perryfeld's had been black. But that meant nothing. There would be others besides Perryfeld.

Suddenly she halted abruptly, catching her breath. Twenty yards or so ahead the big green car had stopped, and a man was walking back towards her. She wanted to turn and run in the opposite direction, but remembered that she must not do that sort of thing. She must not let anyone guess that anything unusual had happened to her or that she was frightened. She must be quite natural and self-possessed if she didn't want to start people asking questions. She could be. She had been calm enough in the car with Perryfeld, and a gun only a foot away from her....

The man paused as he reached her.

"Anything wrong?" he inquired.

"Wrong?"

He nodded.

"Why should there be anything wrong?"

"I just wondered. I saw you running, and I thought you looked kind of worried."

She pressed a hand to her side.

"Stitch," she smiled. "I'm out of training. Too many cigarettes, I expect."

"Running far?"

"Home," she told him.

"And where's home?"

She mentioned her address and he smiled. She rather liked his smile.

"Some run!"

"Some runner," she laughed.

"Sure," he agreed. "But twenty miles is a longish way—"

"Twenty miles? You don't mean to say—"

"It can't be less," he told her. "Didn't you know?"

"No—at least—I didn't think it was quite so far. You see—"

She hesitated, and he smiled again.

"Think up something good," he advised. "I'm not easily kidded. It might save a whole lot of trouble if you told me the truth. Something's wrong. Girls don't go running twenty miles in court shoes and silk stockings just to get their weight down. What's the trouble?"

"Well, it isn't exactly any trouble," she told him, hesitating. "You see, I went out with a friend—in his car—and he started getting a bit fresh, and because I wouldn't stand for that sort of thing he said he didn't see wasting petrol on carting a snowdrift around—"

"He dumped you?"

She nodded.

"Too bad," he smiled. "How's the stitch?"

"Oh, it's gone now, thanks."

"It'll come back," he warned her "long before you've covered twenty miles. You'd better get aboard my bus and let me take you."

She hesitated, eyeing him keenly. She decided that he looked all right. Anyway, she'd never make the distance on foot, and she'd have to risk it.

"I expect you're right," she said.

They hardly spoke during the drive, and, as the car pulled up outside her house, she jumped quickly out and slammed the door.

"Thanks," she said. "I'm terribly grateful."

"Glad to have been useful," he said. "But I'd like to meet the guy that dumped you."

She smiled at that.

"I guess you wouldn't."

"If ever I do, I've a few kind words to say to him and I'd welcome the chance of saying them. What's his name?"

"Name?"

He nodded.

"In case I run across him."

"Smith," she told him. "Good night!"

She turned and hurried indoors, and a few moments later was in her room. Tossing her hat on to the table, she flung herself into an armchair. There, for a long time, she sat with her hands covering her face and her fingers pressed against her temples. She did not want to think, yet again and again she went over each scene of that evening of horror—the look on Schnitzer's face as he had remarked on her pretty hair; the touch of his hand as he grasped her arm; the huddled figure on the floor; Perryfeld's glowing cigar; the gun glinting in his hand; his voice dictating the terms on which she might remain alive; the stranger with the rather nice smile who had come to the rescue. She made an effort to dismiss it all from her mind. It was over now, anyway. She was back home, safe in her room.

She lighted a cigarette and forced herself to smile. There was nothing she could do, and it was no use worrying. Perryfeld couldn't be watching her now, anyway. There was no gun here within a few feet of her ready to go off. Perryfeld might only have said that to scare her. Probably the best thing she could do would be to ring up Police Headquarters and tell them everything. Perryfeld couldn't possibly know that she had done it.

She crossed to the telephone and stood beside it, hesitating. "Even at Police Headquarters," Perryfeld had said. That might, of course, have been bluff, but

She started violently as the telephone bell rang and her hand shook as she took up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Is that Miss Brady?"

"Yes."

"I must want to tell you, Miss Brady, you did very well tonight."

"Who-who's speaking?"

"Well, my name's of no consequence, but I guess you'll remember me. I drove you home."

"Oh!"

"That lie about the guy who dumped you because you wouldn't stand for petting—that was good. Mr. Smith, wasn't it? Much wiser to spin that yarn than tell the truth, Miss Brady. If you'd told me the truth I wouldn't have been surprised to hear a gun go off."

"I don't understand—"

"I guess you do," replied the voice. "The gentleman who took you for a car drive this evening told you something about telling the truth, didn't he? I guess he'll be glad to know you've not forgotten what he said to you." She drew in her breath sharply. So the man with the rather nice smile—Perryfeld had sent him—to test her out—see if she was to be trusted.

"What—why have you 'phoned?"

"Just to let you know we're watching over you, honey, and you've no cause to worry. Good night!"

She heard him cut off, and frowned thoughtfully as she replaced her own receiver. Then she turned suddenly, crossed to the door and turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER IV

LIEUTENANT SPELLMAN was standing by the tape machine, running the narrow strip of paper through his fingers, when Lavine came striding into the office. Just inside the door Lavine paused and stood for a few moments frowning across at him.

"I say, Spellman!"

"Hallo!"

"What's the great idea?"

Spellman continued scrutinizing the tape.

"Huh?"

"Leaving Mr. Perryfeld flat."

"I thought you were looking after him. Perryfeld's not my little brother."

Lavine made a gesture of impatience.

"There's no reason why you should always be so darned up-stage with him."

Spellman glanced across at him.

"And there's no reason, Lavine," he said, "why you should have people like that hanging around. Perryfeld pretty well lives here these days—when the Chief isn't about."

"What if he does?" demanded Lavine aggressively. "Have I got to ask you what friends I choose? Make a list of suitable acquaintances for a police lieutenant and get you to O.K. it, shall I? Like hell I will!"

Spellman, with a shrug, turned his attention again to the strip of paper in his hands.

"Make your own friends, Lavine," he said, "but keep them out of my way, that's all. We don't seem to mix well."

"Huh!" granted Lavine. "Grateful, aren't you?"

"For Perryfeld?" He shook his head. "Keep him Lavine. He's all yours."

"I was trying to give you a break."

"You've a kind heart."

"I was putting you near the money, anyway," said Lavine. "I suppose you don't want to be near the money, eh?"

Spellman grinned.

"I guess I'm near enough," he said. "I live next door to a bank."

"All right, leave it. If you feel like living on your pay, that's your affair. But you're a darned fool, Spellman."

"Sure I am," smiled the other. "And there's nearly a hundred million in these United States who are just the same kind of fools. They prefer to live on what they can earn honestly. Queer, isn't it? Kind of unnatural, eh, Lavine! A hundred millions who never take anything on the side and who'd hand you back your pocket-book if you dropped it. Never heard of those guys, have you? Well, I happen to be one of them. We don't get many write-ups, but we're there all the same."

"Sure you're there," sneered Lavine, "and you'll stay there—put! Still, if you're content—"

He stopped abruptly as the door opened and Perryfeld, smiling genially, came in.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Spellman," he said amiably. "I thought I'd lost you."

"Mr. Spellman will show you round the report room, Mr. Perryfeld," said Lavine, and with a glance at Spellman went from the room.

Perryfeld jerked his cigar towards the tape machine. "Nothing much doing in your line just now in Chester County, eh, Mr. Spellman? Things have been sort of quiet lately, haven't they?"

"I guess they weren't quiet enough for Schnitzer last night, Mr. Perryfeld."

"Ah, yes—Schnitzer. I knew him slightly. There'll be a dame in that case somewhere, Mr. Spellman, from all I've heard of Schnitzer. Nothing else to keep you busy, eh?"

Spellman shook his head.

"We've had nothing in the way of excitement since the Harvey case."

"Too bad, that," said Perryfeld. "I was dining with him that night. He walked with me to the front gate, and he was going back indoors when he was shot. They never found the man."

"Men," corrected Spellman. "It was a machine-gun chopping."

"Sure, I remember. It sounded like a motor-cycle backfire. I was talking with the patrolman on the corner of the block when it happened."

"The patrolman was killed too," added Spellman. He crossed the room and pointed to the frame that hung on the wall. "See this, Mr. Perryfeld? These are the badges of every policeman who has been killed on duty this year." He waved a hand towards the second frame. "And all those since the Great War."

Perryfeld crossed and stared at the frames.

"Quite a few," he remarked.

"Yes, quite a few," agreed Spellman. "I'd like to be able to tell you, Mr. Perryfeld, that every killer who caused a badge to go in those frames went to the Smoky Cell, but they didn't."

"Smoky Cell? You mean the Death House?" Spellman nodded.

"Never heard it called the Smoky Cell before?"

"No; it's a new phrase to me."

Spellman stared at him thoughtfully for some moments. Then:

"You've led a sheltered life, Mr. Perryfeld," he said. Perryfeld laughed easily and took a long draw at his cigar.

"Smoky Cell!" he chuckled. "Well, that's a nice picturesque way of putting it. Some of 'em made it, eh?"

"No, sir," said Spellman, with a frown. "None of them made it. Only one of those killers got even a life sentence, and five years later he was running a booze racket in Los Angeles. Such is life!"

Perryfeld turned away.

"Sure, that's the way things go in this wicked world, Spellman," he said, pulling out his cigarette-case and offering it. "Cigarette?"

"Thanks, but I don't smoke."

Perryfeld raised his eyebrows.

"You don't say! Married?"

"No, sir."

"But likely to be, eh?" chuckled Perryfeld. "Got your little love-nest all fixed, I guess."

"I have, sir."

Perryfeld nodded.

"Well, it's pretty tough, Spellman, trying to live on a lieutenant's pay. It's your funeral, of course, but I don't reckon it's doing right by the girl. Before you know where you are, along comes a little stranger, and then where are you?" He took his cigar from his mouth and stood gazing thoughtfully at the tip. "Listen, Spellman," he said, "if ever you find yourself in any kind of a jam maybe you'll come along and see me?" Spellman glanced at him quickly, and the hint of a smile appeared on his lips. Perryfeld continued to stare at his cigar.

"A thousand dollars one way or the other don't make any particular difference to me, Spellman."

"You're lucky. I seem to remember that you told me that once before."

"Maybe," said Perryfeld, with an airy wave of his hand. "I like you boys. You don't get the pay you ought, not by a darned sight."

"It'll keep me."

Perryfeld smiled.

"It'll keep you pretty short when there's two of you," he said. "Well, just remember what I've told you, that's all. You never know. Anything more to show me while I'm making the tour?"

"I think you've seen pretty well the whole outfit now, Mr. Perryfeld."

"You've got a racketeer fellow here, haven't you? Lavine was telling me—gave himself up, he said."

"Petersen?"

Perryfeld nodded.

"Yes, that was the name. He was trying to make the laundrymen pay for a new society, so Lavine was telling me. He had a bunch of hoodlums. Have you got 'em?"

"No—not yet."

"Huh!" grunted Perryfeld. "It beats me how these traders stand the rackets. It's blackmail and nothing more nor less. What sort of a fellow is this Petersen guy? I'd like to have a peek at him."

"Sorry, but that's against orders."

"Oh, say, there's no harm in letting me—"

As Lavine came into the room, Perryfeld turned to him. "Hullo, Edwin! I was just saying to Mr. Spellman I'd like to take a peek at that racketeer you've got inside."

"Sure," agreed Lavine readily. "He's no beauty, but you can have a look at him if you like."

"Petersen's in the dungeon, Lavine," said Spellman. "Why? Has he been kicking up a fuss?"

"No."

"Then why put him there?"

Spellman shrugged his shoulders and went towards the door.

"I just thought I would—that's all."

"Got the key?"

"Yes," replied Spellman, tapping his pocket. "And I'm keeping it."

As Spellman closed the door behind him, Perryfeld jerked his cigar in his direction.

"Your boy friend's a bit fresh, Edwin."

Lavine nodded.

"He's young," he replied. "They get that way—"

"Means to get married and live on his pay."

"He'll change his mind about that when he's tried it for a while. They all start like that." He glanced hastily round the room. "Say, Perryfeld, I wanted to see you tomorrow."

Perryfeld turned away from him, strolled to the frame of badges and stared at it intently.

"That's O.K., Edwin," he said quietly. "Up at the Pike tomorrow at three."

"That'll suit me."

"I'll pick you up."

"O.K."

"How much will you be wanting?"

"If you could slip me a grand—"

"Sure thing."

He glanced round quickly as he heard the door open and saw Spellman waiting, his hand on the door-knob.

"Come right in, Miss Brady," said Spellman.

Josephine came in slowly. She was pale, and the dark circles around her eyes accentuated her pallor. Spellman, watching her closely, decided that she was frightened but determined to show no sign of her fright. Just inside the door she paused, looking swiftly round the room, and as her glance reached Perryfeld it became riveted on him, and Spellman saw her hands suddenly clench and her teeth show against her lower lip.

"No need to be scared, Miss Brady," he said. "The Chief wants to ask you a few questions, but you needn't let that worry you."

She turned to him and nodded; then once again her glance went back to Perryfeld. He was smiling at her genially, and as she went towards the chair which Spellman had pulled forward for her he came to meet her.

"Why, it's Miss Brady," he said, taking her hand and shaking it warmly. "How d'you do, Miss Brady?" Josephine withdrew her hand hastily, and Spellman frowned.

"Is Mr. Perryfeld a friend of yours, Miss Brady?" he asked.

"Sure I'm a friend of hers," said Perryfeld hastily. "We're old friendseh, Miss Brady?"

Josephine stared at him in bewilderment. What was Perryfeld doing here—at Police Headquarters? And why was he suddenly claiming friendship? Perhaps he had known that she would be called in and questioned this morning and had risked coming there himself to make sure that she should say nothing....

"You remember me. Miss Brady, don't you?" said Perryfeld, and the look in his eyes told her closely what her answer must be.

"Oh yes!—I think so," she stammered. "Yes, of course I do, Mr. Perryfeld."

"Sure you do," he said. "Mr. Schnitzer introduced me to you, didn't he?" The smile left his face and he sighed heavily. "A bad shock for you, I'm afraid, Miss Brady. Poor Schnitzer! You'd never have thought a man like him had an enemy in the world. And you were there when it happened, weren't you?"

"You don't have to answer questions from Mr. Perryfeld, Miss Brady," said Spellman quietly. "And you don't have to ask them, Perryfeld. If there are any questions to be put to Miss Brady, the Chief will put them."

Perryfeld gave a shrug.

"I'm only saying what's in the papers, Mr. Spellman," he said. "No harm meant. The reports all say Schnitzer's stenographer was there when the shooting happened." He turned to Josephine again and patted her shoulder. "You've no cause to worry, my dear," he said. "You just tell them the simple truth and stick to it, and the police aren't going to hurt you. That's so, eh, Mr. Spellman?"

Spellman nodded.

"All you've got to remember," continued Perryfeld, "is not to try any funny business. Funny business don't pay, Miss Brady. The people who get into trouble when they come to Police Headquarters are the ones that try funny business."

"It's no use keeping Miss Brady hanging around, Spellman," said Lavine. "There's no knowing when the Chief will be in. I'll ask her a few questions and then she can go—"

"The Chief wants to see Miss Brady himself, Lavine."

"Of course he does—who wouldn't?" smiled Perryfeld. "But the Chief's not here, Mr. Spellman, and this is no sort of place to keep a lady hanging around. It'd get on anyone's nerves who isn't accustomed to it. It gets on

mine sometimes. I guess I'll take Miss Brady and give her a cup of coffee and a cigarette—"

"Oh no—please—I'd rather not," interrupted Josephine hastily. "I'd much rather stay—I mean, I don't fancy a coffee just now, thanks, Mr. Perryfeld—"

"Well, you're not arrested, you know," said Perryfeld, "and if you'd care to take a bit of a stroll until the Chief arrives there's no reason why you shouldn't." Instinctively she moved closer to Spellman.

"Thanks, but I'd rather wait here," she said. Perryfeld went to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Listen, Miss Brady," he said, and as he smiled at her she saw that ugly look in his eyes again, "there's no sense in staying here and getting yourself all worked up. You just come along with me like a sensible girl."

The door opened and O'Regan strode in.

CHAPTER V

JUST for an instant O'Regan paused, and his glance swept from Perryfeld to Josephine and back to Perryfeld; then he strode in his desk, tossed aside his hat and sat down.

"This is Miss Brady, Chief," said Spellman. "She was at Schnitzer's place last night when the shooting happened."

Josephine glanced up and found a pair of steely-blue eyes surveying her. She tried to smile, but the effort was not much of a success, and her glance wavered and fell. She would have to be terribly careful, she decided, if Captain O'Regan started asking her questions. With those eyes staring at her, it wouldn't be easy to tell a lie and get away with it. Perhaps, after all, it would be wiser to tell him the truth. If only she dared! If only she could pluck up the courage to tell him the truth now, while Perryfeld was there on the spot! She was at Police Headquarters, and was perfectly safe, and she might never have a chance like this again to get out of the tangle. She had only to say, "Captain O'Regan, it was Perryfeld who killed Mr. Schnitzer; I saw him do it," and the whole wretched business would be over and done with.

She took a hesitating step forward, glancing nervously, as she did so, at Perryfeld. He was watching her, with a smile on his face; as their glances met she saw his hand move towards the side pocket of his coat, saw also the ugly look in his eyes, and hesitated. Always a gun not many feet away from her, he had said—even at Police Headquarters. He had got his gun on her now, and if she said one word...

"I'd better be asking Miss Brady a few questions, eh, Chief?" said Lavine. "I guess she can't tell us much, and there's no need to take up your time."

O'Regan glanced at him, frowning.

"I'll question Miss Brady myself," he said shortly. Then, nodding towards Perryfeld: "Who's this?"

"This is Mr. Perryfeld, Chief," said Lavine. "We've been showing him around. He's anxious to meet you—"

"Sure I am," interrupted Perryfeld, smiling genially. "I've heard of you, Captain."

O'Regan's face was unsmiling as he glanced across at him.

"Quite a lot of people in Chester County have," he said.

"I've always been anxious to meet you."

"Quite a lot of people aren't, Mr. Perryfeld."

"I'll tell the world they're not," laughed Perryfeld; "but I'm not one of them. From all I've heard, you're a swell fellow, Captain—"

"Put that testimonial in writing," interrupted O'Regan, "and I'll frame it and hang it in the office." He turned to Spellman. "Show Mr. Perryfeld the way out, Spell, will you?"

"Say, what's the hurry, Captain?" said Perryfeld.

"I'd like a bit of a talk with you—"

"You might not. And I'm busy now, anyway. I want to talk to Miss Brady alone."

Spellman went to the door and opened it, but Perryfeld made no move.

"If you've no objection, Captain," he said, "I'd be interested to stay right here and listen. I've never been present at a grilling, and I'd welcome the chance of seeing how it's done."

"Never been grilled yourself, eh, Mr. Perryfeld? Too bad! But keep hoping. You may get your chance one day. Lieutenant Spellman's waiting to shut the door behind you."

"O.K., Captain," replied Perryfeld. "I'll be along again some other day. Glad to have met you."

With a glance at Josephine he followed Spellman out, and Lavine closed the door behind them.

"Miss Brady was at Schnitzer's place last night, Chief," he said again, "but she didn't see—"

"Didn't I say I'd question Miss Brady myself, Lavine?"

"Sure. But I'm just telling you—"

"And I said 'alone'," added O'Regan.

"Oh, all right," said Lavine, with a shrug, and slammed the door behind him.

O'Regan glanced across at Josephine and waved a hand towards the chair on the opposite side of his desk.

"Sit down, Miss Brady, won't you?" he invited.

She went slowly forward and seated herself, aware all the time of the keen scrutiny of O'Regan's eyes. She could not bring herself to look at him. She sat with downcast eyes, her hands clasped together in her lap, dreading the moment when he would speak and she would somehow have to answer him. She felt that it would be useless trying to deceive him, that he would know at once that she was not telling the truth; yet even here, alone with him in his office, she would never dare to tell him the whole truth. Perryfeld's visit

just when she was brought to Police Headquarters had not been a coincidence. He had come with some set purpose, and she had not the least doubt as to what his purpose had been. He had not trusted her, and had meant to be there on the spot to see that she kept her promise to him and to carry out his threat if she failed him. He had even tried to stay in the room while she was questioned, and the fact that O'Regan had refused to allow this did not reassure her. Perryfeld was not far away. He would somehow get to know exactly what she told O'Regan, and if she told him the truth she would never be allowed to reach home again. Outside in the street someone would be waiting for her....

"Well, Miss Brady?"

She forced herself to look up, and saw O'Regan smiling at her.

"How are the toes?"

"Toes?"

"The toes I danced on at the Social Club the other evening. Don't tell me you've forgotten."

She smiled.

"No, Captain O'Regan, of course I haven't. I remember perfectly."

"The evil that men do lives after them, eh? I guess I left you plenty of souvenirs. I intended sending you a new pair of dance shoes, but I didn't have your address. When it comes to dancing, sitting-out is my strong point. Not feeling sore with me?"

"Not now," she said.

"But you were?"

She nodded.

"I thought you might have told me that I was dancing with the famous Captain Tricks O'Regan. I had no idea. I only found out when I saw your photograph in the newspaper and recognized you. You said your name was Smith—"

"I did," he admitted. "But when a police officer goes dancing he doesn't advertise his profession. It doesn't pay—professionally. Besides, there's a prejudice amongst young ladies against a policeman's footwork, and he'd get no partners."

Josephine was breathing more freely. Captain O'Regan had remembered her and seemed quite disposed to be friendly. Perhaps he wouldn't ask her too many questions. They had got on splendidly together the other night. They had danced together most of the evening, and he had said that he was hoping she would let him see her again some time; and then he had

suddenly disappeared and left her partnerless. She had understood later, when she had seen his photograph in the newspaper and recognized him, that he had probably been called away on police business, and she had been vaguely disappointed at the thought that he had left without having her address and she would, in all likelihood, never meet him again.

And now here she was, sitting in his office, and he was obviously glad to see her, and perhaps, after all, there was nothing to be nervous about. He would probably take her word as a friend and not ask too many awkward questions.

"Not quite such pleasant surroundings as the last time we met, eh, Miss Brady?" he said. "I'm afraid we don't cater for our visitors' comfort, either physical or mental, at Police Headquarters, and I'm sorry it has been necessary to invite you here. But I've got to ask you a few questions. You see, Miss Brady, I'm not Mr. Smith in this office; I'm Captain O'Regan, and—"

"You think I may prefer Mr. Smith?" She smiled. "I'll tell you later, shall I—when you've finished grilling me?"

"I guess there'll be no question of 'grilling', Miss Brady," he said. "People who tell the truth needn't have any fear of Tricks O'Regan or any other police officer." The smile left his face and his mouth grew grim. "But if anyone comes into this office and starts lying—then God help them! If I had my own mother sitting where you're sitting, she'd have to tell me the truth or take the consequences."

He was silent for some moments, gazing at her searchingly. She managed to meet his glance without wavering.

"Well, Captain O'Regan? What do you want to know?"

"I want to know who killed Schnitzer."

"I can't tell you that."

"No idea? No suspicion?"

"None at all."

"Can't say whether the person who did the shooting was tall or short, fat or thin, young or old?"

She shook her head.

"Just can't tell me anything at all?"

"Nothing."

"Too bad!" said O'Regan. "Well, I may as well tell you, Miss Brady, that at 7.15 last night the person we suspect of doing this killing was seen entering Schnitzer's place in your company—"

"He wasn't," she flashed. "I went there alone." O'Regan smiled.

"I know you did," he said. "We've established that fact."

"Then why say—"

"I'll tell you why: because I wanted to show you that when you said just now that you could tell me nothing you weren't being quite accurate. 'He wasn't', eh? So it was a man, was it? You know that, do you?"

"Oh—well—yes, I know that," she stammered. "At least, I suppose it was a man—"

He cut her short.

"Now listen, Miss Brady," he said. "You were at Schnitzer's place last night. I'm not asking you why you went there; that's of no importance. It's not the sort of trip I'd care for a sister of mine to make—"

"I went there to take down some correspondence," she interrupted. "I was Mr. Schnitzer's stenographer, and he 'phoned through to me and asked me to go round at once. If you don't believe me—"

"I do," he told her. "Schnitzer certainly did 'phone you; we've checked up that call."

"And if you hadn't checked up the call you wouldn't have believed me?"

He smiled faintly.

"I guess Mr. Smith would have believed you, Miss Brady, but Tricks O'Regan wouldn't. That's about the size of it, and just at the moment I'm Tricks O'Regan. Now, you were at Schnitzer's place last night when the shooting happened, and when you tell me you can't give me any information at all, as Tricks O'Regan I've got to ask you to think again. You must have seen something—"

"I saw nothing at all. I was in the next room when it happened, and I saw nothing until it was all over and I went in and found Mr. Schnitzer lying on the floor."

"And you didn't hear anything? All happened in dead silence, eh?"

"Oh, well—yes—of course I heard the bang," she admitted.

"Only just the bang? Nothing more? Nobody said anything?"

"Oh yes, I heard—after the bang—I heard their voices. They said something about getting away as quickly as possible—"

"Their voices? There was more than one of them, was there? We're getting along nicely. We know now that it was a man who did the killing, and that someone else was with him. How many others were there—one, two, three?"

"I tell you I don't know, Captain O'Regan. I didn't see them. I just heard voices—men's voices—"

"This fellow who did the killing," interrupted O'Regan calmly, "would he be a big sort of man?heavily built, I mean?"

Josephine sprang to her feet.

"It's no use going on like this!" she exclaimed angrily. "I've told you I saw nobody, but you keep on asking me questions and trying to trip me up and make out I'm telling lies, and you're only wasting time."

"There's no need to take offence, Miss Brady," soothed O'Regan. "I'm just trying to help you remember, that's all. All right—you saw nobody. Now sit down again and tell me this: when you found Schnitzer lying on the floor, what did you do?"

She seated herself on the chair again.

"I fainted."

He nodded.

"I'm not doubting your word there, anyway. And then?"

She glanced nervously at the door. If only she could be sure that she could tell him the truth without anyone hearing, that as soon as she started telling it the door wouldn't open and...

"And then, Miss Brady?"

"Oh, I—of course, I came round. I don't know how long I was unconscious, but as soon as I came round I hurried away from Mr. Schnitzer's house."

"Hurried where?"

"Why, home. You see, I-I'd promised to meet a friend. He was to take me out for a car drive, and I was late already."

"I see," said O'Regan. "You didn't inform the police? It never occurred to you that when you knew Schnitzer had been murdered it might be as well to do that?"

"I was scared," she explained. "I didn't know exactly what I was doing. I'd had a dreadful shock, and I suppose I lost my head."

"But you remembered your appointment for the car drive. I see. And then?"

"I met my friend and he took me for a drive."

"Enjoy it? Beautiful night for a drive yesterday, wasn't it?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't enjoy it at all," she told him. "We had a bit of a quarrel—in the car, I mean—and I—I insisted on getting out. It was rather silly, I suppose, because we were a long way from home and I might have had to walk back.... But you don't want to hear all that, do you? It has nothing to do with Mr. Schnitzer."

"And you had to walk home, did you?"

"Well—no. I was lucky enough to get a lift. A car came along and the driver stopped it and said he'd noticed me running—"

"Oh, running home, not walking? Any special hurry? But no doubt you'd remembered that Mr. Schnitzer had been murdered, and were in a hurry to get back and telephone to Police Headquarters like a good citizen. Why didn't you telephone? Or call? You must have known, Miss Brady, that when you found Schnitzer dead the first thing you should have done—"

"I tell you I didn't know what I was doing," she interrupted desperately. "I lost my head and had no idea what I was doing. Of course, I realize now that I ought to have done something about it, but can't you understand that when a girl has seen what I'd seen—"

"Heard," he corrected. "You saw nobody and nothing—"

"I'd seen Mr. Schnitzer," she said. "That's what I meant. I'd seen him lying dead on the floor. It was horrible—ghastly—you've no idea how I felt; and all I thought about was just getting out of that awful house as quickly as possible—"

"And keeping your appointment for a car drive. O.K., Miss Brady; we'll leave it at that for the moment. Sorry to have worried you, but I guess you understand that a police officer has his duty to do, and won't feel sore with me."

Josephine rose from her chair with alacrity.

"Why, of course not, Captain O'Regan," she smiled. "I quite understand. It can't be very pleasant for you either, having to question people like that and doubt everything they say."

"Not very pleasant for Mr. Smith, anyway."

She smiled. "And may I go now?"

"Sure. At least... Well, there's just one more point I'd like to know."

"Yes?"

"How well do you know Perryfeld?"

"Perryfeld?"

"The big fellow who was here just now and wanted to stay and hear a grilling."

"But I don't know—"

"He knows you, Miss Brady. He was talking to you here just before I opened the door and came in. I heard him."

"Yes—he was. But I don't know him—not really know him, I mean."

"But you've met him? Before today, I mean."

"Oh yes, I've seen him before," she admitted. "Just once or twice—at—at Mr. Schnitzer's office. He used to call there, you know, occasionally, and I spoke to him a few times."

He nodded. "Like him?"

"Do you think I'd like him, Captain O'Regan?"

He gave a shrug. "Was it Perryfeld who took you for the car-ride?"

She repressed a start and managed to smile.

"If Mr. Perryfeld invited me to go for a car ride," she said, "I'd be confined to bed with something catching."

"Not a friend, eh? Never met him outside of Schnitzer's office?"

"Never," she assured him; "and never want to." O'Regan rose and held out his hand.

"There's nothing wrong with your taste, anyway. Miss Brady," he said. "Good-bye!"

She took his hand and then crossed to the door.

"It's good-bye to Captain O'Regan, anyway, I hope," she said.

He opened the door. "And what about Mr. Smith?"

"Oh, just au revoir to Mr. Smith," she smiled, and went out.

CHAPTER VI

O'REGAN returned thoughtfully to his desk. She had not, of course, told him the truth, certainly not the whole truth. It was the last thing he wanted to admit to himself concerning Josephine Brady, because ever since the night, a few weeks earlier, when he had met her at the dance, his thoughts of her had been persistent and pleasant ones.

Owing to Josephine Brady, O'Regan had lately been several times guilty of entertaining thoughts at Police Headquarters which could not strictly be classed as business, and when he had found her in his office this morning he had experienced a sensation against which, as a police officer and something of a cynic where women were concerned, he had thought himself immune; and he found it, for the first time in his career, hard to believe that a girl with limpid blue eyes like Josephine Brady's could be guilty of deception or be mixed up in any way with men like Perryfeld or the late unlamented Schnitzer.

But the fact remained that she had quite obviously been trying to hide something from him. Making all possible allowance for the shock she had had, it was not easy to believe that, after seeing—or at any rate hearing—the murder committed, she had walked out of Schnitzer's house and, without saying a word to anybody, gone for a car drive with a friend. Not even the limpid blue eyes could persuade him to accept that story; and the story of what had happened afterwards was even less credible. Why, for instance, had she been running when the obvious thing to do was to stand still and signal to a car that she wanted a lift? What had she been running away from? What had frightened her? Or who?

O'Regan frowned. Perryfeld was in it somewhere. Without the least logical reason for any such suspicion, that suspicion was quite definite. Perryfeld knew Josephine Brady, and she was Schnitzer's stenographer, and Schnitzer and Perryfeld were acquainted—there was a link somewhere if he could only find it.

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of Spellman and Lavine.

"That girl's scared. Chief," said Spellman.

"Lots of people are when they come to Police Headquarters, Spell," said O'Regan. "But don't blame me this time; I was just about as fierce with her as a turtle-dove."

"Scared of something outside of here," said Spellman. "Seemed nervous at leaving the building and asked me if a sergeant could see her home. I sent Jennings with her." O'Regan nodded.

"Nerves," he said. "Schnitzer dead can't have been a pretty sight."

"Did she talk, Chief?" inquired Lavine.

"Sure. She told me she'd been for a car ride with a boy friend."

Lavine frowned.

"Nothing about Schnitzer?" he asked. "She must have been there when the shooting happened—"

"Oh yes—quite a lot about Schnitzer. She told me he was dead. I guess that's the most important fact about Schnitzer—eh, Spell?"

"If we could ask Schnitzer I fancy he'd say so," grinned Spellman.

"Schnitzer's dead," repeated O'Regan. "We don't have to ask why he's dead—we know. We can make a pretty good guess, anyway. He's dead because he wouldn't pay to live. I told you, Spell, that's the racket that's going on, and Schnitzer's just another victim. He wouldn't pay, or couldn't pay, so they shot him up just to show those who are paying that it's as well to keep up to date with their installments. I've seen this coming for a long time, and now it's come—the biggest racket ever."

Spellman nodded.

"It's not of much importance who killed Schnitzer," continued O'Regan. "It might be one of a dozen—fifty—a hundred. Chester County's swarming with killers, but they don't count much. They're only the small fry who do as they're told and draw their wages. There's a big shot behind them, and he's the fellow we're after. I'm going to get him—see? It's the big shot against Tricks O'Regan, and it's Tricks O'Regan who's going to win. Geissel!"

Sergeant Geissel came to the door of the glass-house. "Yes, Chief?"

"I want that file.",

The sergeant placed a file of papers on the desk and O'Regan began to look through it. For some moments Lavine stood watching him doubtfully, and then he strolled towards the desk.

"Say, Chief," he began, "about Perryfeld—"

O'Regan continued writing. "What about Perryfeld?"

"He was a bit sore at the way you treated him just now—said he reckoned a man of his standing ought to be treated with some sort of courtesy when he paid a visit to Police Headquarters."

"Standing? What's his standing?"

"Well, he's a man who counts, Chief," replied Lavine. "He's got a swell place out on Washington and they say he's worth a million dollars—"

"Seems a stiffish price on his face value, Lavine. Sorry if I've hurt his feelings. Sensitive, is he?"

"You were a bit curt with him. Chief, that's all. He's anxious to be friendly—came here this morning specially to see you—and he's a fellow with a whole lot of influence—"

O'Regan cut him short with a gesture.

"Perryfeld—what is he? I see him driving his Packard and wearing his diamond pin and smoking his dollar cigar, but I don't have to take my hat off to him for those things. If he says good morning, I'll say good morning, and that's all I want."

"But on the level, Chief," persisted Lavine, "he's a swell fellow. He's in with all the big men of the State."

"So am I. But that's no testimonial to either of us."

"But there's no sense in getting in wrong with a big man like Perryfeld."

O'Regan laid down his pen.

"Listen, Lavine," he said. "You don't realize it, perhaps, but you're a very ordinary man. I'm not ordinary. If I were just ordinary I shouldn't be the most successful police officer in the State of New York. Some day I shall be governor of the State—maybe president." He smiled. "No, I guess I won't trouble to be president—would you, Spell?"

Spellman grinned.

"What I'm getting at, Lavine," continued O'Regan, "is that I know men—I live by knowing men. But don't let that worry you. The point is. I don't like Perryfeld, and that's all there is to it."

Lavine frowned.

"You've got nothing on him, Chief."

"Not a thing."

Lavine glanced at him doubtfully.

"Well, now," he said, "Perryfeld is anxious to see you, and he said he'd be calling back—"

"We'll put the carpet down."

"Honest, Chief," persisted the other, "you'd like him if you know him. He's square—eh, Spellman?"

"No use asking me," replied Spellman. "I don't know him."

"He subscribes to the police sports," urged Lavine, "and the children's home and everything."

"Fine!" said O'Regan. "But I once heard of a churchwarden who put arsenic in his wife's tea."

"But you'll see him when he calls, eh, Chief?"

"Sure. I'll see him at ten o'clock tomorrow morning if he really wants to see me. 'Keep Chester Clean'—they had that on a banner at the City Hall at the last meeting of the Citizens' League, and that's what I'm here for. Sure I'll see Perryfeld. You can't keep a place clean if you don't see the dirt."

"Say, Chief," protested Lavine, "Perryfeld's a real gentleman—"

"And what was he before he was a gentleman? He's been living in Chester County just three years, and that's all we know about him except that he's swollen with money and does no work. Perryfeld a gentleman! You take it from me, Lavine, that when a man gets money without work he's either a crook or on the Stock Exchange. Maybe he's both. But that bird never bought stock in his life."

"You've never said a word against him before, Chief."

O'Regan rose and began pacing the room.

"I've never known this situation before. We've had two years of copper-shooting and practically no other crime. And I never see the best people in this office."

"I don't get that," said Lavine.

"You wouldn't," snapped O'Regan. "But that's how it is. They all used to come here to Police Headquarters—all the best people—the van Zyls, the Roberts, the Lees. They used to float in at odd times and say, 'How's Tricks?' There are fifty rich families living in the neighbourhood, and somebody was always dropping in to swap yarns. But they don't come here now."

"Maybe they're getting particular," sneered Lavine. "The last of that bunch to call here," continued O'Regan, "was John Harvey—a rich man who was in no racket, and he was shot like a dog—bumped the next day. Why? Just because he came here. And that's why none of the best people come here now. They're all scared of the same thing."

"Perryfeld's a rich man, Chief," Lavine reminded him, "and he's often around."

"Sure," agreed O'Regan. "Perryfeld's not scared. He's the only rich man in the county who isn't. Have you ever wondered why?"

Lavine gave a shrug and went to the door.

"You hate the man, Chief, so I guess he can't do anything right," he said surlily. "Do you want to see Petersen?"

O'Regan nodded. "Get him, Spellman, will you?" Spellman went from the room and Lavine turned and faced O'Regan.

"From your manner, Chief," he began angrily, "anyone would think you didn't trust me."

"You'd be surprised, Lavine."

Lavine bit his lip. "Do you want me to stay here while this bird is being grilled?"

O'Regan seated himself at his desk. "I guess not," he said.

"Any particular reason, Chief, why I shouldn't—"

O'Regan glanced up at his scowling face.

"I said 'I guess not'," he snapped.

"All right—I heard you the first time," said Lavine sullenly, and strode from the room.

CHAPTER VII

A FEW minutes later the door was opened again and Petersen, with Spellman close behind him, slunk into the room. He was a tall, thin, ferret-faced man, with red-lidded, restless eyes and hands that were never still. He took a few quick steps forward and paused, his shoulders hunched, his lips twitching and his shifty little eyes darting to every corner of the room. Then he swung round suddenly towards Spellman.

"For God's sake shut that door!"

It was a thin, reedy voice, which seemed far too small for his body, and he whined rather than spoke the words. Spellman closed the door and Petersen advanced a few more steps and paused again.

"Captain!"

O'Regan got up and went towards him.

"That shade, Captain," whined Petersen, waving a shaking hand towards the window. "Can I have it down?"

At a sign from O'Regan, Spellman lowered the shade, but Petersen's gaze still moved restlessly round the room and came to rest on the door.

"Nobody out there, Captain—in that room?"

"That's not a room," O'Regan assured him; "that's a passage leading into the courtyard."

Petersen still stared at it nervously.

"Is that door locked?"

Spellman crossed to the door and flung it open, and as he did so, Petersen suddenly dropped on to one knee and flung up an arm as if to shield his head.

"All quite clear, Petersen," announced Spellman. "See, I'm locking it."

He turned the key in the lock and held it up for the man to see.

"Nobody else can come in?"

"Nobody," Spellman assured him. "I told you that."

O'Regan pulled a chair forward and pointed to it, and Petersen, with a last swift glance around, sank on to it.

"Scared, eh, Petersen?" said O'Regan. "Why?"

"Me? No, I'm not scared, Captain. What would I be scared of?"

"Been racketeering in this town, haven't you?" Petersen nodded. "Yep."

O'Regan picked up a pamphlet from his desk and consulted it.

"You've been forming a Laundry Protection Society, taking ten dollars a head from those who'd pay and beating up those who wouldn't. That right?"

"Yep."

"You had a gang with you?"

Petersen nodded again. "Three boys, Captain." O'Regan tossed the document aside and picked up a paper from the desk.

"When did you see them last, Petersen?"

"See 'em? Monday, I guess."

"Listen to this," said O'Regan, glancing at the paper. "A blue Dodge sedan was found abandoned on Long Avenue, Queen's. Inside were three dead men. One was identified as Bunny Lane, a well-known character in the Bronx.' These were your boys?"

"I guess so, Captain."

"They were in town Monday night and were dead Tuesday morning?"

"It looks that way."

"And on Wednesday morning you walked into the station and gave yourself up?"

"Sure."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, Captain," whined Petersen, "it was this way. It sort of came over me suddenly that in running this racket I wasn't doing right by my fellow-men—"

"Can that," snapped O'Regan. "Come clean, will you? I'll tell you why you came skulking into the station and gave yourself up, shall I? It wasn't because you'd suddenly found a sore spot in your conscience and wanted to heal it. It was something more serious than that—something that would cause you a sight more inconvenience than a pang of conscience. You came to the station because you'd seen someone in town you didn't care about seeing."

"No, sir."

"I say yes," said O'Regan; "you saw somebody in town and you were mighty anxious he shouldn't get a glimpse of you."

"No, sir," repeated Petersen doggedly. "I saw no one."

"A big shot, eh?"

"No, sir. Me—I don't know no big shots. There ain't no squawk coming from Lem Petersen, Captain. Just get that straight."

"No, crooks don't squawk, do they, Petersen?" said O'Regan. "Some of them have got a gang to clean up the killers. But you've got no gang, Petersen—you're just a cheap skate of a racketeer, hiding for your life. Three of your pals have been dumped, and you come running to the police to take care of you and haven't got the guts to go after the men who shot up your pals."

"Ain't I?" exclaimed Petersen excitedly. "Me—no guts, eh? You got no cause to talk that way, Captain. The guy as did that job will get his all right!"

"Sure—on a gold plate," sneered O'Regan. "That's why you've come to the police, Petersen. This town's full of killers. You made a mistake and jumped into a big racket, and now you've discovered what you've stepped into you're trying to get out of it alive. Not doing right by your fellow-men! Been in Saint Quentin prison, haven't you?"

"Yep."

"And Canyon City prison?"

"Yep."

"Any big shots there with you?"

"Say, Captain," said Petersen, "don't you think I don't want to get square with the guy that bumped those boys, because I do. But you're right, Captain: I'm a lousy racketeer. They just push me around and I've no come-back."

O'Regan declined to be drawn on to that side issue. "Just tell me this, Petersen," he said. "Who was the big shot you met in Saint Quentin?"

"Nobody."

"In Canyon City, then? You met some big fellows there?"

Petersen stared at him with an obstinate, sullen expression and made no reply.

"Somebody in Canyon City, eh?"

"Sure," admitted Petersen. "There were a lot of guys there. Mind you, Captain, I'm not saying any of them was the guy you're talking about."

"Sure you're not. Who was in prison with you when you were there?"

"There was Harry Pawter—the guy that did the big bank job in Denver City—and there was Joe Lacross who held up the Colorado Limited."

"Anyone else?"

"There was Ben Guinney. He ran a gang round the West. A real swell outfit—eight killers. But I ain't saying Ben Guinney's the guy you're talking about—"

"What was Ben Guinney's graft?" demanded O'Regan.

"Any graft where you can use eight killers," replied Petersen. "I guess Guinney wasn't particular as long as there was dollars in it—"

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, glanced tearfully round, and flung out a hand towards the door through which he had entered.

"There's someone outside that door!" he exclaimed in a scared whisper. "I heard 'em, Captain. There's some guy out there listening to every word I'm saying."

Spellman strode swiftly but quietly to the door and flung it open so suddenly that Lavine almost fell into the room. But he recovered himself and walked calmly in.

"What do you want?" demanded O'Regan.

"I got a message that you wanted me, Chief."

"I don't."

"Sorry," said Lavine; he turned and went out.

"Put someone outside that door, Spell," said O'Regan, and when Spellman had given the necessary instructions, turned again to Petersen.

"Sit down," he ordered. "Nobody will be listening now. About Ben Guinney—what sentence did he get?"

"Life."

"He's still there, then?"

"No, Captain," replied Petersen. "Guinney ain't still there. He ain't the sort to stay put. His gang pulled him out. I tell you, that guy can break prisons easier than you can do chores."

"Seen Guinney since you came out?"

Petersen hesitated, staring stolidly at his hands and nervously twisting his fingers.

"Well—yep," he said at last. "I saw him in San Francisco. It was a bad break for me. I bumped right into him. I jumped in a taxi and made the first train out of town, and even then they nearly stuffed me."

"Seen him since then?"

The obstinate look came back to Petersen's face.

"That's all I gotta say," he mumbled.

"You've got to say what I ask you to say," said

O'Regan. "When did you see Guinney last? And where?"

"I tell you I'm saying no more, Captain. I guess I've said more than a mouthful—"

"What did he get his lifer for?" asked O'Regan calmly. "Murder?"

Petersen nodded. "Sure—first degree. Say, listen, Captain. If you ever have to take Ben Guinney, shoot first—see? I'm telling you, Captain; shoot first and don't stop shooting." His voice took on its whining tone again. "Them there boys meant a lot to me, Captain. There wasn't no call to bump 'em. All he had to do—"

"Who?" rapped O'Regan.

"Why, the guy who shot 'em up. How should I know who did it? But there wasn't no cause to do it. All he had to do was to say 'scat' and not take them boys for a ride. That's the trouble with them guys; they only know one medicine for any sickness. It's just kill or nothin'. But don't you go thinking I know who did it, Captain, because I'm telling you I don't know nothin' about it—"

"Sure you don't," soothed O'Regan. "We'll stick to Ben Guinney. How long is it since you bumped into him that time in San Francisco?"

"That was three years ago, Captain."

"Could you identify him?"

"No."

"Suppose I brought Ben Guinney into this room, you mean to say you wouldn't know him?"

Petersen sprang to his feet, his lips working and his fingers clawing at his coat.

"For God's sake, Captain!" he whined. "You ain't going to play a trick like that? Listen—I don't know nothin' about Guinney—see? Nothin' at all, and it's just waste of time to keep on shooting questions at me."

"I'm asking you, Petersen," said O'Regan quietly, "whether you'd know Guinney if I brought him in here—"

"Listen, you!" exclaimed Petersen with sudden passion. "You've got your job, haven't you? And you've got your brass buttons to look after, haven't you? But what chance have I got? I've got no brass buttons, have I?"

He sank back on the chair and sat for some moments covering his face with his shaking hands; then he glanced up.

"Say, Captain, do you know what's the matter with me? I'm starvin'. I've been in this place three days and all I've had to eat is a biscuit I begged off the gaoler. That's what's got me down."

"He has had food sent in to him, Chief," said Spellman.

"Sure I have," said Petersen. "And I put it in the ash-can. There's a friend in town who'd send me in lunches and do you know where I'd be if I ate 'em? I'd be on the table—with them three boys they took for a ride to Queen's. I tell you, Captain, I'm through."

"O.K.," said O'Regan. "Unlock that door, Spellman. If I bring you some food, Petersen, will you eat it?"

"Sure I will, Captain," said Petersen eagerly. "You're a square dealer."

O'Regan nodded. "O.K. You shall have some. Get him back, Spell, will you? And tell Lavine I want him."

As Spellman led Petersen out, O'Regan seated himself at his desk and a few moments later Lavine came in with a jaunty air of self-assurance.

"Grilling over, Chief?" he asked amiably.

"Meaning Petersen's?" inquired O'Regan. "Yes, I've nothing more to say to Petersen."

"Say, why is he in the dungeon?"

"Just because I said he was to be put there. He's safe there."

"Scared, is he?"

"So long as he's in the dungeon nobody can talk to him. And if he starts talking nobody can listen. Did you hear very much when you were listening outside the door just now?"

Lavine flushed angrily.

"You don't have to say that kind of thing to me, Chief," he began, but O'Regan cut him short.

"The next time you listen in on me, Lavine," he said, "you'll hear something that'll make your ears burn. And you won't have to stand outside the door to hear it, either."

Lavine strode to the desk.

"If you've got something on me, Chief," he said, "I reckon I've a right to know what it is."

O'Regan glanced up and met his gaze steadily.

"All right, Lavine," he said, "then I'll tell you. I met your wife the other day on the Pimlico Race Track."

"Any reason why the wife of a police officer shouldn't go to a race track? All the best people go, and—"

"No reason at all," interrupted O'Regan, "provided she can afford it. But I happen to know something about fur coats."

"I don't get you, Chief."

"Your wife was wearing a fur coat that can't have cost less than three thousand dollars, Lavine, and she had ten years' pay of a police lieutenant on her fingers." His mouth hardened. "I want to know here and now where the money comes from for that sort of thing." Lavine smiled.

"There's a simple enough explanation of that, Chief," he said easily; "I've been in on the market." O'Regan nodded. "Then I want your broker's account right here on the table tomorrow morning." Lavine's smile vanished, but he gave a careless shrug. "That's O.K. with me." he said sullenly. "Is that all?"

"I guess it's enough to get on with."

Lavine's hands clenched and he leaned threateningly across the desk.

"Listen, Chief," he said furiously. "I've stood for enough lately. You may be Tricks O'Regan, but even Tricks O'Regan isn't going to treat me like a dog. Do you get that?"

O'Regan's thin lips shaped themselves into a smile.

"Sure I wouldn't, Lavine," he said. "I'm always mighty kind to dumb animals."

For a moment Lavine stood glaring at his smiling face, and then he turned and strode from the room. O'Regan opened the file that lay on his desk and began to study it, and then he leaned back in his chair frowning thoughtfully. Schnitzer—Petersen—Perryfeld—Lavine—Guinney or some other big shot in the background—they all, he felt, fitted in somewhere if he could only see how. Josephine Brady, too. A nice bunch for Josephine Brady to be mixed up with—and it was no use blinking the fact that she was mixed up with them in some way. All those lies she had told him—why should she tell him a string of obvious untruths unless she was somehow in the dirty business and afraid to tell him the truth? She had been shielding somebody—herself perhaps. Or it might be something to do with Schnitzer—something she didn't want to come out. Schnitzer's reputation was commonly supposed to be responsible for most of the sour milk in his district, and she had been at his house that evening—alone....

O'Regan made a gesture of impatience. He would get nowhere along that track. If he was any judge of character, Josephine Brady would be as much out of her natural element in Schnitzer's apartment as Schnitzer would have been out of his in a monastery. That part of her story was no doubt true; Schnitzer had 'phoned for her and she had been obliged to go. But he had a

feeling that she could have told him, had she chosen, who killed Schnitzer. Unless she had been so scared to tell him.... Scared? That might be the explanation—scared of what might happen to her if she told all she knew.

He realized suddenly that he was thinking a good deal about Josephine Brady, who played, after all, only a comparatively insignificant part in the mystery. And then he remembered that, since Josephine Brady had at any rate something to do with it, thoughts of her might legitimately be classed as "business" and quite properly entertained even at Police Headquarters.

Fifteen minutes later Sergeant Geissel, catching sight of his Chief through the window of the glass-house, saw him still leaning back in his chair with a beatific smile on his face such as he had never seen there before. He reported to his colleague, Sergeant Jackson, that the chief apparently was dreaming of angels.

CHAPTER VIII

"I'VE got a hunch, Spell," began O'Regan, when the Lieutenant returned to the room. "Listen. Somewhere around is the best gun gang that ever came East." Spellman shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not so sure, Chief. I fancy Petersen is the only racketeer who has been operating in this county for years."

"Petersen was here just a week, Spell, and then he walked into the station and gave himself up. That told me something. Why did he give himself up? To ease his conscience? Because he didn't feel he was acting right by his fellow-men? Like hell he did! When a racketeer starts thinking about his soul, Spell, you can bet a year's pay he's scared stiff of what's going to happen to his body."

Spellman nodded. "Petersen's scared all right," he admitted.

"I guess he has good cause to be. He's only a cheap little racketeer and he knows that no little snakes can live for long on the same lot as the big snakes. There's a big snake somewhere around, Spell, and it's up to us to find him. Who is he, eh? Well, I've a hunch. How does Perryfeld strike you as a likely candidate?"

"Perryfeld?" Spellman frowned thoughtfully.

"He fits," said O'Regan. "I've been thinking it out. He's the type all right. He's got the money too, hasn't he? He's wallowing in money and nobody has the least idea how he makes it or where he comes from. He comes along and buys a swell place and sets up as a gentleman, and Chester County accepts him at his own valuation. It's easy to get accepted as anything if you can fling the money about like Perryfeld does."

"You've got nothing definite against him, Chief," Spellman reminded him.

"Nothing that's good enough to act on openly," admitted O'Regan, "but I've got something that's pretty convincing to me. I've told you what the racket is: people have got to pay to live—rich people who can afford to pay. And if they don't pay they just don't live. That's why there's not a rich man around here who isn't scared to stiff to come to Police Headquarters. They know they wouldn't be allowed to come twice. Harvey only came once, didn't he? And what happened to Harvey would happen to anyone else who came here—except one man."

"Perryfeld?"

O'Regan nodded. "He's the only rich man who isn't afraid to come here, who isn't afraid of being bumped for it. Sure he's not! Why should he be? He's not going to bump himself. I've got a hunch, Spell, that Petersen ran into Perryfeld and that's what sent him scurrying to the police for safety."

"If that's so, Chief," said Spellman, "the question is, who is Perryfeld?"

"He's someone Petersen had met before, anyway, and someone he's mighty scared of. One of the really big fellows too. It can be one of six men—all from the West—and I've a notion which one of them it is."

"You've been checking 'em up?"

O'Regan nodded. "Fingerprints," he said, tapping the file in front of him. "Give me fingerprints every time, Spell; you can easily get your face lifted, but the fingers stay put. Have a look here."

Spellman leaned forward and glanced at the paper in O'Regan's hand.

"Boston Kid," he said. "He's dead. Chief. Took the hot squat in New Jersey."

O'Regan laid the paper aside and picked up another, and as he glanced at it he sprang suddenly to his feet.

"Say, Spell, look—Ben Guinney!" he exclaimed. "This is a real break, getting this. No portrait, but that's nothing—here are his fingerprints. Ben Guinney—three times death—good God! Remember what Petersen said about Ben Guinney? He met him in Canyon City and was afraid to breathe his name in this office. I guess we've found our big shot. If we think of friend Perryfeld as alias Ben Guinney, I fancy we shan't be thinking far wrong."

"We've got to prove it, Chief."

"Sure," agreed O'Regan. "But there are ways of doing that. If we could get Perryfeld's fingerprints, that's all we'd need. Or if we could persuade Petersen to identify him. But Petersen's scared and I doubt if he'd find the courage to do that."

"Couldn't we pull Perryfeld in on some excuse, Chief?"

O'Regan shook his head.

"He's sure to be at the home of his lawyer," he said. "You've got to remember, Spell, that in America we may break the law but we always respect the lawyer." He tapped the paper in his hand. "Guinney has collected a nice little record," he said. "Five murders, three death sentences and one life sentence hanging over him. Listen: 'He is the head of a small gang of super-gunmen and expert prison-breakers.' According to Petersen that fits Guinney all right. 'Officers having this man under arrest must take precautions to guard their gaols.'—"

He glanced up at Spellman and smiled.

"We'll be guarding our gaol shortly," he said, "or my name's not Tricks O'Regan. Guinney's a fish worth landing, and—"

The door was opened and he stopped abruptly and glanced round as Lavine entered.

"Yes, Lavine?"

"Mr. Perryfeld, Chief. Will you see him?"

"Sure," said O'Regan; swept the pile of papers into a drawer and grinned at Spellman.

"I'll fish alone, Spell. I think," he said, with a nod towards the door.

Spellman smiled and went out, and a moment later Perryfeld sauntered in.

"Busy, Chief?" he inquired amiably. "Well, it's a business call, anyway, so I guess you can spare me a few minutes with an easy conscience." He puffed at his cigar in silence for some moments. "It's just this, Captain," he said. "I live up at the fork on Washington and Brandt."

O'Regan nodded. "I know where you live."

Perryfeld removed his cigar and raised his eyebrows. "Is that so?" he remarked. "Swell place, eh? Well now, last night my chauffeur reported to me he saw four strange men hanging around. They came up by car."

"And that scared him?"

"Why, yes," said Perryfeld. "I went down to see who they were. They were four fellows I knew. They were trying to find my house—just calling in on their way to Queen's."

"That's a grand bit of news."

"You hadn't heard about 'em?"

"Sure I'd heard about them. My patrolman reported four strangers hanging around your house last night. And that's what you've come to tell me?"

"I guessed they might have been reported and thought it might ease your mind to know they were friends of mine."

"It takes a load off my mind," said O'Regan. "No need to worry about them, of course, if they were friends of yours."

Perryfeld stared at him doubtfully for some moments, but O'Regan's face was innocent enough and he seemed satisfied.

"I thought maybe you'd be interested to know," he said. "I guess the police have got enough to keep 'em busy without worrying over harmless strangers."

"Plenty of real crooks, eh? Still, we know most of the real crooks."

"Is that so?" smiled Perryfeld.

"Only we can't always pull them in at once. But we usually get 'em in the end. So when your chauffeur reported the four strangers you went down to see who they were, did you?"

"Of course."

"At once?"

Perryfeld nodded.

"Meaning as soon as you got the 'phone message?" Seeing the frown on the other man's face, O'Regan added, "It must have been a 'phone message, because when my patrolman reported the strangers, you weren't at home; you were in your club. That was reported to me too." Perryfeld's eyes narrowed.

"So that was reported too, eh? What's the great idea, Captain?"

"Just natural anxiety for the safety of a prominent citizen," said O'Regan. "The fact is, Perryfeld, someone called you on the wire at your club and told you a patrolman had refused duty because he saw four strange men."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"And out of the kindness of your heart," continued O'Regan, "you drove straight home to see who they were, and then took the trouble to come along here and relieve my mind. I'm grateful."

"You should be," replied Perryfeld. "And here's another thing I guess will interest you. There's been a fellow in town named Petersen. He's a racketeer."

"Terrible!"

"I've heard he tried to work a racket on the laundry men. I'm glad you've got him inside. Keeping Chester County clean, eh?"

"That's the size of it. Do you know Petersen?"

Perryfeld smiled contemptuously.

"Know him? Huh! I don't know that kind of trash."

O'Regan placed a cigarette between his lips and struck a match.

"No?"

"No."

"What kind do you know, Perryfeld?"

O'Regan flicked the match away and smiled at him pleasantly. Perryfeld was staring thoughtfully at the end of his cigar.

"What kind of trash do you favour with your friendship, Perryfeld?"

The other thrust his cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets.

"Most of 'em wear uniforms," he said laconically. "Quite," agreed O'Regan. "I had an idea they might. It used to be stripes, but now it's a neat grey."

"And if you ask me," snarled Perryfeld, turning on him suddenly, "there's not all that difference between a neat grey"he waved a hand towards O'Regan's tunic"and a neat blue. One's a crook outside and the other's a crook inside."

O'Regan smiled. "We won't let the conversation get personal, Perryfeld."

"That suits me," replied Perryfeld, and began sauntering jauntily round the room.

"They give you a swell office, Captain."

"Not too bad," agreed O'Regan: "but we haven't the high spots of the racketeer."

"I guess that's your fault."

"Fault? I've always rather prided myself that it was a virtue. But it's a matter of opinion, I suppose." Perryfeld gave a shrug and continued his saunter, while O'Regan's eyes followed him. Suddenly he halted and stood frowning at a square wooden box on the table. The lid was off and as he leaned forward and peered inside his frown deepened.

"Say, O'Regan, what the devil's that?"

O'Regan rose, crossed to the table and pulled the box carelessly to him.

"For God's sake go steady!" exclaimed Perryfeld. "That's a pineapple, isn't it?"

"Sure," smiled Tricks. "It's a Stanton-Lewis bomb. Most effective." He took the bomb from the box, glanced at it and made as if to toss it across the table to Perryfeld. "Take a look at it."

Perryfeld started back.

"For God's sake, O'Regan! You're crazy, man! Put the thing away. It's not safe to have that kind of thing lying about. Put it away!"

"Someone sent it to me by post," O'Regan explained. "It was intended for a joke. I can take a joke, so I took it. But if this pin had come out and the handle had come off it would have been a joke I'd never have seen." Perryfeld was mopping his forehead with his handkerchief, his gaze riveted on the bomb.

"Put the darned thing away, O'Regan, can't you?"

"Say, you're not scared, are you? To me it's just a bit of iron." He shook it and held it to his ear. "Gelignite—enough to blow this place to glory."

"For God's sake put it away!" repeated the other.

"I guess I'll take it home with me. It might amuse the janitor's children." He replaced the bomb carelessly in the box and his smile vanished. "Ever used a pineapple, Perryfeld?"

"I have not," said the other emphatically. "That's not my idea of a good way of earning a living."

"No? Well, what do you do for a living?"

"Nothing."

"It just sort of comes natural?"

"Sure. You see, I made a lot of money out West."

"West New York or the great wide open spaces of Hollywood?"

"Western Canada," replied Perryfeld. "There's been big money made out West, you know."

"I see. Sort of West generally. Farming?"

"No—land speculation."

"British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba?"

Perryfeld made an airy gesture with his cigar.

"Oh, just around."

"I see," said O'Regan. "Can you mention anyone in Canada, East or West, you've ever done business with?" Perryfeld jerked his cigar from his mouth and faced him, frowning.

"Say, listen, Captain," he said, "are you calling me a liar?"

"Oh no."

"Then what's the idea?"

"I'm just curious to know," said O'Regan, "how you keep a house in this county and a magnificent apartment on Washington and where you get the money to play the races and lose five thousand dollars a day."

"You've been tracking me, have you?"

O'Regan nodded.

"Yes—for quite a while," he told him. "I just thought I would. Of course you couldn't know because the man who supplies you with information from this office didn't tell you about it. But he didn't know either." For some moments Perryfeld faced him with twitching lips and furious eyes. Then he shrugged his shoulders, smiled and replaced his cigar in his mouth.

"Well," he chuckled, "and how do I get my money? If you know so much about me, I guess you ought to be able to tell me that."

"I can," snapped O'Regan. "Listen, Perryfeld: the big people in this county are paying to live; some blackmail society is giving them protection, and protection just means staying alive. It's the new racket—the racket that was always coming. And now it's come. There's one man in a hundred who'll pay money sooner than have some dirt pulled out of his past, but there's ninety-nine in every hundred who'll pay sooner than stop living."

Perryfeld's face was livid. "Did Harvey—" he began furiously and stopped.

"Go on—say it," urged O'Regan. "Did Harvey tell me...?"

"Bah! You're crazy mad with the heat!" exclaimed Perryfeld. "You've gone bugs, O'Regan. But I'm warning you; I've got a pull in this county."

"Sure you have. There never was a gangster who hadn't. And I'll tell you your big pull, shall I? It's the fellows with the guns skulking around in the street right now, waiting for you to come out. Your tame killers!"

"If you believe that, Captain, I wonder you're not afraid."

O'Regan shook his head.

"You do all the fearing, Perryfeld," he said. "You've cause to. If you're the man I think you are, I've got you booked—right through to the Smoky Cell." Perryfeld gave a chuckle of amusement.

"Is that so?" he laughed. "Well, I guess you've got to have all the spades and aces. You can't put me inside without 'em, O'Regan."

"No," agreed O'Regan, "but I can put you outside." He touched a bell on his desk and Lavine came in. "Show Mr. Perryfeld out, Lavine."

Perryfeld sauntered to the door.

"So long, Captain!"

"So long!"

With an amused smile Perryfeld went out. As the door closed behind him, Tricks strode to his desk, took the file of papers from the drawer and became absorbed in studying them.

"Ben Guinney!" he muttered. "I wonder? Well, I certainly hope so."

CHAPTER IX

EVEN with Sergeant Jennings in close attendance, Josephine, when she left Police Headquarters, could not conceal her nervousness. She had the uncomfortable feeling that all the time she was being watched, and that at any moment something—she had no idea what—might happen. She hurried along, casting anxious glances over her shoulder at every few steps, half expecting at each glance to see Perryfeld, or the man Mike, or the young man who had given her a lift last night. She could not rid herself of the idea that someone was following her, and it was all she could do to restrain herself from breaking into a run.

Yet it was relief to be away from Police Headquarters, outside that room with Tricks O'Regan searching her with his blue eyes and plying her with questions. All the time she had felt that she was making a very poor show, that he knew she was trying to deceive him, that he probably knew exactly what happened last night and was only testing her to see if she would tell him the truth, despising her a little more for every evasion by which she tried to throw him off the scent. If he had kept on questioning her for a few more minutes she would probably have given up the attempt and told him everything.

She wished now that she had done so. After all, he would have seen that nothing happened to her. If Tricks O'Regan with the whole police force at his command, could not take care of her, nobody could. And if only she had somehow found the courage to confide in him she would have had no further cause to worry, and he would not now be despising her for being a coward, or suspecting her, as he must be, of being in some way interested in keeping from him the truth about Schnitzer. She realized that it was of tremendous importance to her that O'Regan should not despise her.

It had been finding Perryfeld there, of course, that had made it impossible to take O'Regan into her confidence. The mere sight of him had unnerved her and sent all her courage ebbing away. He did not mean to give her a chance of breaking her promise to him and had even risked a visit to Police Headquarters to ensure that she kept it. If she had said one word to O'Regan which might have turned suspicion in his direction, that gun in his pocket would have gone off. A man who did not hesitate, within a few hours of committing a cold-blooded murder, to walk calmly into Police Headquarters, would hesitate at nothing. And O'Regan couldn't have saved her then. He couldn't save her now if Perryfeld decided that she was a danger to him. After all, Tricks O'Regan and the whole police force hadn't been enough to save Schnitzer....

She hurried up to the steps of Schnitzer's office. She was late and would have to think of some excuse. She did not want to let it be known that she

had been to Police Headquarters, still less that she had been at Schnitzer's house last night. There was no need to broadcast the fact that she had anything to do with the wretched business, and if she was to keep on the right side of Perryfeld, the less she said about it to anyone the better.

But all hope that she might be able to conceal her part in the affair was speedily dissipated when she entered the office. Maisie, the snub-nosed young lady who sat at the desk next to hers, left her in no doubt.

"Hallo, baby!" was her greeting. "There's been a nice young fellow asking for you. He's called three times already and he'll be calling again."

"Someone for me!" said Josephine nervously. "Did he say what he wanted?"

"He certainly did. He wants to know who's your favourite film star and what you think about Love with a capital L, and if you prefer silk or crêpe de Chine

and what's your feeling about all the other great big things that really matter. And he wants a real nice photograph of you, and if you've no dress without a back he says his paper will foot the bill for one—"

"Paper?"

"The Chester County Tribune," Maisie informed her. "You don't seem to tumble to it that you're front-page news, my dear—'The Girl Who Saw Schnitzer Killed'."

"But I didn't."

"No? Well, that's a disappointment for you, but I guess it's of no consequence. You were there at his house when it happened, and if you didn't actually see him get the works, I guess the Tribune will write you a bigger cheque if you say you stood there trembling and swaying and thinking of your dear old mother while the big bad gunman did his stuff. The papers all say old Schnitzer's stenographer was there when tire killing took place and—well, I reckon some girls have all the luck! You'll get more from the Tribune than you'd have earned in this outfit in a couple of years...."

Maisie went prattling on, but Josephine was paying no attention. So it was known in the papers—that she had been at Schnitzer's house last night! She might have guessed that it would be. Already a reporter from the Tribune had been after her and she would have to face all the hateful publicity. But suppose he wasn't a reporter from the Tribune? Suppose that was just an excuse and he was really from Perryfeld—someone sent to see her, question her, find out how much she had told O'Regan....

"Well, old Schnitzer never was an angel," Maisie was saying, "and I'll bet any money getting shot up hasn't made him one. It's a real pity you didn't shoot

him yourself, kid. For your sake, I mean. You'd have got a whole lot more money for a swell story like that. 'The Unwritten Law. Young Girl Defends Her Honour With a Gun.' And you'll be needing all the money you can get, honey. This outfit's doomed and we'll all be living on hope and peanuts next week."

Josephine discovered a few minutes later that Maisie's information was all too correct. Schnitzer's business, she learned, was to be closed down at once. And as Schnitzer's personal stenographer she was already a superfluous member of the staff. With a week's pay in her bag, she left the office and hurried to her rooms.

And there for the rest of the day she remained, now curled in her big armchair, now pacing the room restlessly and from time to time staring thoughtfully at a small picture cut from a newspaper, which was fixed to the wall with a pin. Below the picture were printed the words "Captain 'Tricks' O'Regan". She had cut it from the Tribune a few days after the dance, thrilled to discover that the mysterious Mr. Smith was in reality the Captain O'Regan who had the reputation of being the most brilliant young officer in the New York State Police. And having decided that, since Mr. Smith was Captain O'Regan—who had no doubt been at the dance merely on police business, who had in all probability not given her another thought and whom she was never likely to meet again—the only sensible course was to think no more about him, she had pinned the picture to the wall where she could not fail to see it a dozen times a day. And she had always thought, when she had looked at the picture and recalled the keen blue eyes and determined jaw of Mr. Smith, that if any trouble arose she would rather have him on her side than against her. And now the trouble had come, and she was on the side of Perryfeld, and O'Regan was against her, and she was afraid of both of them.

It was in the early evening that the telephone bell rang and brought her from her armchair with a start.

She stood for some moments staring at the instrument with frightened eyes. This would be Perryfeld at last. All day long she had been expecting to hear from him and had found it difficult to keep her gaze away from the telephone instrument, half wishing that the bell would ring and that Perryfeld would say whatever he had to say and get it over, and half inclined to take off the receiver so that no message could reach her. And now that the bell had rung she found that her heart was pounding and her throat felt dry.

She lifted the receiver and placed it to her ear.

"Hallo!"

"Is that you, Miss Brady?"

It was not Perryfeld's voice, and her frown disappeared. But an instant later it was back again. Perryfeld, of course, would not telephone himself. Someone would ring up for him.

"Miss Brady speaking."

"How are you, Miss Brady?"

"Who—who are you?"

"Mr. Smith at this end."

Josephine smiled. Captain O'Regan would have been better than Perryfeld, but Mr. Smith was better still.

"Oh—yes, Mr. Smith?"

"Do you know the Florida Restaurant, Miss Brady? Well, Mr. Smith will be in the foyer of the Florida at eight o'clock this evening and there's nothing he'd like better than to see Miss Josephine Brady walk in through the revolving door."

"Alone?"

"Sure. If she's not alone that'd mean Mr. Smith will have to dine alone. What do you say?"

"You promise that it will be Mr. Smith?"

"Sure."

"And it will be Mr. Smith all the time?"

"You can count on that."

"O.K.," said Josephine. "Then Miss Brady will walk in through the revolving door at 8 p.m. to the second."

"Fine. Be hungry, won't you?"

"I am," she told him.

At 8 p.m. exactly, O'Regan, lounging on a settee in the foyer of the Florida Restaurant heard the revolving door swing round and glanced up just in time to see Josephine come through it. She did not see him at first and paused just inside the foyer, glancing round, and for a few moments he made no move to go to meet her, but sat there watching her. Her eyes were bright with excitement and her lips parted. As she stood there with her face nestling in the fluffy white collar of her evening cloak and the light glinting on her hair, she was a picture at which any man might have been excused for gazing.

O'Regan rose and moved towards her, smiling; but he had scarcely taken a step when he halted and the smile left his face. Through the revolving door had come a man—tall, in faultless evening dress. He glanced round as though in search of someone, then walked quickly up to Josephine and touched her arm. As she turned and faced the newcomer, O'Regan saw her start ever so slightly and the smile vanish from her lips. They spoke together for a few moments and then he saw her glance nervously around. She saw him, hesitated a moment, turned abruptly from the man who was speaking to her and came hurriedly towards him.

"This is fine, Miss Brady," he smiled as he took her hand. "But you promised to be alone—"

"I am."

He raised his eyebrows and shot a quick glance towards the man who stood watching them from the spot where she had deserted him.

"Your friend isn't with you?"

She shook her head. "He's not a friend," she told him. "I don't know him. He's—well, as a matter of fact, Captain O'Regan, he's a reporter—from the Tribune. He wants to ask me about Mr. Schnitzer and I don't want to be asked, and—oh, let's go and have dinner, shall we?"

She seemed desperately anxious to get away from the foyer into the restaurant, but O'Regan hesitated.

"Reporters have no right to plague you like this," he said. "You'd better let me go and warn him off once and for all—"

"Oh no—please," she said hastily. "I've told him I've nothing to say, and he won't worry me while I'm with you."

She laid a hand on his arm and urged him towards the restaurant. After a long steady glance at the tall man he turned and went with her out of the foyer. He was frowning thoughtfully as he went. A reporter from the Tribune? He knew every member of the Tribune's reporting staff, and that man was not a member. He felt a sudden pang of disappointment. He had meant to forget all his suspicions this evening, to think of Josephine not as the girl who had been at Schnitzer's house last night and had sat in the police office that morning telling him pitifully transparent lies, but just as a charming girl whom he had invited to dinner because he wanted to be with her. And now, within a minute of meeting him, she had lied to him again, and brought back all his suspicions with a rush. She had been scared of the man; he had seen the fear in her eyes when he had touched her arm and, that being so, why didn't she confide in him and tell him the truth? Why try

to throw him off the scent with the story that he was a reporter badgering her for an interview? She had spoiled the evening for him.

And then, as they seated themselves at their table, it occurred to him that he was possibly being unjust to her. Perhaps this fellow had told her that he was a reporter and she had believed him. It was not worth while to let a mere suspicion spoil his evening, and he would find out the truth sooner or later.

During dinner he tried to dismiss the subject from his mind. Sitting opposite her, listening to her chatting so naturally to him, noticing the rather preposterous length of her lashes, and the way her hair frolicked around her ears, he found it quite easy to forget for a time that he was Captain O'Regan and that the girl with the clear, frank eyes was not all she appeared to be. But he could not help noticing that every now and then she would cast a quick, nervous glance around the restaurant, and that when the conversation came anywhere near to the Schnitzer affair she hastily switched it on to another topic. It was not until the meal was almost over that he ventured anything like a direct reference to the subject.

"So Schnitzer's business is closing down, Miss Brady?"

She smiled. "Is there anything you don't know?"

"Not much," he admitted. "Does that mean you'll be looking for a job?"

"I suppose so. But I don't want to think about all that this evening."

"I just want you to know that if you have any difficulty about it, I might be able to help. I know most of the big people in Chester County and I'd soon get you fixed up. You've only to say the word."

She laid a hand on his sleeve.

"That's kind, Captain O'Regan," she said. "Of course I shall have to find something to do; but I thought—I had an idea—well, I guess I'd like to get away somewhere different. You see—"

She hesitated.

"I see," he said.

She glanced at him quickly in surprise.

"I see why you want to get away somewhere. Miss Brady. You don't have to tell me. You're scared."

Her glance wavered and avoided his.

"I don't know why you should imagine—"

"I'm not imagining," he interrupted. "I know you're scared. And I'll tell you what you're scared of, shall I? You're scared of Perryfeld."

She started ever so slightly.

"Why on earth—" she began, but he cut her short with a gesture.

"Listen," he said, "you're scared of Perryfeld, however much you may try to hide the fact. I've no idea why you're scared, and that's exactly what I want to know. I invited you here tonight—"

"To ask me questions and pump me and accuse me of telling lies like you did in the office? If that was your only reason—"

"It wasn't."

She shrugged a shoulder. "You promised me on the telephone," she reminded him, "that I'd be dining with Mr. Smith and not with Captain O'Regan."

"Sure I did," he agreed. "So you are dining with Mr. Smith, and Mr. Smith is mighty anxious that you should look on him as a real friend who'd be glad to do anything to help you. You're in some kind of a jam, and I'm asking you to tell me as a friend what it is and let me see if I can't help to get you out of it."

She shook her head. "You're imagining things, Captain O'Regan. Just because I happened to be at Mr. Schnitzer's house last night, and was naturally a bit scared about it all, you run away with the idea that I've some fearful secret—"

"Schnitzer's in it somewhere," he said. "So's Perryfeld. I'm dead sure of that. For some reason you're afraid of Perryfeld, and I can't stand the idea of your being in that sort of position with such a man. There's no need. If you'll treat me as a friend and tell me just how things are, I can promise you that you'll have nothing to fear from Perryfeld or anybody else."

He gave her an encouraging smile, but she avoided his eyes and made no reply. He leaned across the table and laid his hand on hers.

"Come on now, Miss Brady," he urged. "Nobody else can hear what you tell me now, and nobody else ever will hear. Just what is Perryfeld to you?"

"I've told you: he's nothing at all to me."

"Then why are you afraid of him?"

"I'm not."

He shook his head. "I guess you don't trust Mr. Smith very far."

"Oh, but I do," she said earnestly. "Truly I do. But I can't—I mean, it's all so ridiculous, really. I keep telling you you're just imagining things and you will insist that you're not, and—oh, for heaven's sake let's talk of something sensible, shall we?"

He was gazing at her searchingly.

"If I were to tell you," he said, as his glance travelled past her, "that at this moment Perryfeld is sitting just behind you—"

He felt her hand suddenly tighten beneath his and saw her quick nervous glance over her shoulder.

"You see?" he smiled. "And you're not scared, eh? But don't worry; he's not there. And now, Miss Brady, since you've given yourself away so completely, suppose you tell Mr. Smith why the idea of Perryfeld sitting behind you should make you want to scream?"

She was quite self-possessed again now.

"Once and for all, Captain O'Regan," she said, "you've run right into a mare's nest. I am not afraid of Mr. Perryfeld and I'm in no sort of a jam—except that I've lost my job—"

"How well do you know Perryfeld?" he persisted. "Just a casual acquaintance, eh? How often do you see him?"

"I never see him," she answered. "Not purposely, anyway. I can't help it if I meet him, as I did this morning, can I? But he's no friend of mine—honestly—and I haven't even seen him more than three or four times. If you can't believe me—"

"I believe you," he told her. "Sorry to have worried you, but I got that impression and I just had to make sure. We'll forget Perryfeld. Care to go dancing, or shall we sit and talk?"

"I guess we'll sit and talk."

He grinned. "Playing for safety? O.K. What shall we talk about?"

She gave a shrug. "You must have lots of interesting things you can tell me, Captain O'Regan."

"I certainly have," he said. "For one thing, you've got the most ridiculously long eye-lashes, and there's a little curl cutting capers around your left ear, and—say, am I being interesting or would you rather go dancing?"

Josephine laughed merrily. "Never mind dancing!" During the next hour, as he sat talking with Josephine, O'Regan rarely thought of Perryfeld, and when the thought of him did come into his mind he instantly dismissed it. Obviously, he told himself, he had been making a mountain out of a molehill. Josephine had assured him that she was not afraid of Perryfeld, knew him only slightly and never saw him, and he believed her. It was only his suspicious nature that had caused him ever to doubt her—and then he had not known her as he knew her now. If Josephine Brady was not a girl in whom a man could have implicit trust, then no girl was to be trusted.

He drove her home and went up in the elevator with her. On the landing outside her door she paused. "You've given me a wonderful time. Captain O'Regan," she said gratefully.

He smiled. "I was going to say that to you."

She laid a hand on his arm and looked gravely up into his face.

"And you do believe me? About Perryfeld, I mean."

"Of course."

"But you didn't."

"Well, perhaps not," he admitted; "but I thought you were keeping things back because you were frightened, and I didn't like the idea of you being frightened. But I believe you now."

"In that case," she laughed, "if you'd like a coffee and a cigarette you may come in and have them."

She opened the door. The light was on in the room, and with a puzzled frown she led the way in. As she did so she suddenly halted and caught her breath sharply. Seated in her armchair, smiling at her, was Perryfeld. She stood for a few seconds staring at him, speechless, and then her glance travelled to O'Regan's face. He too was staring at Perryfeld, frowning. As he turned towards Josephine his mouth was grim and his eyes had that hard steely look which she had seen in them as he had questioned her that morning at Police Headquarters.

"As you have a visitor, Miss Brady," he said coldly, "perhaps I had better go."

"Oh no—please don't go," she begged. "I'd much rather—I mean, I'm going to make some coffee and you must have a cup—and I'm sure Mr. Perryfeld—"

"Don't mind me, O'Regan," smiled Perryfeld, rising. "I just came along to have a bit of a chat with Miss Brady, and as she wasn't home I thought I'd wait for her. I guess Miss Brady won't object to making coffee for three."

"Oh, yes—of course," said Josephine breathlessly. "I'll get it at once."

She turned and hurried from the room. For a moment O'Regan hesitated and then he strode after her.

"Look here," he said, "I guess I'd better clear out—"

Her fingers dug into his arm. "No—please stay."

"Then I'd better clear Perryfeld out."

"Oh no—you mustn't—I mean, I can't very well be rude and offend him. Just stay and have some coffee—"

"Then you are scared? For God's sake. Miss Brady, tell me the truth. I'll do anything to help you, but if you won't confide in me—"

"If you want to help me," she interrupted, "go back and talk to Mr. Perryfeld while I make the coffee. Just don't ask me any more questions."

"I guess I've a right to ask questions. I've a right—as a friend—to some sort of explanation. You told me only a few minutes ago that Perryfeld was no friend of yours, that you never see him, and then I find him sitting in your flat, making himself quite at home—and you expect me to ask no questions! It's not the first time he has been here, is it? I suppose he comes here just when he likes, eh? Got a key, has he? My God—Perryfeld! And I thought—"

He saw the look in her eyes and stopped abruptly.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've no right to talk that way. All right, I'll stay."

He turned and strode back into the room, while Josephine went into her tiny kitchen and set about making the coffee. Perryfeld herein her flat! Thank God she had offered Tricks O'Regan a cup of coffee! If only she dared tell him everything! But she could not do that; Perryfeld would know. He knew everything. That man in the foyer tonight—she had recognized him instantly: the man who had given her the lift last night—one of Perryfeld's men—watching her, reporting to Perryfeld. "I guess you'd better have dinner with me instead, Miss Brady," he had said, and because she had somehow found the courage to turn away and go to Tricks O'Regan, Perryfeld had been informed and had come to demand an explanation, to discover what she had told O'Regan, to decide if it was safe to let her go on living. How could she possibly tell him? The first hint he gave that he knew the truth would be the signal for Perryfeld to exact the penalty for having betrayed him.

She placed the cups of coffee on a tray, picked it up and went out. The door of her sitting-room was open and, as she moved noiselessly along on the thick carpet of the corridor, she could see Perryfeld standing by the armchair and O'Regan, with his back towards him, gazing out of the window. There was an ugly sneering smile on Perryfeld's face and she paused for a moment, watching, and just caught the last few words of his sentence:

"... a better man than Tricks O'Regan to book me through to the Smoky Cell."

O'Regan shrugged his shoulders, still staring out through the window.

"I guess I'll manage it, Perryfeld," he said.

She saw the smile fade from Perryfeld's face, saw his right hand slip into his pocket, saw the gleam of a revolver as he slowly withdrew it and pointed it deliberately at O'Regan's back. And then:

"Captain O'Regan!"

It was almost a scream, and O'Regan spun round. As he did so the revolver slipped back into the pocket and Perryfeld was smiling genially.

"Say, what's wrong, Miss Brady?" exclaimed O'Regan.

She caught Perryfeld's eye and forced a smile.

"Quick!" she exclaimed. "The tray—I've spilt some coffee on my fingers and it's burning like fun...."

O'Regan took the tray from her and placed it on the table.

"Show me," he said; took her hand and inspected it. "Nothing serious," he commented.

"No," she agreed. "But it might have been if you hadn't come for the tray."

They drank their coffee in an awkward silence, and then Perryfeld set down his cup and picked up his hat.

"Well, I guess I'll be going, Miss Brady," he said. "Two's company, eh?"

"I'll see you out," said O'Regan with alacrity.

The other smiled.

"For real nice manners," he said, "give me the Chester County Police Force. Speeding the parting guest, eh, O'Regan? But you don't need to put so much emphasis on the speed. I guess Miss Brady will see me out?"

He looked inquiringly at the girl.

"Certainly, Mr. Perryfeld."

"And we'll have our little chat some other time," he added. "Maybe I'll look you up tomorrow and we'll have a bit of dinner at the Monaco. It's a swell place—knocks spots off the Florida. You'll come, eh?"

"Oh yes, of course...."

Perryfeld grinned at O'Regan. "So long, Captain!" O'Regan nodded curtly.

"You'll be seeing about that booking, eh?"

O'Regan made no reply, and Perryfeld followed Josephine from the room.

In a few moments she was back, and glanced anxiously at O'Regan's face. She thought it looked terribly hard. "Has he gone?"

She nodded.

"And now I suppose I may go?"

"Unless you'd like some more coffee—"

He cut her short with an impatient gesture.

"Have you anything to say to me? Anything to tell me? Any explanation of all the lies—"

"Captain O'Regan—"

"Have you?"

She shook her head. "I can't explain anything."

"Then what do you expect me to think?"

She made a helpless gesture and turned away from him.

"I can't explain, that's all," she said. "You must think whatever you feel inclined to think."

He picked up his hat. "Good night," he said, and strode out.

A moment later Josephine heard the door slammed and buried her face in a cushion.

CHAPTER X

IT was a very thoughtful Tricks O'Regan who returned to Police Headquarters. What was the mystery of Josephine's association with Perryfeld? That there was something between them more than the girl was willing to admit was indisputable. She had said that her acquaintance with Perryfeld had been confined to seeing him on his occasional visits to her late employer Schnitzer; but this, like so many other of the statements she had made, was manifestly untrue.

Perryfeld had been waiting in the girl's flat when they had returned. What, he wondered, could be the significance of that? O'Regan realized by now that he wanted this girl more than he had ever wanted anything in his life—far more than he had ever dreamed he could want anything. But also he wanted to be able to believe in her, and the continual intrusion of Perryfeld into her affairs was, in spite of himself, making such belief difficult.

He had gleaned nothing of any value during his evening with Josephine. Over and over again she had been on the point, he thought, of giving him her full confidence. It was as though, whenever she was about to speak, into her mental vision had leapt the memory of some terrifying happening; and an invisible presence, of whom she stood in mortal terror, had coerced her into silence. With a flash of his normal cynicism—lately in danger of being superseded by what, in his introspective moments, he knew to be a less sound influence—he decided that it must be an unusually powerful circumstance which had prevented her, a woman, from "spilling the beans" into the first sympathetic ear that bent towards her.

Well, he would have to take a stronger line. He had tried sympathy, gentleness, coaxing; tomorrow he would see Josephine again and compel her to tell him the truth. He must have it, as much for his own peace of mind as to aid him in putting Schnitzer's slayer behind bars.

He sat at his desk, leaning back in his chair, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, the unlighted cigarette between his lips drooping dejectedly. Only when Spellman entered the room did he shake himself out of reflections that had brought a frown to his forehead and deepened the lines at the corners of his mouth.

"Hullo, Spell!" he greeted his Lieutenant. "Did you see Steinberg?"

"Yes."

"Did he explain why he rang up headquarters and wanted an officer sent to him?"

"No."

"Or why he changed his mind when Lavine saw him?"

"No. Say, Chief," went on Spellman, grave of face, "that boy's had a shock; he's all nerves. I called him on the wire, and when he heard I was speaking from Police Headquarters I could almost see him having a fit. He wouldn't let me go to the house; his car picked me up outside of town and we kept to the country."

"Did he spill anything?"

"Not a thing."

"H'm! It's the same old story, of course. Steinberg's a rich man and he's scared. All the rich people around here are like that. If you meet 'em on the street they just say 'Hallo!' and hurry on. That's the racket—shell out or go out!"

Spellman looked thoughtful.

"He is certainly scared," he agreed. "I had a talk with Connor a little while ago. He's worried sick about Steinberg."

"Why—does he know him?"

"Yes, his house is on Connor's patrol. He says that Steinberg is scared to death about something; he's had his house barricaded as though he expected a siege."

The Police Chief grunted. He was about to speak when the door of the glass-house opened and the impassive features of Geissel appeared round the corner.

"There's shooting up by Grant Park, Chief," he reported.

"What's it all about?"

"The patrol's on the wire. He says he saw a black roadster heading for town, travelling flat out. He heard the rattle of a machine-gun—someone trying to shoot the driver, he figures."

"Did they get him?"

"No, sir. Anyway, the car disappeared in the distance."

"Right. Tell him to report again in five minutes."

When Geissel had disappeared into the glass-house, O'Regan turned to his lieutenant.

"What do you make of that, Spell?" he asked quietly.

Spellman considered for a moment.

"It might have been a speed cop shooting," he suggested.

"Coppers don't use machine-guns," retorted O'Regan with a faint smile. He rose from the chair at his desk and spoke slowly and emphatically. "That's

the man we asked to come down—Steinberg! He runs a black roadster and his road would lie through Grant."

Spellman's eyes opened wide.

"Say, Chief"he spoke excitedly"shall I send a car to meet him?"

"No. If he's coming direct he ought to be here in a couple of minutes or so.... Listen!" as the faintly shrill sound of a whistle came to their ears. "That's a cop's speed whistle. Go out and call him in," he ordered. "Yes, Geissel?" to the man who had again emerged from the telephone cabinet.

"Patrol Fourteen says a black roadster passed, heading for town over all speed limits," he reported.

"Anything following?"

"No, sir."

At that moment the door of the office was thrust open violently and a stranger appeared, followed by Spellman.

The newcomer was a young man, dressed in a heavy motoring coat, the collar of which was turned up over his ears. The pallor of his face, no less than his shaking hands and twitching fingers, bore eloquent testimony to his agitation. His right hand was bleeding slightly. As he came through the door he shot a swift, frightened glance behind him as though he feared that his pursuers might still be at his heels.

O'Regan took in the situation at a glance.

"Come right in, Mr. Steinberg," he invited. "Hold that door, Spell. I want to interruptions whatever. Now"he addressed the young man who was making strong efforts to regain his composure"sit down. Are you hurt?"

The visitor sank heavily into a chair by O'Regan's desk.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said, glancing down at his hand. "A bullet over the knuckles... they got a machine-gun on me.... But it was too dark for them.... May I have a glass of water?" He was breathing heavily, and spoke jerkily, as one who has been running a long distance.

O'Regan poured water from a carafe on his desk, and handed the glass to the young man, who drank greedily.

"Have a cigarette?" invited Tricks.

"Thanks." Steinberg puffed for a few moments in silence, which was broken at length by O'Regan.

"Now, what's the story, Mr. Steinberg? You're safe enough here, and you can speak without any fear whatever. Shoot!"

The young man looked round him and seemed to gather some degree of reassurance from his surroundings.

"It was like this, Captain," he began. "This morning—yesterday morning, rather," he amended, with a glance at the clock above the mantelpiece, "a man called me on the long-distance from Boston. He said I needed protection and that I could have it for a thousand dollars a month. He knew my income to a cent. He said that if I went to the police I'd be killed, as Harvey was killed. I laughed, and the guy at the other end said: 'Don't laugh. I'll prove what I say.' He'd hardly said the word before a bullet came through the window, missed me by a foot and hit the library shelf." He shivered at the recollection.

"You didn't see the shooter?"

Steinberg shook his head.

"No. I tell you, Captain, it broke my nerve. The man on the 'phone was still waiting. He said: 'That's a sample.'—"

"Where did he tell you to send the money?"

"To an address in Brooklyn."

"Did you send any?"

"No, sir. I guess I'll die rather." Steinberg's tone was emphatic. "I want to live, but I'm not going to pay to live."

"You're paying me, aren't you? And you're paying God knows how many thousands of other cops—and I'm giving you back value for money." O'Regan rose from his chair and stood erect, his mouth a thin, straight line, the light of combat in his eyes. "You stay right here till I break that gang! Who's that, Spell?" as an urgent knocking sounded on the door of the office.

Spellman opened the door, and from without came the voice of Lavine.

"I've got to see you, Chief," he cried. "It's urgent."

"All right. Wait a minute," said O'Regan, and, taking Steinberg's arm, he led him to the door on the farther side of the room. This he opened. "Go in there," he said, in a low tone; "stay there and don't move. You'll be all right." He closed the door quietly after him before returning to his desk.

"All right, Spell," he said: "you can let him in now."

As the door opened to admit Lavine the police chief looked up sharply.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"It's that bird down in the dungeon, Chief," said Lavine. "He's ill."

"Ill, is he? And how do you know?"

"I heard him scream."

"Through a sound-proof door? Say, what's the big idea, Lavine?"

"Can I have the key?"

"No, sir, you cannot. I'll be right down."

"Oh, but listen, Chief. I tell you..."

At this point Lavine's hand, which had been resting on the back of the wooden armchair on the other side of O'Regan's desk, seemed to twist as if involuntarily, and the chair clattered to the floor deafeningly.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, picked up the chair and went out of the room.

O'Regan's eyes followed him curiously.

"That's funny," he muttered. "Now I wonder why he did that?"

He was soon to know. Walking to the door on the farther side of the office he flung it open.

"You can come out now, Mr. Steinberg," he called.

There was no response.

"Mr. Steinberg!" he shouted. "You can come out now."

No sound of voice or movement came from the other room. Hastily Tricks strode through the open doorway. One swift glance was sufficient.

"My God!" he breathed. "He's gone!" Then, to Spellman, who had joined him: "Get me the direct line and warn all stations. Steinberg's gone!"

Spellman was looking round the room, and now he stooped and picked up something from the floor.

"And he didn't go because he wanted to go, Chief," he said, displaying a bloodstained hat. "Look at that!"

CHAPTER XI

A POLICE motor-cyclist, patrolling some fifteen miles away, saw a car stationary by the side of the deserted country road and pulled up. To his surprise the car held no occupant. Passing round to the near side he discovered the reason: a shadowy heap lay huddled by the side of the roadway. He placed his machine so that its headlight shone full on the amorphous thing that had once been a man, and bent over it.

One swift glance at the body, a hand placed over the man's heart for just a second, and the patrol rose with a shudder.

"My God!" he murmured, and there was horror in his voice.

"Right," came the voice of Captain O'Regan on the telephone in response to the patrolman's report. "Stand by. I'll be along in twenty minutes."

As he replaced the receiver, Spellman looked at him inquiringly.

"Man found shot up on Washington. Steinberg, of course," said O'Regan, with a slight shrug. "I was waiting for this. Get the doctor and a couple of men, Spell."

The car drew up with a jerk beside the waiting motor-cyclist, who saluted as O'Regan, the first to jump out, approached him.

"I found him here half an hour ago, sir," the patrolman reported.

"Meet any other cars?"

"Yes, sir—a big saloon going west; it passed me without lights."

O'Regan shot a glance at the shapeless heap by the side of the road.

"You're sure he's dead?"

The patrolman's face twitched.

"He's dead all right, sir. He couldn't very well be alive after what they've done to him."

Tricks beckoned the doctor.

"You'd better have a look at him, doc."

The doctor's examination was almost as brief as had been the patrolman's. He rose to his feet and shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"Nothing to be done there, Chief," he said laconically. "I suppose it is Steinberg?" It was Spellman who made the inquiry.

"Yes, it's Steinberg all right—or what's left of him," said O'Regan savagely. "They got him out of my lobby and took him for a ride. These guys have got so that they fear neither God nor man!"

"Quite a boy, too," put in the doctor.

O'Regan, one foot on the running-board, had been examining, with the aid of an electric torch, the interior of the car. Now he stepped down, in his hand the dead man's overcoat. This he laid reverently over what remained of Steinberg.

"Yes," he agreed; "quite a boy. And if he'd been quite a girl he'd have gone just the same way. You've a better chance with a bunch of gorillas. And the public have the worst break when a law-protected gangster and a crooked policeman are working like brothers."

The steel-blue eyes were blazing; the thin, straight lips were working. It was rare for Tricks O'Regan to display anything like emotion, and Spellman looked on in wonderment.

"They took him out of my lobby. Spell!" O'Regan repeated. "Under the eyes of Tricks O'Regan!"

He lowered his gaze to the prostrate form and stood in silence for several moments. At last he spoke, and his voice was low and vibrant.

"I killed you, boy," he breathed. "I opened my mouth too wide at the wrong moment. But I'll see you right, boy. I mean that—I surely mean that."

During the journey back to Police Headquarters Tricks O'Regan sat motionless, silent, in a corner of the car, his chin sunk on his breast, his forehead furrowed, his eyes full of a smouldering fire. He was thinking deeply, concentratedly. This last episode in the impudent career of lawlessness which was flourishing right under his very eyes had aroused him thoroughly. It was surely bad enough when gangdom secured such a domination over peaceful citizens that they paid large sums of money for the privilege of not being shot to pieces. That was a state of things the continuance of which, he well knew, was no credit to any police force.

When inoffensive but wealthy men were too terrified of the consequences to notify the police of the threats that were being handed out to them, it was time somebody did something about it. It was all very well to plead, as he might have done, that this very silence on the part of the threatened men—a silence into which they had been coerced by the fate which had befallen the few who had taken the risk and informed the police—made doubly difficult his task of breaking up the gang; but in his heart he knew that such mitigating circumstances could not be pleaded by any self-respecting police captain. And nobody who knew him had ever questioned Tricks O'Regan's self-respect.

But now it seemed that these racketeers deemed themselves so safe from police interference that, always bold, they had become impudent to the point

of entering Police Headquarters and forcibly removing their latest victim from within a few yards of Tricks O'Regan himself. They had murdered poor Steinberg. He had found the courage to visit Headquarters to give information about the threats that were being made against him; Tricks, only too glad to be presented with such a concrete case as this, upon which he might work to the gangsters' undoing, had guaranteed the man's safety. And now he was dead....

He laughed silently, scornfully. Guaranteed his safety! That would have been funny if it were not so tragic.

He knew now, of course, how it had been arranged. The suspicious awkwardness of Lavine in knocking over that chair was now explained—some such noise had been necessary to cover such commotion as might be caused by the removal of Steinberg from the lobby outside O'Regan's office.

He would get these men. He would not rest until he had their leader in the Smoky Cell. If his badge went into the frame with those others, he would do it.

Lavine was in it up to the neck; there could be no doubt about that. Well, he would make a start with him. There was no room for dishonest policemen in the force controlled by Tricks O'Regan, and Lieutenant Edwin Lavine should soon be made aware of that fact.

Back in his office he slumped heavily into the wooden armchair at his desk, and sat for several minutes, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, looking into vacancy. The constantly recurring vision that flashed into his mind was that of the lifeless body of Steinberg, riddled with bullets, mutilated beyond description, lying by the side of the road. It stirred Tricks O'Regan to a depth of cold, implacable fury that would have struck terror into the heart of the boldest racketeer could he have perceived it.

O'Regan sat upright in his chair, squared his shoulders, and pressed the bell by the side of his desk. To the officer who appeared:

"Is Lieutenant Lavine in the building?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Tell him I want to see him at once."

"Right, sir."

The officer disappeared and O'Regan began to pace the floor of his office restlessly. Presently Lavine entered; his manner showed no lack of self-assurance. "Did you want to see me, Chief?"

"No," replied O'Regan. "I don't want to see you—I never did. I hate the sight of you, as a matter of fact. But I've a few things to say to you." His eyes fixed

for some moments on the fleshy, complacent face of the lieutenant, and under his gaze Lavine's self-possession wavered ever so slightly, and his feet shuffled a little awkwardly.

"O.K., Chief," he said. "Well, here I am."

O'Regan's eyes did not move.

"Petersen had no fit—you know that?"

"Well, Chief," began Lavine, "it was like this—"

O'Regan cut him short with an impatient gesture.

"I don't want to know what it was like. I know what you're like, Lavine. I've met lots of dishonest policemen in my time, but you're the slimiest of the lot. Perhaps you can explain why you came into this room and made a fuss and overturned a chair at the moment when those blackguards were getting that boy Steinberg out of the lobby?"

"I didn't know, Chief. How was I to know he was in the lobby?"

"You knew, all right. You were on the wire just before you came into my room."

"Sure," said Lavine. "I was taking a report." O'Regan snorted.

"You were taking nothing of the kind; you were taking instructions from your crook friend Perryfeld."

"Now listen, Chief—"

"Oh, don't bother to try to explain," said O'Regan, a little wearily. "Geissel was listening in. He heard Perryfeld say, 'Go to it.'—"

"I tell you, Chief, you've got it all wrong. Perryfeld's a swell feller. He's been a good friend to me. And he's straight—"

"He's been a good friend to you, all right," O'Regan returned. "There are a few items in your pass-book that prove that. And he's about as straight as a corkscrew that's been struck by lightning."

"Say, listen—" began Lavine.

O'Regan's tone was cold and contemptuous as he broke in.

"I don't want to listen. You haven't even the brains to think up a good story. It's no wonder crooks thrive when dishonest nit-wits like you are made lieutenants.... Do you know," he went on, "that Steinberg was murdered tonight?"

"Why, no, I hadn't heard—"

"Murdered!" repeated O'Regan. "And you were one of the killers—as sure as if you'd been there and pumped the lead into him."

Lavine blustered.

"Look here," he said, "I've heard just about enough. You can't say this sort of thing to me—"

"I'm saying it," O'Regan replied. "Unfortunately I've not enough evidence to send you to the chair, but no doubt I will have before long. But tell your friend Perryfeld, when next you see him, that he's going."

"Oh, yeah?" Lavine endeavoured to display an assurance which he did not feel. "Say, O'Regan, you'll never have anything on Perryfeld. He's clever."

"As well as straight?" said O'Regan. "It's the mistake all you crooks make. There never was a criminal, from a mean little sneak-thief to a professional murderer, who didn't delude himself that he was cleverer than the police. That's why the jails are all overflowing. There never was a really clever crook yet. And if you think you're an exception, Lavine, try a second thought. You're the dumbest of them all. If a man was clever he wouldn't be a crook, because we always get 'em in the end. Remember that, Lavine—we always get 'em in the end. Tell that to the straight and clever Perryfeld when you see him."

He pressed the bell on his desk, and said to the policeman who obeyed the summons:

"Ask Lieutenant Spellman to come."

Then he turned again to Lavine.

"Yes, tell Perryfeld when you see him," he repeated. "And you can see him whenever you like in future."

To Spellman, who came into the room at that moment, he said:

"Take this badge, Spell. He's fired. See him off the premises and then open all the windows."

There was more than a gleam of satisfaction in the laconic Spellman's eyes as he said:

"Yes, Chief. But ain't you going to lock him up?" O'Regan shook his head.

"No," he said. "He's a nasty piece of work, but he's such a mutt I've an idea he'll be more useful to us outside than in."

CHAPTER XII

JOSEPHINE spent most of that night sitting in her arm-chair. Her thoughts were in a turmoil, and sleep was out of the question. She could not rid her mind of the picture of O'Regan as he had stood there, with that hard look in his eyes, and said: "What am I to think, Miss Brady?" And each time that she saw the picture it hurt her more. She had told him that she could explain nothing, and he must think whatever he felt inclined to think—and she knew what he must be thinking. At the best he thought her a liar, and even if he realized that she had lied to him only because she was afraid to tell the truth, he must think her a pitiful little coward. Tricks O'Regan could not help despising a coward. She had seen the scorn in his eyes as he had said good night to her and gone striding out of the room. The best that she could hope for was that his scorn was only for her cowardice.

And now what was she to do? She saw quite clearly that tonight had brought her to the parting of the ways, and she must make a final choice. There was no middle path: it must be either Perryfeld or O'Regan. She must either abandon Perryfeld, defy him to do his worst, and make a clean breast of everything to Tricks O'Regan, trusting him to protect her—or lose O'Regan's friendship. Friendship was what she called it, but she knew it to be something more than that. She had suddenly known it beyond all possibility of doubt when she had paused in the corridor and seen the revolver in Perryfeld's hand, pointed at O'Regan's back. She had known instantly that, whatever might be the result to herself, she must cry out and warn him; that if Perryfeld turned the gun on her instead she would be glad; that provided no harm came to Tricks O'Regan it did not matter in the least what might happen to her.

During the hours that she sat in her armchair after O'Regan had left her, she saw more and more clearly the choice that had to be made. If she could bear that Tricks should despise her and think of her what her silence must compel him to think, then she could do as she had done until now—play the coward because she was afraid of what might happen to her if she ventured to tell the truth about Perryfeld. It was just a simple choice between her own safety and what she now knew to be her love for Tricks O'Regan. If she wanted O'Regan's love—even his respect—she could not have the protection which her cowardice offered her.

Once she saw that clearly, there suddenly seemed to be no question of choosing. She knew what she must do, what nothing and no one should prevent her doing. She must tell Tricks everything—explain everything—and trust him to believe her and to understand. Nothing else would matter very much if she could see that look of scorn leave his eyes, and if he would smile at her again as he had smiled at her that evening at dinner, telling her

of her absurdly long lashes and the curl that was cutting capers around her ear. She decided that she would go to Police Headquarters the first thing in the morning; and, having made that decision, she got up from her chair, stood for a few moments smiling at the newspaper-cutting pinned to the wall, and then went to bed and fell instantly asleep.

At nine o'clock the next morning she left her flat and set off towards Police Headquarters. She went confidently, telling herself that she was not afraid any longer, doggedly refusing to allow herself a single backward glance. After all, she couldn't go on for ever in the state she had been in since her visit to Schnitzer's house—afraid to go out in the street, afraid of every footstep in the corridor, afraid even of the telephone. Quite apart from any other consideration, she was doing the only sensible thing. And in a few minutes now she would have done it, would be safe in Tricks O'Regan's room. Even if someone had followed her from her flat, they would scarcely venture to follow her into Police Headquarters, and she would be safe there, at any rate for a while, free of this awful feeling that someone was watching her all the time, that there was a gun within a few feet of her....

As she came in sight of the Police Headquarters she badly wanted to start running, but she only quickened her pace slightly and told herself that she was almost there and nothing could happen to her now. And just as she told herself that, she felt a touch on her arm, turned her head quickly and came to a sudden halt. Standing beside her was the man who had spoken to her last night in the foyer of the Florida. He raised his hat and smiled.

"Good morning, Miss Brady."

She turned, and took a couple of steps away from him.

"I wouldn't. Miss Brady, if I were you."

There was no mistaking the threatening tone, and she paused irresolutely.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "I don't know you and I—"

"Before you go to Police Headquarters, Miss Brady," he interrupted, "Mr. Perryfeld would like to have a word with you."

She faced him defiantly.

"You can tell Mr. Perryfeld that if he wants to see me—"

She saw his hand slip into his pocket.

"Mr. Perryfeld told me to tell you," he said, "that if you refuse to postpone your visit until he has had a chat with you, you may be obliged to postpone it indefinitely." He nodded towards a big limousine that was drawn up by the kerb. "I think I'd get in, Miss Brady, if I were you."

She hesitated, and then, as he opened the door of the car and waved a hand invitingly, she got in. Lolling in the corner, smoking his cigar, was Perryfeld.

"Come right in, and sit down, Miss Brady," he said, indicating the seat beside him. "I guess we'll go for a nice ride in the country and see the green fields, eh?" She seated herself beside him without replying; the tall man took the wheel and the car started. For some time no one spoke. Then Josephine suddenly turned and faced Perryfeld.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Just a little chat," he said easily. "There are one or two things I'm kind of curious about. So Captain O'Regan's a friend of yours, is he? Took you out dining, eh?"

"Is there any reason why he shouldn't?"

"Of course there isn't," said Perryfeld. "When I take a look at you. Miss Brady, it strikes me as natural that he should. But I'm just a little curious to know what you talked about at dinner." He turned to her suddenly, and his voice took on a harsher note. "What did you tell, eh?"

"I told him nothing, Mr. Perryfeld."

"Sure? You've got to be mighty careful with Tricks O'Regan. If you don't want to tell him something you can bet your last dime he knows you don't, and he'll have it out of you without your knowing. That's O'Regan. If I thought he'd got anything out of you—"

"I told him nothing," she repeated.

"Huh!" grunted Perryfeld. "Well, I guess I've got to take the risk you're not lying. O.K. You told him nothing. But you were going along to see him again this morning, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Perryfeld, I was."

"Why?"

She shrugged.

"Captain O'Regan is a friend of mine, and I've a perfect right—"

"Like hell you have!" he interrupted. "You've got a right to go calling on him at Police Headquarters, have you? Didn't I just tell you that if he wants to get anything out of you he'll get it whether you know it or not? And you must go running around after him and asking for trouble. How do I know what you were going for? How do I know you weren't running along this morning to blab out everything you know? How do I know you're not just stringing me, working in with O'Regan, keeping me sweet with promises and all the time double-crossing me? You've got no conscience, you women—no idea of playing fair. You'd let a guy down, if it suited you, as soon as look at

him You're just quitters—all of you—and I guess a man who trusts you deserves all he gets."

He sat for a time smoking his cigar and staring moodily out of the window. Then he turned to her again.

"Listen, Miss Brady," he said, "you've got to cut O'Regan right outget me? You've got to have nothing at all to do with him. I guess I'm every kind of a darned fool to trust you, anyway, but I don't wish you any harm so long as you'll play fair with me, and I'm asking you to promise me right now that you'll have nothing more to do with Captain O'Regan."

"Captain O'Regan happens to be a friend of mine, Mr. Perryfeld—"

"He's no friend of mine, anyway," he interrupted, "and as long as you're dining with O'Regan and inviting him to your flat, and visiting him at Police Headquarters, I guess I won't get a good night's rest. You've just got to cut him out."

Josephine faced him.

"And suppose I refuse to do anything of the sort?" Perryfeld's eyes narrowed.

"Refuse, eh?" he exclaimed. "Thinking of refusing, are you? You can take it from me that there's no question of refusing. I'm telling you to cut O'Regan out and you're going to do as I say, see? You don't have to decide one way or the other. And you don't have to talk to me that way—see? I'm giving orders, I am, and you're taking 'em. Just get that into your head."

He thrust his face close to hers, and Josephine shrank back into the corner of the seat.

"I'd have you understand right away. Miss Brady," he went on, "that you can't play the fool with me. You've got to do as I say, and if you don't—well, I guess you saw what happened to Schnitzer. And why did it happen to him? I'll tell you: because he didn't do as I told him; because he thought, the same as you're thinking, that he didn't have to take his orders from me; because he got the idea I wasn't as clever as he was, that I was just bluffing him and wouldn't dare do what I threatened. That's what he thought, and you know what happened to him; and if you start acting the same as Schnitzer acted you're going to get what he got—and a dozen Tricks O'Regans aren't going to save you."

Josephine turned her face away from him. Just for a moment she had the wild idea of suddenly flinging open the door of the car and jumping for it. Her glance went to the handle and she tensed her muscles to spring from her seat. But Perryfeld, as if guessing what was in her mind, grasped her arm and held it.

"You've got to realize, Miss Brady," he said, "that you're just nothing to me. Don't you go getting the idea that because you're a pretty young girl I wouldn't treat you as I treated old man Schnitzer. I'm telling you that I'd treat you just the same here and now—"

He stopped abruptly, and leaned back again in his corner.

"But I guess there's no need to talk that way," he said, smiling. "Maybe you're right, Miss Brady. Maybe I just couldn't do a thing like that. There's no need to talk of that, anyway."

Josephine glanced at him in surprise. Perryfeld in his gentler mood, she felt, was none the less dangerous.

"Now listen," he went on. "You're a real nice little girl, and I'm feeling kind of sorry for you. I'm sentimental, I am—don't like seeing a nice little thing like you in trouble." He took her hand in his. Josephine mastered her longing to scream, and left it there. "The fact is, Miss Brady," he said, "I'm mighty fond of you. There's not many girls could make me feel that way, but you've sure got me, and there's not much I wouldn't do for you. I'm going to help you."

Josephine raised her eyebrows.

"Help me?"

"Sure," he nodded. "You don't have to worry any more, Miss Brady. You're wanting a job, eh? Schnitzer's business is closing down, and that means you've got to find something else to do. Well, I've got an idea."

She looked at him inquiringly but said nothing. Her heart was beating furiously. She realized that she was in deadly danger—as deadly as when she had sat in Perryfeld's car before; but now that she was face to face with it she found that she was quite calm and self-possessed.

"Well, it's just this, Miss Brady," replied Perryfeld. "I've got a job for you—up at my home. I'm wanting a secretary pretty badly, and I guess you'd suit me fine. You can start straight away—just run along home and pack your things—"

"Pack my things?"

He nodded.

"Yes," he said. "What I'm wanting is a resident secretary. You'll have real nice quarters, and not too much work to do, and you'll be mighty well looked after. I guess it'll be a real pleasure to have you there. I get kind of lonely sometimes, and I'll be glad to have a nice little girl I'm fond of..."

Josephine snatched her hand away.

"No!" she exclaimed.

Perryfeld smiled.

"Don't quite cotton on, eh, Miss Brady?"

"I'm not going."

The smile left his face.

"Mighty certain about it, aren't you? But you're wrong, Miss Brady. You are going. You're going right home now to fetch your things and—"

"I won't!" she exclaimed furiously. "You can say what you like, Mr. Perryfeld—threaten what you like—but I'm not going."

"You're still wrong. You are going, and if you make too much trouble about it—"

"You can do what you like," she interrupted. "I don't care. I'm not going to your house. I'd rather die first." She controlled herself with a violent effort. "I suppose I shall die if I make too much fuss, eh, Mr. Perryfeld? Well, I guess I'd prefer that—I guess I'd rather go out here and now than be well looked after in your house. I refuse to go, anyway."

"I'd think again if I were you."

She shook her head.

"I refuse," she repeated. "You can shoot me if you want to—like you meant to shoot Captain O'Regan last night."

He smiled.

"That sure was a near thing for Captain O'Regan," he said. "It was mighty lucky for him you happened along when you did, Miss Brady. I guess you didn't realize the risk you ran."

"Oh yes, I did," she stated calmly.

"If I got a little bit excited you might have got the works too."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Didn't seem to matter, eh, so long as Tricks O'Regan didn't get 'em? Kind of fond of Tricks O'Regan, aren't you?"

She made no reply, but a spot of colour appeared on her cheeks.

"Sure you are!" went on Perryfeld. "Why else would you run that sort of risk for him? And you've got his picture pinned on the wall, I saw. I'm sentimental, Miss Brady, and when I saw that picture I felt a big lump in my throat."

"Suppose we stick to business, Mr. Perryfeld? I absolutely refuse to go to your house. Now what are you going to do about it? Are you going to shoot me?"

He sat for a few moments frowning thoughtfully.

"I rather think I've got a better way than that," he said. "You refuse, do you? Well, you aren't going to keep refusing for long. But you needn't worry—there's no bullets coming your way. I've just thought of a better target if there's to be any shooting-practice."

She glanced at him quickly.

"Well?"

"Tricks O'Regan," he said.

The girl's hands suddenly clenched.

"Tricks O'Regan?" she breathed. "You wouldn't dare...."

"Wouldn't I? Well, you should know better than that, kid. You were there last night, and I didn't seem scared to do it then, did I? Dare, eh? You don't have to talk about daring to me, Miss Brady. If I want to do a thing I guess I do it—see?"

He was working himself into a fury again.

"You just remember that," he went on. "I'm telling you quite straight that if you don't do as I say without making all kinds of trouble about it—if you don't come along right now to my house and stay there just as long as I want you there—then I'll blow a dozen holes in Tricks O'Regan if I have to walk into Police Headquarters to do it. I daren't, eh? I did it to Schnitzer, didn't I? Sure I did; I've done it to others, too; and I'll do it to Tricks O'Regan if I make up my mind to it."

Josephine sat rigid, frozen, her face deathly pale.

"You—you swine!" she gasped.

"Maybe I am, but I'm not yellow, and you'd best keep that in mind," replied Perryfeld. "Fond of O'Regan are you? Rather be bumped off yourself than see him bumped, would you? All right, girlie, it's up to you. You just do as I'm telling you, and there'll be no harm coming to O'Regan from me. I give you my word for that, and when I give my word you don't have to worry about taking it. But if you start getting awkward and refusing, well, just listen-in on the wireless and you'll hear what's happened to Tricks O'Regan." He lolled back in his seat and smiled again. "I guess I'm clever, I am," he said complacently.

Josephine sat for a time staring at her hands as they lay on her lap. She was beaten. No sooner had Perryfeld mentioned O'Regan's name than she had realized that, if it came to this point, she could fight no further. Perryfeld would do as he threatened; she had not the least doubt about that. He was right when he boasted that he wasn't yellow. She had to make again

the decision which she had instinctively made last night when she had seen Perryfeld's revolver pointed at the back of the man she loved. She must choose, quite calmly and deliberately this time, between herself and O'Regan, and she knew that there was actually no question of any choice. She loved Tricks O'Regan.

She glanced up and met Perryfeld's eyes—amused, malicious, gloating.

"You find the choice difficult, do you, Miss Brady?"

"Difficult?" she shook her head, smiling. "I'll do as you say, Mr. Perryfeld."

He leaned forward and gave some instructions to the driver, and ten minutes or so later the car pulled up outside the house where she rented her small flat.

Perryfeld opened the door and waved a hand towards it.

"Get your things. Miss Brady," he said. "And you'd best not leave any address."

Josephine got out of the car and hesitated, frowning thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't if I were you, my dear," said Perryfeld. "A telephone message from you just now won't do Tricks O'Regan any good at all. I'll be waiting—and I won't be worrying, either."

She turned away and went hurriedly indoors.

Half an hour later she reappeared, placed her bag in the car, got in, and seated herself beside Perryfeld. The latter gave a nod to the driver and the car glided away.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was remarked the following morning at Police Headquarters by the observant Sergeant Geissel that the Chief seemed unusually preoccupied. Geissel concluded, from the frequent frowns which darkened O'Regan's face, and the curt replies which he received when he ventured to speak to him, that the Steinberg business of the night before had "got the Chief on the raw".

To a certain extent Geissel's deductions were correct. The Steinberg affair had affected O'Regan more than he would admit even to himself. The callous brutality of the crime had sickened and infuriated him and the insolence with which it had been carried out had exasperated him. His pride as a police officer had been badly stung. He felt that the invasion of Police Headquarters and the removal of Steinberg from under his very nose had been a deliberate display of insolence and a challenge to his efficiency. Whoever was behind the affair—and the Harvey affair and the Schnitzer affair—had snapped his fingers in O'Regan's face and got away with it, and the insult was hard to swallow.

It had been partly his own fault. Without Lavine's help the kidnapping could never have succeeded, and he should have fired Lavine long ago. He never had trusted the man and had long suspected that when the police machinery failed, as it had done all too frequently in the last few months, it was Lavine who had thrown the sand in the wheels. But Lavine, after all, was only one of the smaller fry, and firing him would not go far towards keeping Chester County clean. There was a big snake somewhere in the grass, and as long as the big snake was free there would be more Steinbergs and Schnitzers and Harveys.

But who was the big snake, the big man behind it all? Ben Guinney? Perryfeld? If Perryfeld was really Ben Guinney there would be no need to look further; and he had an idea that the answer to that question would soon be in his possession. He was all ready for Perryfeld the next time he called at Police Headquarters, and he felt fairly certain that the visit would not be long delayed. If Perryfeld had had a hand in the Steinberg affair, it would not be long before he put in an appearance. Impudent effrontery was obviously part of his technique.

For the greater part of the morning, however, O'Regan's thoughts were only indirectly occupied with Perryfeld. His mind so persistently thrust Josephine Brady on his notice that at length he gave up dismissing her from his thoughts and gave her his undivided attention. Last night, when he had left her, he had quite definitely decided that he had no wish to see her again. Facts were facts, and it was absurd to ignore them. And the facts, when marshalled, formed a formidable array.

She had been Schnitzer's stenographer—a fact which alone would have been enough to make anyone who knew anything of Schnitzer regard her with suspicion; she had been, on her own admission, at Schnitzer's house, alone with the man, on the night of the murder; she had come to Police Headquarters, and lied blatantly; she had assured him only last night, as they had sat together at dinner, that Perryfeld was no more to her than a mere acquaintance—and an hour later he had found Perryfeld in her rooms, obviously very much at home, obviously on intimate terms with her. More lies—and worse than lies! If his brain wasn't softening, he would think no more about Josephine Brady except as a girl who told lies and was on intimate terms with Perryfeld, who was probably Ben Guinney.

And then, remembering her as she had sat opposite to him at dinner, he wavered—and began right at the beginning again. She was frightened, perhaps—shielding someone—afraid to speak the truth. All she had said about Perryfeld might be true. She had seemed surprised, just for a moment, when they had found Perryfeld in her room, and she might not have been acting a part. As a police officer he was, perhaps, too ready to suspect people of acting—he should not, at any rate, condemn her too hastily. He should at least see her again, question her again, make absolutely sure. Perhaps if he rang her up and asked her to see him...

Several times during the morning his hand went towards the telephone and was withdrawn; and it was not until he had been several hours under the observation of Sergeant Geissel that he at last lifted the receiver and asked for her number.

"I want to speak to Miss Brady, please."

"Who?" asked a woman's voice.

"Miss Josephine Brady."

"It's Mrs. Glauber speaking. Who do you want?" O'Regan sighed.

"Listen, Mrs. Glauber," he said patiently. "You've a Miss Brady lodging with you—on the second floor. I want to speak to her. Put me through, will you?"

"Miss Brady?"

"Sure."

"Miss Brady's not here."

"What time are you expecting her in, Mrs. Glauber?"

"I'm not expecting her in at all," replied the woman. "She's gone."

"Gone?"

"Left—packed her things and cleared off. She's paid her rent all right."

O'Regan was frowning.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "Did she leave any address?"

"No, no address."

"When did she go?"

"Say, who are you, anyway?" inquired Mrs. Glauber, with unmistakable suspicion in her voice. "I don't reckon I'm obliged to answer questions—"

"It's Police Headquarters speaking."

"Police, eh? Now listen, you. I don't want nothing to do with the police, see? I've got enough troubles without the police. I don't know nothing about Miss Brady. She's gone and she's paid her rent and that's all that concerns me."

There came a click as she rang oft, and O'Regan, with a shrug, replaced his receiver. Josephine gone—suddenly—last night....

The door opened and Spellman appeared, smiling. "Well, Spellman? What's the joke?"

"You were right, Chief. He's here."

"Perryfeld?"

"Uh-huh. Asking to see you."

O'Regan smiled.

"I guess I'm wanting to see him this time, Spell," he said. "Bring him in."

Perryfeld came into the room with his usual easy swagger and amiable smile. It struck O'Regan, as he watched him, that if he was no less a person than the famous Ben Guinney, it was not surprising that he had so many achievements to his discredit. The man had supreme self-confidence and marvellous nerve. For all he knew, O'Regan might even now have the proof of his identity which would inevitably send him without more ado to the Smoky Cell; yet he could stroll coolly into Police Headquarters, knowing well that he might never leave there again as a free man, and never bat an eyelid. There was something O'Regan couldn't help admiring about the man. He certainly had courage, and that, in the eyes of Tricks O'Regan, ranked first among the virtues.

"Well, here I am seeing you again, Captain," began Perryfeld. "I guess you didn't expect me again so soon. Pleasant little surprise for you, eh?"

"Not even a surprise, Perryfeld," replied O'Regan. "Sure. I was forgetting. Everything's known at Police Headquarters—even before it happens. It's a real pity you and me don't go into partnership, Captain; we'd make big money playing the races."

"I'll always back my own judgment, anyway, Perryfeld, and I had a fair idea I'd be seeing you again before long." He turned to Spellman. "O.K., Spell," he said. "You know how to carry on. I'll ring for you if I want you."

With a nod Spellman went out, and O'Regan waved a hand towards a chair.

"Sit down, Perryfeld," he invited. "You're in no hurry?"

"Well, no. But I've got my lawyer waiting outside."

"That's a fine place for him," returned O'Regan. Perryfeld seated himself and stared out of the window for a few moments. Then:

"I guess I got a bit excited the last time we met, Captain," he said. "But you don't have to take any notice of that. I get that way now and again, but it doesn't mean a darned thing."

"That's all right, Perryfeld. I didn't worry. I'd just been showing you a pineapple, and I made allowances. After all, you haven't my nerve. Anything special you've got to say to me this time? No more mysterious strangers hanging around your place and frightening police and chauffeurs?"

Perryfeld shook his head.

"No," he said. "But listen, Captain—it's too bad about that boy Steinberg."

O'Regan got up from his chair and rested, with one leg swinging, on the edge of his desk.

"Yes—that was tough luck," he agreed.

"Taken for a ride, wasn't he?"

"That's the way they do it, you know," said O'Regan. "Ever seen a man bumped off, Perryfeld? I did once—when I was plain Sergeant O'Regan. I got on the tail of a ride party. They got their man with a shotgun, and I lay there and watched the whole outfit. It wasn't a pretty sight. The fellow went on his knees to them, but they killed him just like he was a head of cattle in the stockyard."

"Huh!" grunted the other. "What are you policemen for, eh? I thought the police stopped all that kind of thing long ago."

"No—we haven't—yet," returned O'Regan. "You see, this is a democratic country—which means that if you've got enough pull you can do almost anything." He lighted a cigarette and sat gazing steadily at Perryfeld's face. But the man's eyes did not waver. "What's the great idea, Captain?"

"I'm just having a look at you. Have you any objection?"

"No. Just keep on looking; it'll do your eyes good."

"Any objection to telling me something, Perryfeld?" asked O'Regan.

"Well, I'm answering no questions, if that's what you mean," said Perryfeld. "Let's get that right straight away."

"Ever been in California?"

The other smiled.

"Well, I don't mind answering that. I have. It's a fine country."

"In Denver City?"

"And most other places."

"Do you know Canyon City Penitentiary?"

"I've heard of it."

"Who hasn't?" smiled O'Regan. "But have you seen it?"

"From the outside—certainly I have."

"Saint Quentin—have you seen that?"

"Yes—from the outside."

O'Regan got up from the desk, crossed to the window and stood for a while staring thoughtfully into the street. Perryfeld sat watching him, an amused smile playing about his mouth, complacently smoking his cigar. Tricks, too, was smiling faintly. It was a habit of his when his mind was particularly active, as it was now. He was satisfied in his own mind that Perryfeld was Ben Guinney. Sitting within a few feet of him, smiling, self-confident, quite at ease, was one of the biggest killers in the country, three times sentenced to death, and guilty of God only knew how many murders for which he had never even been arrested... and all he could do was to let him go on sitting there. If Perryfeld chose to walk out of the room, there was nothing that he, O'Regan, could do to stop him I

It was just the kind of situation that appealed to O'Regan. Somehow he must prevent Ben Guinney from walking out again with that complacent grin on his face. So long as Perryfeld could walk where he chose there would be more men, like Harvey and Schnitzer, who would die because they would not pay to live. Women, too, perhaps. It would come to that in due course, no doubt—men's wives, daughters, sisters. He thought of Josephine Brady and his smile vanished.

"Perryfeld!"

"I'm still here, Captain."

"Where's Miss Brady?"

Perryfeld's smile broadened.

"I guess you know her address, O'Regan, as well as I do."

"I guess I know what it was. I want to know what it is. I rang through to her rooms just now and they told me she has gone and left no address. Where has she gone?"

"Why ask me, O'Regan?"

"Because I've an idea that you know."

"You're kind of interested in Miss Brady, aren't you, O'Regan? You needn't bother to tell me; I know you are—and small blame to you. She's a mighty pretty kid is Josephine Brady, and I guess von Tricks O'Regan has his soft spot somewhere. Ever noticed her eyes, Captain? Nice innocent blue eyes, eh?"

O'Regan was still staring out of the window, but Perryfeld saw his hand suddenly clench, and went on in the same good-humoured drawl:

"But you don't have to trust too much to that sort of thing, O'Regan. Nice innocent blue eyes don't mean a thing—not a single thing—and I guess you'd be mighty particular about any dame you took a fancy to. You'd be sort of narrow in your outlook, if you get me, when it came to weighing up a woman. That's why you're heading for a nasty fall when you let yourself feel interested in Josephine Brady. She's not your sort—no, sir!"

"What exactly do you mean by that, Perryfeld?"

"Well, I'm a man of the world," said Perryfeld, "and I'm not narrow-minded, and I guess Josephine Brady's the same as me. You know what I mean? She'd sure have to be broad-minded to hold down a job with Schnitzer. You'd best remember, O'Regan, she was Schnitzer's stenographer for a good few months, and she was round at Schnitzer's house the night he was bumped, and I guess you can put two and two together." O'Regan suddenly swung round and strode towards him.

"If you don't shut your foul mouth, Perryfeld—" he began angrily. Then he stopped abruptly, and with an effort regained his self-control. "I'm just asking you, Perryfeld," he went on, "where Miss Brady is—and I mean to know."

Perryfeld smiled at him with insolent assurance.

"And I'm just telling you, O'Regan, that Josephine Brady is no concern of yours. You've just got no interest at all in that little girl—see? If you've been indulging in dreams about Josephine Brady, you take my advice and forget 'em. She's booked."

"I give you fair warning, Perryfeld, that if any harm comes to her—"

"Harm? You're crazy, O'Regan. No harm's coming to her—not from me or anyone else. She's a swell kid, and I'm getting mighty fond of her—"

"Where is she?" again demanded the Police Captain.

"Well, there's no real reason why you shouldn't know," returned Perryfeld. "You see, I felt sorry for that girl, O'Regan. With Schnitzer gone, she'd got no job, and I just couldn't bear the thought of a swell kid like that running around with no one to be kind to her. I've got a soft heart, you know, O'Regan, and it didn't seem right for me, with a big house and everything I want in life, not to offer to share—"

"She's at your place?"

"She is."

O'Regan stifled an oath.

"She's my stenographer now, O'Regan—the same as she was Schnitzer's. But I'm not like Schnitzer. I'm mighty fond of that child, and I mean to marry her. I guess we'll have a real swell wedding, O'Regan."

Tricks turned suddenly away and walked again to the window.

Perryfeld chuckled.

"Feeling kind of disappointed, eh, O'Regan?" he said. "And surprised, eh? But you've got to look at these things from the girl's point of view, you know. Just ask yourself which you'd choose if you were a girl: Tricks O'Regan, captain in the police force, scraping along on his bit of pay, or Perryfeld—me—with a swell house and a swell car and as much money as she fancies to buy herself pretty frocks and—"

O'Regan cut him short with a gesture. He was smiling faintly again now—that cold, hard smile which, had Perryfeld understood its significance, might have shaken his complacency.

"You're too modest, Perryfeld," he said. "Miss Brady, I'm sure, wouldn't place much value on those things. What attracted her was your charm, your personality, your Grecian profile. Just take a look at yourself in the glass some time, Perryfeld, and you'll wonder how you've managed to keep single for so long." Perryfeld straightened his tie.

"Well, I guess I'm not a bad-looking fellow," he said. "I dare say that had something to do with it. She didn't need inviting twice, anyway."

"What girl would?" smiled O'Regan. "So she's up at your place, eh?"

"And she's staying there, O'Regan. Just get that straight, will you? It's no kind of use your calling there, because you won't see her. She don't want to see you. She's dead sick of the sight of you. You've got just nothing to do with that kid, and you'd best keep clear. She's mine-see? I've got her, and I mean to keep her, and if you try butting in..." He paused abruptly. "Bah!

You're just nothing. Tricks O'Regan. You don't amount to that!" he said, snapping his fingers. "I reckon I don't need to worry about the likes of you."

"Sure you don't," agreed O'Regan. "And now we'll forget Miss Brady for a while, Perryfeld, shall we? We were talking about Saint Quentin Penitentiary. You said you'd been there—"

"I said I'd seen it—from the outside."

"I'm told that's quite the best view of it," said O'Regan. "Tell me, Perryfeld, did you ever meet a guy called Guinney?"

O'Regan was watching the other closely, but Perryfeld's face betrayed nothing.

"Can't call him to mind," he said perfunctorily.

"Ben Guinney."

"No, sir."

"A big shot—a big killer."

"Oh no! I don't know any killers."

"H'm!" said O'Regan thoughtfully. "Do you know why they call me 'Tricks' O'Regan, Perryfeld? Because I'm plumb full of tricks."

"Is that so?" drawled Perryfeld.

"And I had an idea I might be seeing you again before long."

"I guess you've got second sight, Captain. But if you're aiming to scare me, you're wasting your time. Your tricks mean nothing in my young life. You see. I've got nothing to be afraid of."

"Nothing in your past, Perryfeld, that you wouldn't care to have dug up."

"Nothing."

"All pure and sweet as a lily, eh? Well, you're lucky. There aren't many men who can truthfully say that."

"Nobody's got anything on me, O'Regan—or ever will have."

"You're confident," returned O'Regan. "I've had a bit of experience, you know, and you can take it from me that nine out of every ten big-shots die of over-confidence."

"You should know, O'Regan. But I'm not expecting to die."

"And I'm expecting to make you change your mind about that, Perryfeld. We shall see who's right. Did you ever meet Steinberg?"

"No, sir."

"But you met John Harvey?"

"Now, listen, O'Regan," said Perryfeld, "I'm answering no questions."

With a shrug O'Regan turned away and took several turns up and down the room. And then he paused behind Perryfeld's chair and stood gazing down thoughtfully at the top of his head. For a few moments Perryfeld continued calmly smoking; then his feet shifted uneasily, his fingers drummed on his knee, and at length he twisted around in his chair and glanced up at O'Regan's pensive face.

"What's the idea, Captain?"

O'Regan turned away and began pacing the room again.

"I was just wondering," he said.

"Sure. You're always wondering. Wondering what?"

"Wondering why, if there's nothing in your lily-white past you want to keep hidden, you should go to the trouble and discomfort of wearing a wig."

"A wig?"

O'Regan nodded. "A very good wig, Perryfeld, but still a wig."

"A wig, eh? Me wearing a wig? That's a good one I I've never worn a wig in my life, O'Regan. I've got no need to wear a wig—see?"

O'Regan shook his head.

"I know a wig when I see one. Did you tell Miss Brady you wear a wig? If you didn't, Perryfeld, that's false pretences, and when she finds out—"

"I tell you I've got no wig!" interrupted Perryfeld excitedly. "You're clean crazy, O'Regan. You've got all kinds of wrong ideas about me in your head, and there's no getting 'em out. There's no false pretences with me, see? I'm all square and above-board, I am. I've got nothing to hide—"

"Not even a single hair, eh?"

The other man jumped to his feet.

"Say, listen, O'Regan," he said. "You've got me all wrong-about this wig and about everything. I tell you I'm wearing no wig, and it's no use your keeping on saying I am." He pointed to his head. "Feel for yourself." O'Regan smiled. "May I?"

"Sure. Get on with it and see for yourself." O'Regan ran his hands over Perryfeld's head and nodded.

"Nature's own handiwork," he said. "My mistake. But it looked too elegant to be genuine."

"Well, I guess I am elegant," said Perryfeld complacently.

"Face massage twice a week—hot towels and all that sort of thing, I suppose?"

"Sure."

"And a manicure?"

"Yes, a swell manicure," said Perryfeld, glancing at his nails in obvious pride. "There's a pretty little girl who's real interested in my nails—"

"May I see?"

"Why not?" said Perryfeld, and held out his hands for O'Regan's inspection.

O'Regan took one of Perryfeld's hands in each of his own so that the fingers rested on his palms and stood regarding them intently.

"I'd like an introduction to your manicurist," he said. "Look at those cuticles."

"Swell job, eh?"

O'Regan nodded, dropped his hands and turned away.

"Well, I reckon I owe you an apology, Perryfeld," he said. "I was wrong about that wig and maybe I've been wrong about other things I've been thinking. But even Tricks O'Regan can't always be right." He paused and glanced at Perryfeld with a friendly smile. "Say, Perryfeld, you asked me why they call me 'Tricks' O'Regan, didn't you? Care to see a few tricks before you go?"

"If you can show me how to pull dollars out of a hat—"

"Better than that," said O'Regan. "Just watch."

He crossed to a table that stood against the wall and grasped one end of it.

"Just lend a hand with this table, Perryfeld," he said, "and I'll show you a trick that beats any you've seen on the stage."

Perryfeld nodded, grasped the other end of the table, and together they carried it into the middle of the room.

"Regular show, eh, O'Regan?"

O'Regan smiled and seated himself at his desk.

"More of a show-down," he said, opening a drawer. "Now watch carefully. See this?" He took a small bottle from the drawer and held it up. "That's plumbago," he said. "This is a—hare-foot." He held up a small slip of paper. "You have to guess what this is, Perryfeld."

"O.K.," smiled Perryfeld. "It's a newspaper-cutting."

O'Regan shook his head.

"Much more interesting than that," he said, "and much more reliable. It's the fingerprints of Ben Guinney."

He saw Perryfeld's fingers tighten on his cigar, but otherwise the man's self-control was complete. "Ben Guinney, eh?"

"Ben Guinney," repeated O'Regan "three times sentenced to death—the man who's working the biggest racket ever hatched in a rotten, festering mind; the man who killed Harvey and Schnitzer and Steinberg and God knows how many others, and who's going to the death-house if my badge has to go into that frame to get him there."

"That's a fine speech, Captain. And you've really got Guinney's fingerprints, eh? Take 'em yourself?"

O'Regan got up from his chair.

"No, I didn't take them," he said; "but I'm hoping to get a duplicate of them. That's where the trick comes in, Perryfeld. I'll show you."

He went to the table in the middle of the room, stooped, unpinned a long slip of paper from beneath the edge of the table and stood upright.

"Just where your fingers were, Perryfeld," he said. "You didn't think of that, did you?"

Perryfeld was scowling now and puffing rapidly at his cigar.

O'Regan returned to his desk and laid the strip of paper in front of him.

"Grease," he said. "You use far too much grease on your hair. Grease from your hair on to my hands, from my hands on to your fingers, and from your fingers on to this strip of paper. I'm glad it wasn't really a wig. And the rest is simple, you know."

Perryfeld tossed his cigar away and thrust his hands into the side pockets of his coat.

"It seems a darned silly trick to me, O'Regan."

"Watch!" said O'Regan. "We just drop a little powder on the paper where the eight greasy fingers have touched it—like that; then we brush it lightly with the hare-foot—like that—and there we are, Perryfeld!" He held up the paper. "See the fingerprints? Quite clear, aren't they? Well, maybe they are the fingerprints of Ben Guinney, eh?"

"Maybe they are, O'Regan," replied Perryfeld. "But you've still got to prove it, you know. You can't arrest me on that until you've proved it."

O'Regan slipped the paper into the drawer and got up.

"If I can prove you're Ben Guinney, Perryfeld," he said, "I can hold you now. We'll see."

He pressed the bell-push and almost immediately the door opened and Spellman, grasping Petersen by the arm and urging him forward, came in. As he caught sight of Perryfeld, Petersen halted abruptly and stood staring at him with scared, wide-open eyes, his lips working and his hands wandering restlessly.

"Listen, Petersen," said O'Regan; "you see that man?"

Petersen, his eyes still staring at Perryfeld, nodded.

"Do you know him?"

Perryfeld, his hands still thrust into the side pockets of his coat, kept his eyes fixed on Petersen's.

"You've never seen me before, have you, son?" he said easily.

Petersen remained dumb. His tongue passed quickly over his lips and his hands clenched and unclenched.

"Don't be afraid, Petersen," encouraged O'Regan; "you're quite safe here. Just tell me if you know him."

Suddenly Petersen's eyes seemed to blaze.

"Know him!" he screamed. "Know—him!" He flung out a shaking hand towards Perryfeld. "That man is Ben Guinney! There's a reward of fifty thousand dollars for his arrest, and I claim—"

"You claim it!" snarled Perryfeld's voice. "Sure you can claim it, but you'll never collect it!—"

There came a muffled report. Petersen seemed to stiffen and then collapsed in a heap on the floor. As he did so, Spellman and O'Regan sprang forward and Perryfeld's arms were seized. O'Regan plunged a hand into Perryfeld's pocket, pulled out the still smoking revolver, and thrust it into his own pocket. Then he strode across to where Petersen lay and knelt beside him.

"That's O.K., Captain," said Perryfeld. "Ben Guinney doesn't miss his targets."

O'Regan rose, and stood silent as Spellman slipped the handcuffs on to Perryfeld's wrists. Then he turned away.

"Take him away, Spell," he said, and seated himself at his desk. "Get out, Perryfeld!"

Perryfeld smiled insolently.

"Sure, Captain," he said. "Which way?"

O'Regan turned in his seat and pointed to the door. "That's the way, Ben Guinney," he said. "Straight to the Smoky Cell."

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the journey to Perryfeld's house, Josephine did not speak. She leaned back in her corner of the car with her gaze fixed on the road ahead, and was grateful that Perryfeld made no attempt to draw her into conversation. Her mind was in a turmoil, but one thing she saw quite clearly: she had done the only sensible thing, the only possible thing. Perryfeld, she knew, would have been as good as his word. If she had refused to go with him, it would not have been she but Tricks O'Regan who would have paid the penalty. After all, it would not be difficult to shoot O'Regan—no more difficult than to shoot anyone else. And there had been no difficulty about shooting Schnitzer. Perryfeld had just walked into Schnitzer's house, shot him, and walked out again, and he would do the same to O'Regan if he wanted to. He had almost done it last night in her sitting-room.

She shuddered as she thought of that ghastly moment when she had seen Perryfeld's revolver pointed towards O'Regan's back and the evil smile on Perryfeld's face. But she was glad now that she had seen it. In those few seconds she had suddenly realized beyond all possibility of doubt what her feelings towards Tricks were, had known with utter conviction that her love for him was a thousand times greater than her fear of Perryfeld's revolver. Whatever might happen to her now, she had saved Tricks. She had, at any rate, saved him for the moment, and now, provided Perryfeld kept his promise, she was placing him definitely out of danger. But would Perryfeld keep his promise? Wasn't she being a fool to put any trust at all in the promise of a man like Perryfeld? Could she be sure that Tricks would be any safer as the result of what she was doing? She glanced doubtfully at Perryfeld, and he smiled at her reassuringly. He seemed to have guessed what was going on in her mind.

"You've no cause to worry, Miss Brady," he said. "You just be a good little girl and do as I say, and nothing's going to happen to Tricks O'Regan. When I give my word I stick to it."

She turned her head again and stared out through the windscreen. She must take the risk of Perryfeld breaking his promise, anyway. There was nothing else to be done. She must at least pretend to be a good little girl and do as he said, and be ready for any chance that might occur to get free of him. Something would happen to show her the way out of it, and she must wait until it did. She did not care to look further into the future than that.

"But there's got to be no monkey tricks—see?" added Perryfeld. "I'm trusting you the same as you're trusting me, and you've got to play fair. You've just got to stay at my place and act like a sensible girl—"

"For how long?" she demanded.

"Just as long as I say," replied Perryfeld. "Just as long as it suits my convenience. You've got to do as you're told and not ask questions. I guess a girl knows when she's well off, and maybe you won't be in a hurry to leave a little later on. When a girl finds she can have everything she fancies—as many pretty dresses as she wants and a swell house and nothing to do but amuse herself—she's not going to start pining to get back to her typewriter. I'll be calling at Calder's today and telling them to send along some real pretty frocks—"

"I have all the frocks I need, thanks, Mr. Perryfeld."

"Most girls have. But that don't stop 'em wanting more. You can pick what you fancy from what Calder's send, and you don't have to worry about the price." Josephine did not argue about it. At that moment the car swung through a gateway in a high brick wall, and a few seconds later stopped at the door of the house. Perryfeld got up and Josephine followed him up the steps and into a spacious hall. A negress of enormous proportions, her face wreathed in smiles, came waddling to meet them.

"This is Sarah," said Perryfeld; "she'll look after you when I'm not here. Anything you want you just ask Sarah for and she'll see you have it." He turned to Sarah. "You hear that, Sarah? Miss Brady is staying here—as my secretary. Anything she asks for she's to have—see?"

The negress's beam expanded.

"Sure, suh. You trust Sarah to look after the missie. I'll treat her like one of my own lambs—take her right under my wing, suh."

With a nod Perryfeld led the way into a large, lofty room, luxuriantly furnished.

"Just make yourself at home. Miss Brady," he said. "I've got business down town this morning and I can't stop to show you around, but you can go exploring on your own. There's a swell garden with a bathing pool—the finest in Chester County—if you've a fancy to go swimming. All you've got to remember is to keep inside the garden. Outside the garden wall you'll find it—well, not so healthy. I guess you understand?"

"Quite, Mr. Perryfeld," said Josephine. "In other words, I'm a prisoner."

He went to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Listen, Miss Brady—but say, I don't have to keep on calling you Miss Brady now, do I? Sure I don't, and as Josephine is a bit high-sounding, I guess 'Jo' will do for me."

Josephine made no protest. It didn't in the least matter what Perryfeld called her. She even smiled as she reflected that Mr. Perryfeld's first name—which

in due course, no doubt, she would be asked to call him—was probably "Clarence" or "Cyril", or something equally inappropriate.

"Now listen, Jo." Perryfeld continued, "you don't have to talk that way. Asking you to stay one side of the garden wall isn't saying you're a prisoner. It's a real big garden."

"Aren't there real big prisons, Mr. Perryfeld?"

"I shouldn't wonder," he replied, "but this isn't one of them. I want you to be comfortable here. And I want you to look on me as a friend. I'm fond of you, Jomighty fond of you—and I'd like to see you getting a bit fond of me. I guess—that shouldn't be difficult, eh?" Josephine made no reply to that and his arm slid around her shoulders. She tried to turn away, but his hand gripped and held her.

"Mighty sweet little mouth you've got, Jo," he said. "You aren't going to say no if I ask you to let me kiss it, are you?"

She glanced quickly up at him.

"Yes, Mr. Perryfeld, I am."

He smiled. "In that case," he said, "there's no sense in asking, is there?" His hand tightened on her shoulder. "I guess I'll kiss it without asking."

His arm drew her forward and he leaned towards her until his face was within a few inches of hers; and then, with a sudden wrench, she freed herself, her arm was drawn back, and her clenched fist, flashing forward, struck Perryfeld full in the mouth.

The colour rushed to his face as he started back, and he stood glaring at her with an ugly scowl. Then, mastering his fury with an obvious effort, he gave a shrug, and smiled again.

"Full of spirit, eh? Well, that's all to the good. I like 'em that way. I reckon it'll be real amusing taming you. So long, sweetheart! I'll be seeing you later." He went from the room, and a few moments later Josephine, standing at the window, caught a glimpse of him seated in the corner of the car as it went down the drive and out through the gate-way.

She stood for some time gazing thoughtfully out of the window. From the moment when Perryfeld had suggested that she should go to his house as his secretary she had had a suspicion of the kind of situation she would have to deal with, and Perryfeld had lost no time in confirming it. She had been a fool, perhaps, to strike him, but when she had seen his face so close to hers she had struck out instinctively. But she might have ruined everything. If Perryfeld had taken it badly, he might have called off the whole bargain. She must be more careful in future—handle him differently, remembering all the time that it was Tricks she was safeguarding, and not

allowing herself to do anything which might make Perryfeld change his mind. How it was to be managed she had no idea, and it was useless to worry anyway.

She left the window and set out on a tour of the house. It was a magnificent mansion, furnished throughout in the most expensive style. Sarah carried her bag upstairs and showed her to her room, a luxurious apartment which, had it been in any other house, would have impressed her as all that a girl could wish for.

She unpacked her things and then sat for a time at the open window. It looked out over the garden and from where she sat she could see above the high wall on to the road. There was nobody visible in the grounds, and every now and then a car passed, travelling to or from the town. It struck Josephine that it was rather absurd to talk of being in prison here. Perryfeld, it seemed, had taken it for granted that she would make no attempt to escape, and there was nothing to prevent her walking out of the house, stopping the first car that came along and going straight to Police Headquarters with her story. Nothing but Perryfeld's threat that if she ventured to disobey him, Tricks would pay the penalty. He was relying, she supposed, on that. And he was quite right.

She saw a police patrolman pass along the road and told herself that she had only to call to him to be safely out of the house within a few moments. But she did not call. She turned away from the window with a sigh and then, catching sight of a telephone instrument on a small table in the corner of the room, she paused. It was a comfort to know that was there, anyway. The mere sight of it made her feel less lonely, less completely cut off from the outside world. If matters reached a crisis she could, at any rate, get into touch with somebody. She would only have to get through to Police Headquarters and tell Tricks to come along if she really couldn't manage thing without him. She wished now that she had told her landlady where she was going. She had told nobody, and if Tricks should telephone to her flat—it wasn't likely, of course, after last night, that he would trouble any more about her—but if he should try to get her on the wire and Mrs. Glauber could give him no information...

She crossed to the instrument and stood for a few moments hesitating; then she suddenly lifted the receiver and placed it to her ear. Almost as she did so she heard a man's voice:

"Hullo! Is that Miss Brady?"

She started and could think of nothing to say in reply. "This is Mr. Perryfeld's private switchboard," went on the voice. "You'll be wanting Police Headquarters, will you, Miss Brady?"

"Oh, no—oh, no—as a matter of fact I want—"

"I'm sorry," interrupted the voice, "but I'm afraid I can't put you through to Captain O'Regan, Miss Brady. It wouldn't be—safe. Mr. Perryfeld's instructions are that no calls are to be put through to any number without his permission, so I reckon you won't waste your time trying again. If there's anything you require, Sarah will see to it...."

Josephine replaced the receiver. So she was in prison, after all! Perryfeld was taking no risks. She wondered what would have happened if she had ventured to call to the patrolman, and what would happen if she went beyond the garden wall. Something, she was sure.

She was not left unguarded. Somewhere quite close to her there was always a gun....

She crossed to the door, noticed that there was a key in the lock outside and slipped it into her pocket. Then, going out of the house, she wandered round the garden until Sarah appeared and summoned her to lunch.

There was a wireless set, she noticed, in the dining-room, and she switched it on, tuned in a dance band and settled down to her meal. There was nothing to worry about for the moment, she told herself. It would be time enough to start worrying when Perryfeld returned. She was glad that she had that key in her pocket.

The dance music ceased and a voice began speaking, but she paid no attention at first. And then, as the words "Police Headquarters" reached her, she laid down her knife and fork and glanced quickly across at the loudspeaker.

"... arrested at Police Headquarters this morning," the voice was saying. "He has been definitely identified as Ben Guinney, the notorious gunman and prison-breaker who has already been three times condemned to death but has so far always succeeded in escaping from prison before the sentence could be carried out. He has been living in the district for several years under the name of Perryfeld, regarded as one of the most prominent citizens ..."

Josephine sprang to her feet and stood staring at the loud speaker with incredulous eyes. Ben Guinney—Perryfeld—arrested! She stood there listening while all the details were given. Perryfeld, she learned, was suspected of being concerned in the recent murder of both Schnitzer and Steinberg. The police were of the opinion that he was at the head of the biggest racket that had ever been attempted. But this time he would certainly go to the electric chair, and the authorities were already taking steps to round up the rest of the gang.

As the voice ceased speaking, Josephine did not return to her lunch; instead she hurried upstairs and began to pack her bag.

CHAPTER XV

AS she gathered her things together and stuffed them haphazard into her case, Josephine had only one thought in her mind: she could tell the truth now. With Perryfeld safe in the hands of the police she had no longer anything to fear from him, either for herself or for Tricks O'Regan. She could now go straight to Police Headquarters, see Tricks and explain everything to him—why she had been obliged to tell him all those lies about Schnitzer—and he had, of course, known that they were lies. Why Perryfeld had been at her flat last night; why she had refused to give any explanation of his presence there, and why she had accepted the post of secretary to Perryfeld and had come to live at his house. Tricks would believe her; she must somehow make him believe her.

She closed her bag, put on her hat and went cautiously down the stairs, pausing every few steps to listen. But there was nobody about. She could hear Sarah clattering around in the kitchen, but that was all, and she went confidently across the hall, opened the front door and glanced along the drive. The whole place seemed to be deserted. She hesitated for a moment, wondering whether before going to Police Headquarters she should telephone to Tricks and tell him to expect her. Then, remembering the voice that had warned her that no calls would be put through, she set off, walking briskly along the drive towards the gateway.

Suddenly she halted. A man had turned in at the gate and was coming along the drive towards her. There was something vaguely familiar about him and she stood still for a few moments trying to recall where she had seen him, and then she smiled and started again towards the gate. She had nothing to fear from this man, anyway. She remembered him now; she had seen him at Police Headquarters—the fattish, dark-complexioned Lieutenant who had been there when she arrived. Lavine, they had called him. But he was not in uniform now, and just for the moment she had not been able to recognize him. She had better ask him to take her straight to Tricks O'Regan.

As he reached her, Lavine stepped in front of her and paused, frowning.

"Where are you going, Miss Brady?" he demanded. She smiled at him.

"To Police Headquarters—as fast as I can, Mr. Lavine," she told him. "I've some information to give to Captain O'Regan—"

"Got permission?"

She frowned.

"Permission?"

"Permission from Mr. Perryfeld. I understood that he had engaged you as his secretary—"

"He had," she interrupted; "but haven't you heard? The news just came through on the wireless: Perryfeld has been arrested. They say he's Ben Guinney, the gunman. Weren't you at Police Headquarters when it happened?"

Edwin Lavine smiled faintly.

"No, Miss Brady," he said, "I wasn't, but I've heard about it, of course."

She nodded.

"They believe he killed Mr. Schnitzer too," she said.

"They said on the wireless—"

"Sure they did," agreed Lavine. "And you're just running along to Police Headquarters to tell them they're right, eh? You saw it happen, didn't you, and can tell them all about it? Well, I reckon the police will have to do without any more of your evidence, Miss Brady."

She stared at him in amazement.

"The police and I have parted company," he informed her, "and if you think you're going to be allowed to go squealing any more to Tricks O'Regan you've got another guess coming. I'll carry your bag for you, shall I?"

He held out his hand, but she gripped her bag more tightly and tried to step past him. He grasped her arm and held it.

"Listen, Miss Brady," he said. "Don't you understand?you're not going to Police Headquarters. You're going back to the house, and if you make any kind of trouble about it I guess you'll just go for a nice car ride and won't come back. Is that clear?"

She met his gaze defiantly.

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Lavine," she said. "I understand that you're just another low-down skunk like Perryfeld—"

He swung her round and began to urge her towards the house.

"Never mind my character," he said. "I don't lay claim to being a Tricks O'Regan—or any other kind of plaster saint. You're not running along to spill any more beans to him, anyway. You've spilt more than enough already."

She made no further resistance. She realized that in any case resistance would be useless. She might have guessed, she told herself, that she would not be allowed to escape quite so easily as that. That man at the switchboard should have warned her that she had not been left unwatched.

She had probably been under observation all the time and had never really had the least chance of getting away. And now she would certainly have no chance whatever. Nobody knew where she was, and if she were ever to get free of all this business she would have to rely on her own wits entirely.

Even supposing that Tricks O'Regan still felt sufficiently interested in her, he had no idea where she was and it was useless counting on him. And she could not really blame him if he never gave her another thought. She understood now the significance of Perryfeld's words when he had warned her that even at Police Headquarters she would still be within reach of a gun. Lavine, of course. All the time, she supposed, he had been working hand in glove with Perryfeld—and Perryfeld was Ben Guinney, four times a murderer! She thought of him with his arm around her shoulders and his lips close to hers, and shuddered Thank God he was under lock and key, anyway!

They entered the house, and Lavine, who was evidently well acquainted with it, led her straight into the dining-room and closed the door behind him. There were several other men in the room, lolling in arm-chairs, who seemed to be awaiting their arrival. Two of them she recognized. One was the man Mike, who had been with Perryfeld at Schnitzer's house, and the other was the tall young man who had given her a lift back to her flat when Perryfeld had dumped her by the roadside. It was the tall young man who first spoke.

"Glad to meet you again, Miss Brady," he said. "Since we had our pleasant little ride together I've been hoping all the time I'd have the pleasure—"

Lavine silenced him with an imperative gesture.

"You can cut out all that stuff, Sherriff," he interrupted; "there's no time to be lost. We've got to find out just where we stand—and quickly. You can take it from me that O'Regan won't waste time. He's got Ben Guinney—"

"Ben won't squeal," said Mike confidently. "O'Regan won't get nothing helpful out of Ben."

"No," agreed Lavine, "and perhaps he won't try. Perhaps he's no need to try. Perhaps someone has done all the squealing already. And that's just what we've got to know."

"Sure," agreed Sherriff. "Somebody's been squealing, and I guess I want to know who. Sit down, Miss Brady." He waved a hand towards a chair.

Josephine seated herself and glanced around to find them all staring at her intently. Her heart began pounding furiously, but she managed to meet their gaze steadily. For a few moments she sat thus, and then she glanced at Lavine.

"Well, Mr. Lavine?" she said.

Lavine frowned.

"There's few things you've got to tell us, Miss Brady," he said, "and I guess you'll be well advised to come clean and try no funny business—eh, boys?"

Mike grinned.

"I've got a gun in my pocket. Miss Brady," he remarked.

Josephine turned her head and faced him.

"Of course, I remember you now," she said. "You're fond of shooting, aren't you? You wanted to shoot me in the car that night, and before that—at Mr. Schnitzer's house—"

Mike sprang to his feet.

"Now listen—you've got to forget that!" he exclaimed furiously. "You've got to forget all about Schnitzer—see? You never saw me there—"

"Oh, but I did. I saw you quite clearly with the gun in your hand—"

"I'm telling you you didn't! I'm telling you I know nothing about Schnitzer—"

"Cut it out, Mike," interrupted Lavine; "there's no need to get windy."

"Windy!" exclaimed Mike truculently. "Who's windy? But if you think I'm letting a lying jane send me to the chair—"

Lavine placed a hand on his chest and thrust him backwards into his seat.

"I'm sending you into that one, anyway," he said, "and you'd best stay in it and keep a grip on yourself." He turned to Josephine. "We want to know, Miss Brady," he said, "just how much you've told O'Regan. You were dining out with him yesterday evening, weren't you?"

She nodded.

"I was." She glanced across at the man named Sherriff. "Sorry I couldn't dine with you, Mr. Sherriff," she said, "but I had a previous engagement."

"What did you tell O'Regan?" demanded Lavine again.

"About Mr. Sherriff? Oh, I said he was a reporter from the Tribune who wanted a story from me about Mr. Schnitzer. But I'm afraid Captain O'Regan didn't believe me. You could hardly expect him to, could you? I mean Mr. Sherriff looked much too handsome for a reporter—"

Lavine made an impatient gesture.

"You'll do no good by talking that way. Miss Brady."

She shrugged. She knew perfectly well that she would do no good that way, but she wanted time to think, to see how best to deal with the situation, to take no definite line until she could perceive clearly where it would lead her.

She could not decide whether to tell them the truth—that she had told O'Regan nothing—or to let them think that he knew everything. And she knew that in any case she must not let them guess that she was afraid of them. She would gain time, if nothing else, by fooling. "But he is handsome, isn't he?" she smiled.

"Never mind Sherriff," said Lavine impatiently. "What did you tell O'Regan? About Schnitzer, I mean."

"Did you tell him you saw me there?" demanded Mike. "That's what I want to know. If I thought you'd told him that; if I thought you'd squealed about me

"Don't worry; I didn't," said Josephine.

"You didn't say nothing about me?"

She shook her head.

"Didn't talk about me at all, eh?" he persisted.

"No," said Josephine. "Our conversation was all quite pleasant."

"Huh!" grunted Mike, and leaned back in his chair. "Did you talk about Perryfeld?" demanded Lavine. "Listen, Miss Brady; somebody squealed on Perryfeld. They can't arrest a man for nothing and they'd got nothing on Perryfeld yesterday. I know that you're the only one who knows anything about the Schnitzer business, and you were out dining with O'Regan last night, and this morning Perryfeld is arrested. I guess he's got you to thank for it. You told O'Regan last night that Perryfeld shot Schnitzer and, in that case—"

"I didn't."

She had seen his hand moving towards his pocket and the words forced themselves from her lips.

Lavine smiled incredulously.

"Didn't even give him a hint, eh?"

"No."

"Yet this morning Perryfeld is arrested. That means somebody squealed, Miss Brady, and if it wasn't you, then who was it?"

"I don't know," she exclaimed desperately. "I've no idea. All I know is that it wasn't I. I didn't say a word. I didn't even mention Mr. Perryfeld. We just talked about dancing and—and that sort of thing, and we said nothing at all about Mr. Schnitzer. And if the police got to know that Mr. Perryfeld shot him they didn't get the information from me last night."

"This morning, maybe," suggested Sherriff. "I wouldn't be surprised if you 'phoned O'Regan this morning—before you left home, perhaps—"

"No, I didn't."

"Later, eh?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't 'phoned him at all."

"I reckon she's lying," remarked Mike. "There's never no sense in trusting a dame, Lavine. If Perryfeld had realized that I reckon he wouldn't be where he is now. He ought to have let me do as I wanted a couple of nights ago, and you'd better let me do as I want now. You just let me take Miss Brady for a car drive—"

Lavine cut him short.

"If you had your way, Mike," he said, "you'd only leave yourself alive and you'd still feel nervous. We've got enough trouble without making more if we can avoid it." He turned again to Josephine. "You haven't spoken to O'Regan since you left him last night?"

She shook her head.

"Nor sent him any message?"

"No."

"Then he doesn't know where you are—doesn't know you're here?"

"I haven't told him, anyway."

"Have you told anybody?"

"Nobody."

"You can bet your life she's lying—" began Mike; he paused abruptly as the telephone bell rang noisily, and sat staring with scared eyes at the instrument.

Lavine strode to the telephone and lifted the receiver. "Hullo!... Who?... Miss Brady? Sure you can. I'll fetch her."

He clapped his hand over the mouthpiece and turned to Josephine.

"You're wanted, Miss Brady."

She got up and went to the instrument.

"Me?" she exclaimed in surprise. "But who—"

"It's O'Regan," he told her. "And he didn't know where you were, eh? You didn't tell him anything—"

"I did not," she insisted. "If he knows I'm here—"

"He does," interrupted Lavine, "and he wants to speak to you. Now listen, young woman, you're all right—see? There's nothing wrong and he has no

cause to worry. And you don't want to see him, either. You'll be wise to remember that when you're talking to him."

"Sure you will," growled Mike, rising and going to her. "And you just remember this, Miss Brady: I'm not here. Nobody's here except you and Lavine. You haven't seen me and you don't know nothing about me." He pulled a gun from his pocket. "Just you say one word you shouldn't say, Miss Brady, and I guess you won't finish what you're saying."

Lavine thrust the receiver into her hand, and with a nod uncovered the mouthpiece.

Josephine glanced round at them as they stood watching her, glanced at the gun in Mike's hand, and turned to the instrument.

"Hallo!"

"Is that you, Miss Brady?" came O'Regan's voice,

"Yes."

"O'Regan this end. Are you all right?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Quite a number of reasons. Why are you there at all, anyway?"

"I came here as Mr. Perryfeld's secretary."

"Huh! Some job!" replied O'Regan. "Well, Perryfeld needs no secretary now, Miss Brady, and isn't likely ever to need one again. There's no postal connection with hell. And the sooner you leave the better. You're to go straight away. Don't wait to pack anything—just go."

"Go?"

"You're not going," warned Lavine; "you don't want to go."

"You understand, Miss Brady?" asked O'Regan. "But why should I, Captain O'Regan? I'm quite all right here, and—"

"I'm not arguing," O'Regan interrupted; "I'm giving you orders—from Police Headquarters. You're to leave at once."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"If you haven't left in ten minutes," he replied, "I shall do as I think best. I shall know. Now be sensible, Miss Brady, and do as I say. Who's there with you?" She glanced at Lavine.

"Who's here?" she repeated, and saw Mike move a little nearer to her and felt something pressed hard against her ribs.

"Only me," whispered Lavine. "He knows I'm here, anyway."

"Lavine's there, isn't he came O'Regan's voice.

"Yes."

"Anyone else?"

"No."

"Can you leave if you want to? Lavine's not stopping you?"

"No, of course not. Why should he?"

"Then leave in ten minutes," replied O'Regan. "There'll be a police car waiting at the corner, and you're to get in it and come straight along here. I'll explain things when I see you. Good-bye."

She heard him ring off, replaced the receiver and turned to Lavine.

"Well?" demanded Lavine. "What did he want?"

"Just to know if I was all right," she told him. "I said I was."

"Sure you are," agreed Mike. "But just how long you're going to remain all right" He fingered his gun, frowning. "You're all wrong, Lavine," he said. "There's no sense in risking it. If O'Regan gets hold of her she'll spill everything she knows. You just let me take her for a nice drive in the country—"

"Sit down, Mike, and don't get windy," interrupted Lavine. "Maybe the time will come when we'll take Miss Brady for a ride, but it hasn't come yet." He turned to Josephine. "How did O'Regan know you were here?" She shrugged her shoulders and stole a furtive glance at the clock. Ten minutes! If she didn't leave in ten minutes, O'Regan would do as he thought best. It was a comfort to know that. She must hang things out for ten minutes, anyway—keep them talking until O'Regan had time to reach her. He would reach her somehow; she was sure of that. He had not believed her when she had told him that she was all right, and he was going to do whatever he thought best. Of course, it might only mean that he was looking after her because it was his duty as a police officer to do so; but she preferred to think that it meant...

"How did he know?" repeated Mike. "Because she told him, of course. I told you she was lying, Lavine. You can't never trust a female. She got him on the wire—"

"Not from here," interrupted Sherriff. "She 'phoned no one from here. I've been on the switchboard ever since she arrived."

"Then how did he know?" demanded Lavine, turning to the girl.

"I've really no idea," Josephine replied. "I've told you that I didn't tell him. I didn't tell anyone. But I suppose the police have ways of finding out—"

haven't they, Mr. Lavine? Perhaps Mr. Perryfeld told him. Or perhaps someone saw me in Mr. Perryfeld's car. Anyway, I told him I was quite all right, so I guess he won't worry any more about me. Have you any more questions to ask me, or may I go now?"

"You may not," snapped Mike. "You can take that from me, Miss Brady, whatever Lavine says. Lavine's soft—the same as Perryfeld—when a girl's got blue eyes and smiles at him. But your blue eyes don't mean a thing to me. No dame means a thing to me."

Josephine took another swift glance at the clock and turned to him with a smile.

"You must be married," she replied.

The man made a gesture of impatience.

"I guess we're talking too much," he said. "We've got to clear, Lavine—the quicker the better. But I'm not going without Miss Brady. I'm not leaving her out of range of my gun. She's coming along with us—see? Maybe you'll see reason and we can lose her somewhere, but I'm not leaving her behind so long as she can use her tongue, and that's flat."

"Mike's right, Lavine," agreed Sherriff. "We'd best be moving and taking the girl with us. O'Regan has got nothing on us so far as we know, but it doesn't do to be too sure. I'll get the car out."

Lavine nodded and Sherriff went towards the door. As he did so a bell rang and he halted abruptly, glancing back at Lavine. The latter strode to the window and looked out; then he turned quickly away.

"There's a police car at the gate," he announced. "I guess this'll be O'Regan."

Josephine's hands clenched and she bit her lip to stop herself from smiling.

"But we don't have to worry," added Lavine. "Stick your gun in your pocket, Mike, for God's sake, and get a grip of yourself. O'Regan's got nothing on any of us. He's just hoping to get something by coming here, that's all. I know his ways."

The bell rang again.

"Do I let him in?" asked Sherriff.

"Sure," said Lavine. "Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not," exclaimed Mike excitedly. "Because as soon as he comes inside here this girl will start squealing...." He swung round and faced Josephine. "Just say one word, that's all!" he threatened. "Just you mention my name and I'll pump a gunful of bullets—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Mike," Lavine interrupted. "Listen to me. Perryfeld knew how to keep Miss Brady's tongue from wagging, and his way is better than your way."

Again the bell rang long and noisily.

"We're going to let O'Regan in. Miss Brady," Lavine continued, "and we're trusting you to say nothing you shouldn't say. He will probably want you to go with him, but you're not going. You've got to tell him you're O.K. here, and you don't want him butting in—see? You don't want anything more to do with him. You're to tell him I'm looking after you now, and that you I are very good friends—"

"I won't!" exclaimed Josephine furiously. "I refuse to tell him—"

"You won't refuse," said Lavine coolly, "when I've explained a bit more. You see, I know. Miss Brady, you're fond of O'Regan—mighty fond of him, from what Perryfeld told me—and I'm treating you the same as Perryfeld did. If you say one word you shouldn't say, then it won't be you who'll get the gunful of bullets: it'll be Tricks. O'Regan. Just remember that, Mike, will you? If there's any shooting to be done, O'Regan's the target," He nodded to Sherriff. "O.K. Let him in," he said.

Sherriff went out, and Josephine stood staring at the door with scared eyes. She was suddenly terribly afraid. She did not want O'Regan to come into that room. She wanted to cry out, to warn him, to tell him that if he came in there death was waiting for him. Her lips parted but no sound came from them. She glanced desperately round, saw Mike's hand in his pocket and the look on his face as he watched the door, and shuddered. Mike was scared and excited, and even Lavine might not be able to stop him shooting. If only she could keep Tricks out of the room—go to him....

She took a quick step towards the door, and, as she did so, O'Regan came in, and Sherriff, following, closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

TRICKS O'REGAN went straight to Josephine and gave her his hand.

"Good morning, Miss Brady."

He turned and glanced round—at Mike, Lavine, Sherriff and the two other men who were sprawling in arm-chairs, calmly smoking cigarettes.

"Quite a party," he said, with a smile. "Five of 'em, eh? And every one with a gun in his pocket! All friends of yours, Miss Brady?"

She made no reply. She was trembling and her teeth were pressing her lower lip. Tricks mustn't stay here. It was mad of him to have come. He must go—at once—before anything happened....

"All friends of yours, anyway, Lavine," O'Regan went on. "Birds of a feather, eh?"

"What do you want?" demanded Lavine surlily. O'Regan ignored the question and continued his scrutiny of the five men, whose eyes were fixed on him.

"And all friends of Ben Guinney," he smiled "five devoted friends, met together to sorrow over poor Ben Guinney! Going to send him a wreath, boys? 'In fond remembrance—from five lousy racketeers.' Or, better still: 'From his four devoted killers and one dishonest policeman.'"

"If you think that, O'Regan," said Lavine, "you've got a nerve to come here."

"Oh, I've a nerve all right," agreed O'Regan. "But I've got no nerves, Lavine; and that's where I'm better off than poor Mike, who's scared stiff in case I've got something on him, and who's aching to let his gun off; only he hasn't got the nerve to do it."

"You've got nothing on me—" began Mike aggressively, but O'Regan cut him short.

"Not even a gun, Mike—so far," he smiled. "But I'm grieved to think that a nice, gentlemanly young fellow like you should be friends with a low-down swine like Lavine."

"What do you want?" inquired Lavine again. "Perhaps you don't know," added O'Regan, ignoring the question, "that Lavine's the sort of man who'd sell his own father, and if I'd cared to do it I could have sent him to jail. But I didn't care. He's not worth caring about—just a poor, lousy hanger-on of Guinney's who hasn't the guts to pull a gun on anyone. Well, if you're sending a wreath for friend Ben, boys, I'd suggest lilies of the valley, and you'd best send it quick and address it to Smoky Cell. He'll be leaving there shortly for a warmer clime."

"I don't know Ben Guinney, nor nothing about him," protested Mike. "I just got acquainted with Perryfeld—"

"Did you know Schnitzer?" asked O'Regan "I know nothing about Schnitzer."

"Nor Steinberg?... O.K., Mike. Take your hand off your gun. I haven't come to fetch you to join friend Guinney. Maybe I'll do that later, but not today." He turned to Josephine. "I've come to take you away, Miss Brady," he said.

"Me?"

He nodded.

"But why?"

"Need you ask? You've just heard me telling these people what I think of 'em. They're not the kind of friends you want. Miss Brady."

"And you are—eh, O'Regan?" sneered Lavine.

"Sure I am," smiled Tricks. "I'm the most respected man in Chester County. Mothers write and ask me to chaperon their daughters, and racketeers cross the road when they see me coming. Ready, Miss Brady? We'll be getting along."

He stepped towards the door, but Josephine made no move to follow him. She glanced at Lavine.

"She's not going with you, O'Regan," said Lavine.

O'Regan swung round.

"You're wrong, Lavine," he said. "Miss Brady is—coming with me right now. And she's not asking your permission. Come along," he said to the girl; "I've a car waiting."

Josephine forced herself to speak.

"Then please go, Captain O'Regan.'—"

"Eh?"

"I—I'm not going with you."

O'Regan frowned. "Why not?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Is it any concern of yours?"

"Well, yes, I reckon it is, Miss Brady," replied O'Regan. "I'm a friend of yours—at least, I hope so—and I wouldn't be much of a friend if I left you here with five low-down racketeers with guns in their pockets. They're all friends of Ben Guinney, and that's enough to make any decent man hold his nose when he gets near them. Now take my advice and come along to some place where the air's purer." She made no reply. If only he would go! Didn't he realize the risk he was running? Or was it that he didn't care? But he must care; he must go while they'd let him. She must somehow make him go.

"Well?"

She shook her head.

"I'm staying here," she said. And then, as she saw he was about to speak: "I suppose I can do as I choose, Captain O'Regan—can't I?"

"Choose? Are you sure you're choosing?" He glanced across at Lavine. "Is she choosing, Lavine?"

The ex-Lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

"If you mean am I keeping her here, I'm not," he said. "She can go if she wants to."

Josephine did not misunderstand that. She knew that if she agreed to go with O'Regan, he would get no farther than the door. Mike would see to that if no one else did. If he was to go at all, he must go without her.

"I really don't understand what all the fuss is about, Captain O'Regan," she forced herself to say. "I suppose I'm free to do as I wish—and I wish to stay here."

"In what capacity-secretary to Ben Guinney? But Ben Guinney is as good as dead and he has no further use for a secretary—"

"Aw, mind your own business, O'Regan," interrupted Lavine angrily. "Miss Brady was engaged by Perryfeld—"

"Guinney," corrected Tricks. "Still, it's of no importance. A killer by any other name smells just as bad. But Guinney needs no secretary in Smoky Cell. It's of no use his communicating with anyone but his Maker now, and he won't require a stenographer to do that. In any case, I guess the letter would be returned unopened."

"Guinney ain't dead yet, O'Regan," exclaimed Mike. "You'll see. It'd take more than the whole police force of this country to kill Ben Guinney. They haven't done it yet, have they? No, and they never will. He's a swell feller—"

"Sure," agreed O'Regan; "but the point just at the moment is, does he need a secretary?"

"Maybe he doesn't," said Lavine, "but I do. Miss Brady has been engaged by me. It's a real good job I've offered her, and she doesn't want you or anyone else butting in. Take a hint, O'Regan, and get out of where you're not wanted."

O'Regan frowned, and his keen blue eyes searched Josephine's.

"It's quite true. Captain O'Regan," she told him. "I'm staying here—as Mr. Lavine's secretary. And now please go."

He shook his head.

"I guess I'm not going without you—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, go!" exclaimed the girl suddenly. "I'm not going with you. I've told you so. I just want you to clear out and leave me alone and not worry me any more. If you think I'm grateful to you for coming here and making a scene and insulting my friends—"

"Friends? Good God!"

"Yes—friends," she went on angrily. "But just because they're not your friends, because you don't happen to like them, because you've got all sorts of crazy ideas into your head about them, you seem to think you've a right to come here and insult them and be damnably rude to me, and order me about. I'm not standing for any more of it. Just because you're a police officer you seem to imagine you can force me to do whatever you wish—"

He held up his hand to stem the outburst.

"No, Miss Brady," he said quietly, "I can't force you. I wish I could. I'm just advising you—as a friend—"

"I don't want your advice," she interrupted. "And I don't want your friendship. If your friendship means that you're to issue orders and I'm to obey them, that I'm to be treated like a kid who can't take care of herself and can't be trusted to choose her own friends—then I'd rather be without it. I'm sick to death of your ideas of friendship. Captain O'Regan, and that's straight from the shoulder. Now will you go?"

She was afraid that even now she had failed. O'Regan stood frowning at her, with his jaw obstinately set, and made no move to leave.

"If these people here are friends of yours, Miss Brady—"

"They are."

He nodded gravely.

"In that case," he said, "I can understand your not caring about my friendship. And, of course, it's only natural that you should resent my interference as much as they do."

"I certainly do resent it."

He smiled.

"Lots of people do," he replied. "Guinney resented it, Lavine resented it, and I bet Mike would just hate me to start interfering with him. But that doesn't stop me interfering when I feel inclined to. Interfering is a kind of hobby of mine."

"Then please don't indulge your hobby at my expense," she said curtly, turned from him and seated herself in a chair.

"I'm afraid I can't promise that," he replied. "But there's trouble coming for some of these friends of yours, Miss Brady, and I'm just giving you the chance to get clear of them before it's too late. I'm asking you to come away with me now. If you're afraid to do that—"

"I'm not," she broke in. "I'm not afraid of anything except that you'll go on talking until I fall asleep. You're not welcome here, and if you've any manners at all you'll go at once."

O'Regan glanced round.

"I'm afraid that settles it," he said. "I can't force you; five guns to a pair of fists seems kind of uneven. All right. Miss Brady; I'll leave you to your friends—and your secretarial duties."

He strode to the door, opened it, and paused, glancing back over his shoulder.

"Nobody doing any shooting?" he inquired. "Well, I guess some of you will be sorry one day you didn't take the chance when it came your way to put a bullet into Tricks O'Regan—and I had my back to you!" He smiled scornfully. "You're yellow—the whole darned lot of you are yellow!"

He strode out and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVII

FOR some moments Josephine stood staring at the door. She could hear O'Regan's footsteps going along the corridor, and it was all she could do to restrain herself from rushing after him. If she let him go now, the chances were that she would never see him again. If she were not a coward she would fling open the door now, call to him and tell him the whole truth; and yet there she stood, hesitating, afraid.

Tricks had not been afraid to come to her. With five guns covering him he had never once shown the least sign of fear. Scorn and contempt, yes—but not fear; and she felt that his contempt had included herself. He could be thinking only one of two things: either that when she had told him that she was happy where she was, resented his interference and wanted to have nothing more to do with him, she had been speaking the truth—in which case she had hurt his feelings appallingly; or that she had been forced by the threats of Lavine and the others to tell him all this in order to get rid of him once and for all, in which case he could hardly fail to despise her cowardice. She must not let him think either of these things. If she let him go she would never cease to despise herself.

She heard the front door slam and took a quick, impulsive step forward. And as she did so she felt a hand on her arm that jerked her roughly round, and she found herself looking into the threatening eyes of the gangster called Mike.

She wrenched her arm free.

"Leave me alone—don't dare to touch me!" she exclaimed furiously. Her glance swept the crowd of men scattered round the room, and even Tricks O'Regan could not have contrived to put more scorn into a look. "Tricks was right," she said, "you're yellow—every one of you! One man against five, and all you could do was to sit still and look uncomfortable."

She turned away and flung herself into a chair, a contemptuous little smile on her lips.

"But perhaps it wasn't fair on you," she said. "One Tricks O'Regan unarmed is worth a bunch of yellow hoodlums, all with guns and scared to use 'em."

Mike strode across the room, planted himself in front of her and flourished his gun menacingly a few inches from her face.

"Scared to use a gun, am I? Listen, sister, I don't let no one pull that stuff on me. No dame's ever yet called me yeller and got away with it. Tricks O'Regan's fond of you, isn't he? Likes your pretty face, don't he? Well, we'll see if he likes your pretty face when this gun that I'm scared to use has finished with it!"

She saw his finger find the trigger, and bit her lips savagely to prevent herself from screaming. She was terribly afraid of that smooth, blue-black barrel, and the cruel, sadistic eyes behind it. But it flashed into her mind that she must on no account let him suspect that she was afraid.

"Is that the same gun you used on Schnitzer?" she smiled.

She saw his lips drawn back, disclosing the yellow, wolf-like teeth; she saw his shifty eyes narrow, and his bony hand tighten around the butt of his gun. And then Lavine took a quick step forward and struck Mike's wrist a vicious upward blow; there came a deafening explosion and a shower of plaster fell from the ceiling.

"For God's sake, Mike, cut it out!" exclaimed Lavine. "That kind of stuff'll get us nowhere. We've got to get down to cases, and there's no time to be lost. If you think we've seen the last of Tricks O'Regan you've got another guess coming. I know O'Regan better than you do, remember, and I know that once he's got his teeth into anything he doesn't let go. Don't kid yourself we scared him, because we didn't. You can take it from me he's gone straight back to Police Headquarters and the next time he turns up he'll not be alone. We've got to beat it." He stood by the door and opened it. "Come on, boys, we've got to talk—and what we've got to settle may be mighty interesting to this girl here, but it don't concern her. She knows a darn sight too much already."

They trooped from the room, Lavine following them. Josephine heard the key turned in the lock.

For a time the girl sat motionless. She suddenly felt terribly weak, incapable of making the least effort, either mental or physical. She supposed she had been very near to death. Mike, she was sure, would have shot her if Lavine had not interfered. It had been stupid of her to have said what she did; but somehow, after seeing Tricks O'Regan face them without the slightest trace of fear, she had felt that if she showed less courage she would really have deserved all the scorn she had seen in Tricks's eyes. Even though Tricks would never know, it was some consolation to feel that she had acted in the way he would have had her act.

She wondered just how much of what she had said he had really believed. All of it, probably. Even before today he had had reason enough for suspecting that she was in some way involved with Perryfeld's criminal schemes; and it was only natural if he had allowed all she had said today to confirm his suspicions. In that case she had certainly seen the last of "Mr. Smith"; but with equal certainty she had not seen the last of Captain O'Regan of the Chester County Police, who, once he got his teeth into a thing, never let go.

And then it struck her that perhaps the same might be equally true of "Mr. Smith". Tricks, after all, was fond of her—she was sure of that; and if he cared anything like as much as she thought he did—anything like as much, indeed, as she cared for him—it wouldn't be like Tricks O'Regan to let go of that, either. Perhaps Captain O'Regan would never be able to persuade "Mr. Smith" that she could really be mixed up with people like Perryfeld and Lavine and Mike and the rest of them.

She sat up in her chair, all her listlessness gone. Tricks perhaps had not believed anything that she had told him. Now that she came to think of it, he had suggested more than once that she was not acting of her own free will, and it was at least possible that he had grasped the situation and understood that when she had dismissed him, and forbidden him to interfere any further with her, she had only done so because, for some reason, she was afraid. If he had any faith in her at all, he must surely have realized that, must have seen that she was playing a game, and, for some reason of his own, accepted—or pretended to accept—her decision as final.

After all, at the moment, since she refused to go with him, there was nothing he could do alone against five of them; and the more she thought of it the more convinced she became that he must have understood what was happening, and had chosen, for his own ends, to take a part in the game himself. Lavine thought so; he had been quite certain that Tricks would go straight back to Police Headquarters and would return before very long—and not alone!

She rose from her chair and began to pace the room. If Lavine were right—but of course he was right! If she hadn't been scared out of her wits she would never have doubted that Tricks would come back. If he had understood the situation he would come back for her; if he had not understood he would certainly come back for the others. The great thing was that in any case he would be back before long. She felt her heart beating more quickly; she would at any rate see Tricks again, and seeing him meant at least the possibility that all might come right, and in any case an opportunity for her to show that she was not the weak-kneed little coward which she must have seemed to him last time.

"We've got to beat it," Lavine had said. She stood still, frowning. That, of course, would be their idea—to get away quickly, before Tricks could return. And, if they went, they would of course take her with them, in which case it might well be that all Tricks's efforts to find her would be in vain. She knew far too much for them to risk leaving her free to say what she chose to the police. Even if Lavine and the others were prepared to go without her, Mike certainly would not be; and since Lavine was so inextricably involved with Perryfeld's affairs, it was hardly likely that he would give her the opportunity

of giving the police evidence which might make the case against Perryfeld even blacker than it was.

Somehow, she must stay where she was—at least long enough to give Tricks the chance, if he wanted it, of returning. But how, exactly, if they decided to take her with them, she was to avoid going she had not the slightest idea. If Tricks O'Regan had been able to do nothing single-handed against them, what possible chance would she have?

She heard the handle of the door turned, and spun round as Lavine entered, closed the door behind him and locked it. She was glad to see him lock it; that meant, at any rate, that Mike and the others were safely out of the way for the time being, and it was just possible that she might be able to handle Lavine.

"We've got to beat it, Miss Brady," he announced curtly. "We'll be starting in five minutes. The boys are just getting the car ready. I've put your bag on board."

She gave a contemptuous little smile.

"Running away? But of course you would be! Tricks O'Regan might be back at any moment and say 'Boo' to you."

Lavine bit his lip; then he forced a smile.

"Listen, Miss Brady," he said: "I guess you've every reason to feel sore at the way you've been treated, but you've no cause to feel sore with me. I've treated you right, haven't I?"

"Treated me right? It you think it's treating me right to make me lie to Tricks O'Regan, to make me let him think I'm a coward, that I don't care for him, that I never want to see him again—"

"Say, that just couldn't be helped, Miss Brady. You must see that. You know things, and it stands to reason the boys aren't going to take any chances. But you don't have to worry; you just do as you're told and you'll have nothing to be afraid of. Just trust me—I'm looking after you."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Trust you?" She was silent for a few moments, frowning thoughtfully; then she turned to him with a smile. "And suppose I do trust you? There's Mike—"

"Forget it! You don't have to mind Mike—he's scared and doesn't know what he's saying. Trust yourself to me, little girl, and you'll not have any trouble with Mike or anyone else."

He went to her and laid a hand on each of her shoulders.

"Going to be sensible? Sure you are! There's no reason why you and I shouldn't be the best of pals—is there? We'll be seeing a good deal of each other from now on, so why shouldn't we be—friendly?"

Josephine gazed at him for some moments with questioning eyes. Friendly? There was a look on Lavine's face that told her quite clearly what meaning he attached to that word; but she realized that at all costs she must not antagonize him now; she mustn't say anything that might make him lose patience and cut short the conversation; every moment was precious. "Where are we going, Mr. Lavine?" she asked.

"Just a nice car ride," he smiled. "Maybe we'll be touring around for a time. Anyway, you don't have to worry. If you're going to be sensible there's no reason why it shouldn't be a very pleasant little trip."

"Sensible? What exactly do you mean by that? That I won't scream and struggle and try to escape?"

"Well—yes. But if you're really sensible I guess you'll go a bit farther than that. 'Friendly' is the word. You know what friendly means—don't you?" One of his arms slipped round her shoulders and she felt him draw her to him. She had a sudden impulse to treat him as she had treated Perryfeld, and send her clenched fist against his mouth with all the strength she possessed. But with a tremendous effort she stifled the urge and allowed herself to be drawn towards him with only the faintest suspicion of resistance. She felt his lips pressed almost savagely against hers, and held her breath to prevent herself from screaming. If only she could keep him here, gain a few precious minutes, give O'Regan the chance to come before it was too late, it was worth even this.

His arms released her and he stood smiling down at her flushed face.

"That's what I mean by 'friendly'," he said. "You're not sore with me, are you?"

She forced a smile and shook her head.

Again his arm went round her, but as it did so the handle of the door was tried, and then there came a noisy knocking on the panels.

"Say, Lavine!" It was Mike's voice.

With a frown Lavine turned and strode across the room, unlocked the door and threw it open. Mike came in, Sherriff at his heels, and stood glancing from Josephine to Lavine with a leering smile on his lips.

"Sorry to butt in, but I guess this is no time for petting. The car's ready and we're waiting."

Lavine shrugged.

"O.K., Mike; we're ready." He turned to Josephine. "Come along, Miss Brady."

The girl did not move.

"I'm not going," she announced calmly.

"Eh, what's that? Not going, aren't you? I guess we've wasted too much time already." He strode up to her and pointed to the door. "Get out—quick! D'you hear?"

Josephine shook her head.

"I'm not going," she repeated. "I won't go! You can do what you like, but I'm not moving from here until I know—"

Mike's hand gripped her shoulder and thrust her roughly forward towards the door. She staggered and almost fell, and, as she recovered herself, her wrists were seized and she felt herself being dragged from the room. She gave a furious wrench, but the grip on her wrists only tightened, and a sickening pain shot up her arm. She screamed, and the next instant she felt the grip on her right arm relax, swung round, and caught a glimpse of Mike, his arm uplifted, clutching the barrel of his gun.

"Scared to use a gun, am I?" she heard him exclaim.

And then a crashing blow descended on her forehead, and all was darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRICKS O'REGAN had been certain, when Perryfeld had told him that Josephine had accepted the post of secretary to him and gone to his house, that she had gone there against her will; that Perryfeld had terrified her into going or had even taken her there by force. All the suspicions which had surged into his mind when he had found Perryfeld in her flat, and she had refused to give him any explanation, had left him in the morning; no matter how black the case against her might appear, he had found that he was unable to believe in it. There must, he had felt, be some explanation which, for some reason, she could not give him. And Perryfeld's gloating announcement that she was at his house had only strengthened his conviction.

But now all his suspicions returned. He had been certain, when he had decided to go to Perryfeld's house and bring the girl away' with him, that she would be glad to come. Never for an instant had it occurred to him that she would need to be persuaded, and her absolute refusal to leave the house had astonished him more than he had allowed her or the others to guess. Standing there in the room at Perryfeld's house, he had tried to find a reason for her refusal, and had failed utterly to find a convincing one. She could hardly have been afraid, as he had at first suspected. She knew that, had she been willing to go with him, he would have taken her away no matter what might have happened, and it was extremely unlikely that anything would have happened.

Shooting Tricks O'Regan would be a risky business, and he was sure that there wasn't a man among that crowd who would have the pluck to do it. If Guinney had been there it would have been a different matter. Guinney, whatever vile qualities he might possess, certainly did not lack courage, and if he had wanted to keep Josephine Brady there it would have needed more than a mere police uniform to persuade him to let her go. But the others, compared with Ben Guinney, were poor specimens of gunmen whom Guinney would despise as much as he. O'Regan, despised them; and Josephine could safely have walked out under their noses without the least fear of getting a bullet in her back.

But she had refused to leave, had stated quite categorically that she preferred to stay, and had told him bluntly that she resented his interference. Why? In the case of any other woman O'Regan would have found no difficulty in supplying the reason, and he knew' that, however much he might dislike having to admit it, there was in reality only one reasonable explanation in the case of Josephine. She was in some way connected with Guinney, playing some part in the organization of which he

was the head; she worked for him, and no doubt had her share, however small, of the profits.

To an unbiased mind everything clearly pointed to that explanation—her presence at Schnitzer's house, and her refusal to give any information about his death; Perryfeld's presence in her flat and her second refusal to explain; and again today her refusal to leave Lavine and the rest of them and come away with him when he offered her the chance. All that was clearly against her; and against that evidence he could find nothing to set but his disinclination to believe it and his hunch that Josephine Brady was not the kind of girl to have anything in common with Ben Guinney. He told himself that only a fool would shut his eyes to that evidence.

But in the evening, when Spellman came into the office, O'Regan was still reluctant to open his eyes fully.

"About Miss Brady, Spell," he began.

"What about her, Chief?"

"You saw her when she was here. I'd like to know what impression you got."

Spellman smiled.

"I got the impression you're—well, kind of interested in her, Chief."

"It's my business to be, isn't it?"

"Sure."

"It's my duty to keep an eye on her."

"That's it-duty," said Spellman. "Always do your duty—eh, Chief?" He went to the tape machine and began running the ribbon of paper through his fingers. "She's got nice eyes," he remarked.

O'Regan glanced at him sharply, but Spellman's face was expressionless.

"And a sweet little mouth," added the Lieutenant. O'Regan nodded absently.

"Pretty hair, too," said Spellman. "Notice her hands, Chief? Dinky little dimples on the backs of them."

"That night she was at Schnitzer's, Spell—"

"Sure," agreed Spellman. "She's got a real sweet way of telling lies, Chief." He dropped the tape and turned to O'Regan with a smile. "I reckon I know what you're wanting me to say, Chief," he said, "and I can say it all right without perjuring myself. She's straight."

"She's in with the Guinney crowd, Spell. She's up at his house—with Lavine and Sherriff and the whole dirty bunch of them. She refuses to leave."

"You've been there?"

O'Regan nodded.

"You've got a nerve, Chief," returned Spellman admiringly. "They're a tough kind of crowd."

"I was uneasy about her."

"I'll say you must have been. And you still are, eh, Chief? Well, if she's among that bunch, I guess you've reason to be. She doesn't belong there. If she wouldn't leave. I'd say there was a mighty good reason. Probably she couldn't—didn't dare."

"But I was there, Spell."

Spellman grinned. "Maybe she'd have felt safer if you'd been wearing a bullet-proof waistcoat," he said. "Everybody hasn't got your nerve, Chief, and you couldn't have done much if they'd started in with their guns. Sounds to me as though she just had to stay there."

O'Regan rose from his chair and began to pace the room.

"Listen, Spell," he said, "I believe you're right. She'd have come away with me if she'd dared; but she didn't dare. They'd got her badly scared, and she just had to do as they'd told her. They're holding her because they're afraid to let her go—afraid she knows something and might spill the beans here. It's the Schnitzer affair, I shouldn't wonder. She knows more about that business than they'd care for the police to know, and they don't mean to let her start talking. If one of that crowd killed Schnitzer, and she knows, they've just got to shut her mouth somehow..." He halted abruptly. "By God, Spell!" he exclaimed. "They're not going to hold her. She's not going to stay there. If she won't come of her own free will, then I'm going to take her."

"You can't do that—"

"Can't I?"

"I don't see how, Chief. You've got nothing definite against that bunch, and if Miss Brady refuses to leave the house ..."

O'Regan made a gesture of impatience.

"I'm fetching her, Spell," he said. "If there's no other way of getting her out of it, then I'll arrest her. If it means taking the whole police force with me and breaking down the house. I'm going to have her out of it."

"But you've got no evidence, Chief, and you can't arrest her without evidence—just because you've a hunch—"

"I'm risking it," interrupted O'Regan. "There's the Schnitzer affair, in any case; I can pull her in for that—on suspicion. And if I find I've made a mistake—well, I guess I can apologize, and she can go back to them if she wants to." He glanced at his watch. "Geissel!" he called.

Sergeant Geissel appeared from the glass-house.

"I want a car in five minutes," said O'Regan.

"O.K., Chief."

"I want a Lewis gun on board."

"Tear bombs, Chief?"

"Yes—everything. And three men. Call up the patrolman and tell him to be on the corner by Perryfeld's house in ten minutes. He's not to leave until he gets the word from me. Got that?"

"Yes, Chief," replied Geissel, and returned to the glass-house.

O'Regan strapped on his belt and picked up his hat.

"So long, Spell!"

"Say, Chief, what have I done?" asked Spellman. "Don't I get an invitation?"

"Do you want one?"

"Sure."

"Come on, then. I'll be glad to have you."

"Thanks," replied Spellman. "And the other invitation—do I get that too?"

"The other?"

"To the wedding," grinned Spellman, and followed his Chief from the room.

CHAPTER XIX

TEN minutes later the big police car stopped at the gates of Perryfeld's house, and O'Regan, Spellman and the three policemen got out. The patrolman came hurrying to meet them.

"Watch the gate," O'Regan ordered him. "No one is to come out."

They went up the drive. A man was placed on each side of the house and another at the back. O'Regan and Spellman went towards the front door. They paused a few yards from the porch, surveying the house. On the top floor there was a dim light showing through the drawn blind of one window, but the rest of the house was in darkness. O'Regan strode to the front door and pressed the electric bell-push. They heard the bell ring noisily, and waited, listening intently for the sound of any movement inside. None came, and O'Regan pressed the bell again. There was still no sound in the house, and he went out on to the drive again and glanced up at the lighted window.

"Spell!" he called.

Spellman joined him, and O'Regan waved a hand towards the window.

"Someone's there," he said.

"They may have left the light burning."

O'Regan shook his head.

"The window was shut when we arrived, and now it's half open."

Spellman nodded.

"That's right," he agreed. "I guess they've spotted us. A gun doesn't fire so well through a closed window. I've a fancy we'd be safer under the porch, Chief."

O'Regan did not move.

"They wouldn't fire with the light on behind them," he said, and as he spoke, the light suddenly went out.

"There's the answer, Chief."

O'Regan returned to the porch, held his finger against the bell-push and kept the bell jangling for fully half a minute.

"They must have heard that, Spell."

"Try knocking."

O'Regan hammered the door vigorously again and again, but still there came no reply from within.

"Afraid we're not welcome, Chief."

O'Regan stood frowning thoughtfully for some moments. Then:

"I'm going in, Spell," he said. "There's someone here right enough, and if they won't let me in, I'm going—"

He was interrupted by a scream. It came from above their heads—a woman's scream, high, piercing, terrified, followed by another and another. O'Regan spun round, ran out to the drive and glanced up at the top-floor window where the light had been showing. The room was still in darkness, but the screams seemed to come from that direction, and O'Regan strode back to the porch.

"She's in that room," he said. "I guess this door's going down."

He crashed his shoulder against it, but the door stood firm. Spellman added his shoulder, but still the door held.

"Window," said Spellman. "This way, Chief."

They ran from the porch to one of the windows that looked out on to the drive. It was large and low, with its sill not more than four feet from the ground. Spellman sprang onto the sill; there came a crash and the tinkle of falling glass, and a moment later the window was flung up.

O'Regan followed Spellman into the room, groped his way to the door, felt for the electric-light switch and clicked it down. He found that they were in the room where, earlier in the day, he had seen Josephine and the others. There were glasses on the table and the floor was littered with ash and the stubs of cigarettes. O'Regan flung open the door and stepped into the hall. It was in darkness, and he groped for the switch, failed to find it, and felt his way until he touched the handrail of the staircase.

"This way, Spell," he called.

Spellman joined him at the foot of the staircase and just for a moment they paused, listening. The shrieks had stopped and the house seemed uncannily quiet. And then, with startling suddenness, the screaming started again and O'Regan, with one hand on the rail for guidance and the other grasping his gun, went bounding up the stairs with Spellman close on his heels. On the second-floor landing they paused. Again the screaming had stopped, and O'Regan, switching on the light, saw the doors of three rooms. In turn he tried each door, but all of them were locked, and he glanced at Spellman.

"It's one of these, Spell."

"Sure."

Spellman stooped and put his eye to the keyhole of each of the doors, and waved a hand towards one of them.

"That's the one, Chief," he said. "There's a key in the lock—on the inside. I guess we'd better—"

Another scream rang out, followed by another and another. O'Regan strode to the door, crashed his shoulder against it. Three times he flung his weight furiously, but without result, and then, as Spellman joined him the door suddenly gave way and they staggered into the darkness of the room. As they did so, the screaming became still louder.

"Light, Spell," snapped O'Regan.

There came the click of the switch, the light flooded the room, and O'Regan, glancing swiftly round, took a couple of quick steps forward and halted abruptly. Lolling in an armchair, with her head against a cushion, her eyes closed and her hands folded on her lap, was Sarah, the negress. Her mouth was wide open, and she was screaming with all the force of her capacious lungs.

As O'Regan stood staring at her in amazement, she opened her eyes, and the screaming suddenly ceased.

"Golly!" she exclaimed; and then, as she caught sight of the gun in his hand, her eyes began rolling wildly, her mouth opened again to its wildest extent, and scream after terrified scream issued from it.

O'Regan glanced at Spellman to find him grinning.

"Maybe she's got a pain somewhere, Chief."

O'Regan stepped up to the shrieking woman and clapped a hand on her shoulder.

"Listen," he shouted. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

She rolled her eyes at him, and the shriek changed to a high-pitched howl; and though O'Regan shouted, soothed, coaxed and threatened in turn, the howl only became more piercing. He glanced despairingly at his Lieutenant, who was eyeing Sarah with a concerned expression on his face.

"The pain seems mighty bad, Chief," he said. "I guess the kindest thing to do would be to put her out of her suffering."

Gun in hand, he advanced towards the screaming negress; and as he did so the screaming suddenly stopped and Sarah sat upright in her chair.

"No, suh!" she exclaimed. "I ain't got any pains nowhere, suh. You don't have to put me out of no sufferin'. You jes' put that gun right back in your pocket, young man—"

"Where's Miss Brady?" demanded O'Regan. "Do you know?"

"No, suh," replied Sarah. "I don' know nothin' about no one. I jes' got to keep right on screaming...."

She opened her mouth wide, but before the scream could issue from it O'Regan clapped his hand over it.

"Is Miss Brady in the house?" he asked.

Sarah shook her head.

"She's gone?"

Sarah rolled her eyes and made unintelligible noises, and O'Regan slowly removed his hand.

"Is anyone in the house?"

"Yes, me an' you an' that young man, suh," replied Sarah. "Miss Brady, she's gone; and Mr. Lavine, he's gone—"

"Did they say where they were going?"

"No, suh. They didn't tell me nothin' about that. Mr. Lavine jes' told me they'd be goin' away for a while and I was to stay right here an' look after the house."

"When did they leave?"

"This afternoon, suh," Sarah told him. "They'd be going a long way, Mr. Lavine said, and maybe they'd not be back for a long time, but I was to stay right here until I heard from him and do jes' as he'd said—"

"What had he said?" interrupted O'Regan.

"Well, suh," explained Sarah, "maybe the police would be callin' later on, he said, but I didn' have to be scared about that, he said. I didn' have to take no notice of the police nor nobody else, he said. 'Don't you open the door to no one, Sarah,' he said. 'If they knock, let 'em go on knocking, and if they break the door down, don't you do nothin' at all.'—"

"Not even scream, eh?" grinned Spellman.

Sarah shook her head emphatically.

"You've just got that all wrong, young man," she said. "Mr. Lavine, he gave me ten dollars. 'You know what that's for, Sarah,' he said. 'That's for screaming. If the police come here,' he said, 'jes' you go upstairs, Sarah, and lock yourself in your room and keep on screamin'. And if they start breaking in, jes' scream louder. I'm givin' you ten dollars and I sure expect ten dollars' worth of screamin', because as long as you keep screamin' the police won't go away and start lookin' for other folks elsewhere.' That's what he said, suh, and I've sure done my best for him."

"You have," agreed O'Regan.

"But I'm an honest woman, suh," added Sarah, "and I guess I won't feel right about spendin' them dollars if I don't give Mr. Lavine full value for his money. Jes' you tell that young man to put his gun away, suh. I got no pains nowhere, but I've sure got two dollars' worth of screamin' to do."

O'Regan turned and strode to the door.

"Come on, Spell," he said. "I'm not leaving until I've had a look round."

They searched the house together, but Sarah, whom they could hear assiduously earning her ten dollars on the top floor, had evidently told them the truth. Except for her, the house was empty; there was no car in the garage, and a thorough search of the garden brought no result.

As they drove back to Police Headquarters, O'Regan was frowning thoughtfully for a time, and then his frown vanished and a faint smile appeared on his lips. He turned to Spellman, who was in the seat behind him.

"Tricks O'Regan, eh, Spell?" he said. "Well, I reckon I'm not the only one who knows a trick or two. We've wasted a lot of time over that screaming. Lavine has probably got clean away."

"Huh!" grunted Spellman. "You won't miss Lavine in Chester County, anyway."

"Lavine? No," replied O'Regan, rather wistfully. "No, I shan't miss Lavine."

CHAPTER XX

THE days that ensued were days of mental anguish for Tricks O'Regan; days that furrowed his brow and deepened the lines at the corners of his mouth; days throughout which one torturing thought was never absent from his mind. Where was Josephine Brady? There could be no peace in his soul until he had found her and rescued her from the power of the gangsters who, under ex-Lieutenant Lavine, had removed her to an unknown destination.

O'Regan sat for hours in his desk-chair, hands in pockets, chin on breast, brooding dismally. Not until now had he fully realized how all-important this girl had become to him. Hitherto he had lived a womanless, care-free, almost ascetic life; had, in his more introspective moments, rather prided himself upon keeping his mental peace and equilibrium undisturbed by the weakening, stultifying influence of the female sex. That was what women were to him—just the female sex. Frail, feeble, ephemeral, unreliable; possessing no apparent code of honour; unfortunately necessary for the continuance of the species, but not to be taken seriously as a factor in the life of any sane, intelligent man. And then he had met Josephine; she had smiled on him, and almost before he realized what was happening, the crude, superficial, cynical outlook engendered in the immature bachelor had disappeared. He realized that, for the first time in his life, he wanted someone so badly that it was colouring all his thoughts, clouding all his mental processes, putting out of gear all the wheels of his more or less ordered existence.

This emotional phenomenon called love, disintegrating at the best of times, is never so much so as in the case of a man who has hitherto kept himself unspotted from the world of feminine charm. He goes in off the deep end, as it were, becoming at once completely submerged, conscious of nothing save that the water is very cool and pleasant. It may be, of course, that he can swim. . . . Such a man was Tricks O'Regan.

And now Josephine had disappeared, and he was without a single clue to her whereabouts.

He had, of course, during the past few days set in motion all the resources of the force under his control in the endeavour to find the missing girl; but all his efforts had produced absolutely no result. She was being held a prisoner somewhere; of that he could have no doubt; and his brain was incessantly tortured by the thought of what might be happening to her, of the ordeal through which she might be passing. It was true he had Guinney, alias Perryfeld, safely under lock and key; but the satisfaction which this achievement might have been expected to give him was, oddly, missing—

submerged in what was to O'Regan the more important issue—where was Josephine Brady?

Of Lavine there had been no sign or word since his disappearance with the girl; nor could any of his fellow gangsters be traced. O'Regan knew them too well, however, to suppose that their silence implied idleness. This bunch had a reputation, not only as killers, but as prison-breakers, and it was unlikely that they would quietly accept the fact of their chief being in jail, awaiting execution, without attempting to evolve a plan of rescue....

He sat suddenly upright in his chair; his hands left his trousers pockets and he half rose from his seat. A new gleam showed in his brooding eyes. Of course I Why hadn't he thought of it before? It was so obvious that Lavine or one of his confederates would visit their chief, Guinney, in prison, or establish communication with him somehow or other. And there was, too, the chance of Guinney talking. In any case, with one of the gang in his hands, if Tricks couldn't make him divulge all he knew about Josephine Brady—why, there was no significance in his nickname. An almost fiendish expression came into his face as he envisaged the speech-compelling process.

He reached for the telephone and called the Penitentiary.

That same morning Chester County Jail received a visitor. He presented his credentials and was admitted to the visitors' room. Presently the Chief Guard appeared.

"Good morning, Mr.—er—Lavine," he greeted the caller, glancing at the document presented to him.

"Good morning, sir."

"I gather you wish to have an interview with the prisoner Guinney?"

"That's so," replied Lavine.

"Are you related to him?"

"Why, no. He's just a friend, and I guess I'd like to see him once again before...." He did not complete the sentence.

The Chief nodded understandingly.

"Sure," he said. "Let's see, you were Lieutenant Lavine until recently—isn't that so?"

"Uh, huh," agreed Lavine.

"Did you resign?"

"No, sir, I was fired."

"Ah, yes, I remember," said the Chief, and his face assumed a somewhat less genial expression. "Well, listen, Lavine; you've been a police officer and you know the regulations—or ought to. If you're prepared to observe them I'll allow you this interview."

"That's O.K. with me," said Lavine.

The Chief Guard produced a printed card, from which he read:

"You are not to discuss any matter directly or indirectly associated with the offence for which this man is to suffer, or accept any instructions from him regarding any person or persons associated with the trial. You are not a newspaper reporter and you will not communicate to any newspaper, magazine, or any other publication, particulars describing the prisoner or the interview, or complaints concerning any grievance he may have against any officer of the Penitentiary, or his treatment whilst an inmate of the Penitentiary Sign this card."

Lavine scrawled his signature in the space provided at the bottom of the card.

"I suppose there's no chance of a pardon?" he asked.

The Chief Guard frowned.

"You know as well as I do," he returned, "that I can't express an opinion on that. In this establishment we only accept facts—we never speculate."

"Has Captain O'Regan been to see him?"

"I can't tell you that, either. Now understand, Lavine: make no attempt to pass anything through the wires, and don't speak to the prisoner in any other language than English. If you want to use any other language I'll have an officer here who understands it."

Lavine shook his head.

"That's all right, Chief," he said. "I only know plain English."

The Chief Guard nodded.

"And you've no narcotics or weapon of any kind in your possession?" he asked.

"No, sir."

The Chief stepped forward a pace and ran his hands lightly but thoroughly over the caller.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, "but we have to be sure."

"Of course," Lavine agreed.

"All right." The Chief beckoned to a warder who was standing by awaiting instructions. "Bring in Guinney."

The condemned man was brought in between two guards, securely handcuffed, and placed in a steel-barred cell which formed part of the furnishings of the visitors' room. The warder remained outside the cell, leaning against the bars, negligently and without any apparent interest in the proceedings.

Lavine approached the bars and greeted Guinney. "Hullo, Ben! How are you?"

"I'm grand, thanks. How's all the boys?"

"They're fine and dandy." Lavine paused and looked fixedly at the prisoner. "Ben, they're doing all they can and they're not going to let up doing all they can. Maybe one or two of 'em will be seeing you."

"Oh yeah?" drawled Guinney, elaborate unconcern in his tone.

"Yes," Lavine continued. "Say, we're going to have a little meeting on the East Side. Maybe we won't rope you in. Maybe—"

The warder, negligently leaning against the bars, shot a quick, significant glance at the Chief Guard.

"Now, Lavine," interrupted that official, "talk so as I can understand you, or just quit."

"All right, Chief," said Lavine, almost humbly. Guinney came close to the bars.

"How's Tricks?" he asked.

The corners of the visitor's mouth twisted in an ugly smile.

"She's O.K.," he said. "We tried to get her a few days back, but we couldn't quite make contact. She hasn't been to see you?"

"No."

"All the boys send their love. They're all trying to persuade Tricks to go home—but I guess they're too busy fixing the meeting. Don't you lose hope, Ben." Guinney grinned confidently.

"Don't worry about that, Lavine; I'll lose weight first."

"Anything I can get you, boy?"

"No. I've got everything."

"Nothing I can do?"

"No-not a thing."

"That's the lot, boys," came the voice of the Chief Guard. "Time's up. Take him away," he said to the warder.

When Guinney had been led back to his cell:

"Well, Chief, thanks for letting me see him," said Lavine. "Say, they oughtn't to kill a man."

"I guess all the people he killed thought that, too," the Chief returned.

"Still," went on the visitor, "he's a swell feller and it's a bad break for him."

"No worse than it was for them. It's my opinion," went on the Chief Guard, "that there's a deal too much sympathy handed out to convicted murderers. More often than not a murderer is just a plain murderer—a wicked man—just plain wicked. These psychologists and psychiatrists try to explain away their playful habit of killing with a lot of long words that don't mean a darned thing, and the Press surrounds 'em with a lot of glamour that gives them an entirely false idea of their own importance. And in nearly every case the killer is just a wicked man—lazy, selfish and vain. But the man he's bumped off is buried and forgotten, save by the widow and kids left behind—maybe in penury and want. No, sir, I guess all my sympathy is for the poor guy that gets murdered. I'm queer that way."

"Sure," murmured Lavine. "Well, thanks, Chief."

"You're welcome. Jack, show him out," he said to the attendant warder.

The Chief got back to his office in time to hear the ringing of the telephone on his desk. He took off the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Is that you, Morgan? This is Captain O'Regan, speaking from Police Headquarters. Is everything O.K. with Guinney?"

"Sure!" returned the Chief Guard. "He gets his tomorrow night—and as I've just been pointing out to that guy Lavine, he deserves it."

"Lavine!" O'Regan echoed the word, a note of alarm in his voice.

"Sure," said the Chief Guard again. "He's just been to see Guinney. Had a permit from the Governor—everything was in order."

"Has he gone?" excitedly.

"Yes—some minutes ago. Why, is anything wrong, Captain O'Regan?"

"Only with me," said Tricks bitterly. "I seem to be developing a nasty habit of missing the bus. I must be getting old. All right, Morgan."

Hanging up the receiver, O'Regan cursed long and luridly. He couldn't quite understand what was happening to him these days. He ought to have

thought of this long before. His usually acute mind didn't appear to be developing full power. He was forced to the reluctant conclusion that it was this love business which was making the wheels squeak. Well, in that case, there was all the more reason for finding Josephine, since it appeared that her absence was interfering with him in this unprecedented manner. There must be some way by which he could get news of her. Could Guinney be provoked into talking, he wondered?

He took up the telephone receiver again and called a number.... A few urgent sentences spoken into the mouthpiece...

"Sure," said Chief Guard Morgan.

IN his cell that night, Ben Guinney, many times a murderer, paced the stone floor impotently. The moonlight streamed through the heavily barred window; it was the only perceptible link with the outside world and it seemed strangely incongruous and out of place in that structure of steel and concrete that housed the man who was to die on the following evening.

Outside the cell stood a guard, apparently not in the least interested. It was his duty to keep an eye on the prisoner, and it was no part of his duty to talk; in fact, to hold any kind of conversation was strictly against his orders. So he stood there, chewing gum, and whatever thoughts might be passing through his mind found no expression.

The night was sultry; it may have been this that accounted for the restiveness of the condemned murderer. He paced his cell like a caged tiger; every time his pacing brought him to the bars of the cell outside which lounged the silent, gum-chewing warder, he paused and looked at the man long and searchingly.

"Dummy!" Guinney's voice broke the silence.

The warder straightened himself slowly and looked at the prisoner in mute inquiry.

"Hey, Dummy, get me some water."

Without speaking a word the warder disappeared round a corner and came back carrying a mug of water, which he passed through the bars to Guinney.

"Thanks," said the gangster. "Say, I'll give you a laugh, Dummy. I wake up nights dreaming about you. Can you beat that, eh? Why don't they give this job to a human being? Did you ever have any human feelings, Dummy? Ever keep a date with a girl, huh?"

He paused. The warder was leaning against the opposite wall, his jaws working with an automatic rhythm presumably comforting to himself but which seemed to infuriate the man behind the bars.

"Can't you speak? Say, can't you speak? Haven't you got a tongue in that ugly face? Say, listen, how can you sleep nights—don't they haunt you? Don't they come out from the Smoky Cell and follow you round, you damned man-burner? Tell me, Dummy—have you got a home? I bet you gotta wife and kids. And you've got friends, and you talk about the high cost of livin' and where you're going to for your vacation, and maybe you dig garden truck and raise melons, and have a dog to follow you round? Huh? I want to live—to take you for a ride. I'd make you talk!"

If the warder heard he gave no sign; his passivity was masterly.

"I say, I'd make you talk, you lousy screw!" stormed Guinney. "Say, you Dummy, you're the Smoky Cell and the Death House and the chair—there's death in your face." His tone changed, his manner became wheedling. "Ah, Dummy, I was kiddin'—you're a swell feller. You got your duty to dot—hat's O.K. by me. They didn't give me a break at the trial—Tricks fixed the jury. I never meant to kill that squealer—just to scare him. He got me sore. Say, Dummy, did you ever see a trial like that? I'll bet you didn't. Armoured cars outside the courthouse an' militia and every copper with a gun up his sleeve. They know Guinney's boys—but the poor saps could have saved themselves all the trouble, huh? My boys know just when to get busy. That Governor of New York's going to change the sentence, or he's going to change over from livin' to dyin'. And there's three State Senators that are shaking in their shirts tonight, Dummy; yes, sir! No Smoky Cell for mine—not likely! Maybe when I'm out I'll come along and see you.

"How do they pay you here? Just enough to live on if you save your car fare? Two hundred a month, ain't it?... I'd give a million dollars to be out of here. Dummy, and half the money would be on the table before you moved. How's that, boy, huh? A million bucks—yeah. I'm not guessin' anything. You say 'yes' and I'll fix it and I'll fix O'Regan—what I won't do to that guy! A million bucks, Dummy, an' you'd be in Europe before they got wise it was you that got me out. Huh? Eh?"

Beyond shifting the wad of chewing-gum from one side of his jaw to the other, the warder made no sign; he might have been a deaf-mute.

Guinney's voice rose again to a higher pitch.

"Hey, Dummy, when I talk to you, talk, you dumb swine!—I say, when I talk—talk! If I could get at you, I'd" His anger subsided as quickly as it had arisen. "I never got a break," he muttered. "There ought to have been a re-trial. If there'd been any justice I would have been sent back to Canyon City to finish my sentence. The Governor's got to review the sentence—you bet he has. And my boys are going to get me out. I'm the brains of that organization—they'd starve without me. Two hundred bucks a week—there's

no gunman in America gets that much—two hundred bucks regular, and a cut. They get paid every—what's today?"

He paused, but not a sound came from the warder's lips.

"Dummy, what's today? Saturday? Can't you say what day it is?... Why don't they give you something that would put you out quick? They tell me it doesn't hurt, none of it... too quick. Electricity moves faster than thought, huh? You've seen 'em, Dummy, haven't you? Hey, don't you hear what I'm saying? You don't think I'm yeller, do you? Say, I'll walk into that Smoky Cell on my hands, the same as that other guy did.... Did you see him? I say, did you see him?" His voice rose, then subsided again. "Huh!" he grunted. "Waste of time.... Get me some water, will you?"

A second time the warder disappeared, taking the mug, filled it and pushed it through the bars of the cell. Guinney laughed.

"Thanks," he said. "I've only been stringing you, Dummy. Gee, you're easy, you old horse face. What's the time? About two, I guess. Say, you ought to have a shade on that window; the moon don't belong to this place. Ever look at the moon?... Say, Dummy, I'd like to hear you speak. I'd give a grand to hear your voice, Dummy. Can you speak?... Damn you, you yeller-faced rat! If you were inside here and I was outside I'd talk to you—I'd talk to you. You're a hell of a teller, holding a man who's killed fifty better men than you. I never bumped a man like you—not such a low-down dog as you. Why don't you answer me? Won't they let you speak?"

Guinney resumed his pacing of the cell. The pale light of the moon streamed in through the window.

"Any luck?" asked the Chief Guard.

"No, curse it!" replied Tricks O'Regan, stripping off his warder's jacket and removing the traces of his disguise. "Keep an eye on him and let me know at once if he spills anything—"

CHAPTER XXI

HAD Ben Guinney been aware of the precautions taken to ensure that at 11 p.m. on the appointed day the prescribed voltage should duly switch him off this mortal coil he would doubtless have felt flattered. They were a tribute to his reputation, of which, as gunman, racketeer, prison-breaker and triple murderer, he had every reason to be proud. At ten o'clock that night the guards outside the prison walls were doubled and among them they had enough machine-guns to play havoc with a battalion. The warden of the prison had announced that he was taking no chances. Ben Guinney, he had said, might have escaped from Canyon City prison without his due dose of high-power juice, but he wasn't going to jump this dump. Rumours of an attempt at rescue had reached him and his reputation as warden was at stake. Guinney's only chance of staying alive this time, he had said, was insulation—which he didn't reckon even Ben Guinney could contrive.

Inside the jail there was nothing to encourage Guinney in the belief that he was in any respect more important than any other convicted murderer. He might be a big shot and a real swell feller outside the prison walls but once inside them he could expect no special treatment. Despatching Ben Guinney was a mere matter of ordinary routine, and those whose duty it was to ensure his rapid transit seemed totally unimpressed by the fact that they would be conducting on his final journey the country's most notorious gangster. The electrician, for instance, calmly arranging and testing his apparatus, might have been tuning in his wireless set in his own parlour; the guard, lolling against the wall, absently watching him, yawned every few minutes, and the doctor was intent on touching up his nails with a nail file.

The door was opened and Chief Guard Morgan sauntered in.

"Evening, doctor."

"Good evening, Morgan."

Morgan glanced at his watch.

"Ten minutes yet," he said. "If Ben Guinney's to miss the hot squat this time he's got to get a hustle on."

"There's talk of pulling him out," remarked the electrician. "This bird's got a gang, so they say. They pulled him out of Canyon City gaol—and that wants some jumping."

"Sure," agreed Morgan. "But to jump this wall he'll need a mighty big spring. And there's enough machine-guns on the other side to chop up every racketeer in the country and then some." He grinned. "It's volts for Ben Guinney, not vaults, this time."

The doctor smiled.

"That's—smart, Morgan," he said. "Is that your own?" The guard lolling against the wall yawned again. "There's a bunch of reporters outside. Chief," he said. "Uh-huh. There would be; Ben Guinney is news. Passes all correct?"

"All in order, Chief," replied the guard. "There's six of 'em."

"Got a list?"

The guard took a paper from his pocket and handed it to Morgan, who studied it, frowning.

"H'm! They come from all over the States—Minneapolis Star, Minnesota Journal, Cincinnati Messenger, St. Paul Herald..." He tapped the paper with his finger. "I'd like to know how these men are chosen. If you were editor of a newspaper, doctor, what kind of a man would you send to write up an execution?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"The kind of man who likes reading about it, I guess."

"I'd stop the whole thing, if I had my way," continued Morgan. "Reporting it, I mean. I'm not concerned with what people read, but one of these days we're going to have trouble. It seems to me to be pretty easy to impersonate a reporter from the other side of the continent, and I can't be expected to know every newspaper man in the United States." He glanced at his subordinate. "Remember that reporter who said he was from New York and came from Chicago? He took photographs. Nobody knew he was from Chicago or where he'd come from. O.K. Get the witnesses in." The guard went out and a few moments later the six reporters came in and stood in a bunch by the door. Morgan glanced at them in evident disapproval.

"Answer your names, gentlemen, please," he said. "I guess I want to know who's who."

He read the names from the list in his hand, subjecting each man to a searching stare as he answered, and ticking off his name with a pencil.

"Now listen to me, gentlemen," he said, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "I want you to report just what you see and nothing more. We don't want anything sensational, and the less fancy writing you do, the better for all concerned. I guess I don't have to tell you that taking photographs is against regulations, do I?"

They murmured their agreement and Morgan nodded. "O.K.," he said. "And now, if anyone of you has got a camera he'll hand it over right away to the guard here, and he can have it back when he leaves." He waited for a few moments and then gave a shrug. "Nobody got one, eh? Well, I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I can't take your word for it. Nobody had one once before, but there was a photo in a Chicago newspaper, and I'm not running that

kind of risk again. You newspapermen have only yourselves to blame if I can't believe you. I'll have to search you for cameras if you're to stay here." He waved a hand towards the rows of wooden benches that ran across the room. "As I finish with you, pass into those pews and sit down. Who's first?"

A man stepped forward and Morgan began rapidly running his hands over him. As he did so he heard a gasp and glanced round sharply. One of the reporters—a thin, pale-faced youth—had stepped forward from the group and was swaying drunkenly on his feet, his eyes closed and his hand clasping his forehead. Morgan suddenly straightened himself, took a quick step forward and grasped his arm just as he seemed about to collapse on the floor.

"What's got you?" he demanded.

The youth opened his eyes.

"Say, I'm sorry," he said apologetically, "I'm kind of dizzy. I guess I'm going to faint—"

Morgan shook him roughly.

"Faint, eh? I want no fainting here. If you haven't the guts for the job you shouldn't have come." And then, as the youth sagged towards the floor, he glanced around at the doctor. "I reckon this is more your line than mine, doc," he said.

The doctor stepped forward, took the youth's arm and led him to one of the benches.

"Sit down," he ordered, "and try to pull yourself together. You'll be all right. Your first time in the Death House, I suppose?"

The youth nodded, resting his elbows on his knees and covering his face with his hands.

"I won't ever forgive myself if I faint," he said. "This is my first big job—"

"Keep like you are," advised the doctor kindly, "and you won't see anything. Try to forget you're here."

The young man nodded again and sat motionless.

One by one the reporters were explored by Morgan's experienced hands; passed into the seats and sat down.

"And now you just keep quiet," said Morgan. "Nobody says anything—see?" He glanced at his watch. "Are you all ready, electrician?"

"O.K., Chief."

With a nod Morgan strode from the room and the guard leaned against the wall again and yawned.

For fully a minute they waited, the reporters whispering together, shifting in their seats and shuffling their feet. Then, as footsteps sounded in the corridor every figure became motionless and all heads were turned in the direction of the door.

The door opened and through it, with Morgan on one side of him and a guard on the other, came Guinney. His face was paler than usual, but with that exception he showed no sign of fear. He came in with his usual easy swagger and his usual air of insolent self-assurance.

Just for an instant, as he stepped into the room, he paused, and shot a swift, anxious glance towards the figures that sat motionless on the benches facing him. And as he paused a shot rang out and Morgan sagged and pitched forward.

Instantly, as Morgan collapsed another shot and the room was plunged into darkness. And then hubbub, more shots, quick, staccato words, confused shuffling on the bare boards, the slamming of a door, and then the doctor's voice shouting: "Emergency lights!"

A few seconds later the lights flashed on and the doctor glanced swiftly around. The reporters had vanished. Ben Guinney had vanished. Morgan and two guards were crumpled heaps on the floor and the electrician lay limply across the chair. Then came the sound of shots outside, the rattle of machine-guns, the strident screaming of a siren, the voices of men shouting.

And at that moment Ben Guinney dropped from a rope that dangled from the prison wall and landed among a group of men who were waiting in the shadow. One of them, wearing the uniform of a police officer, helped him to his feet and gripped his hand.

"O.K., Ben," he said. "Get into these." He held, out a police overcoat and, as Guinney slipped into it clapped a police hat on his head.

"O.K., Lavine," said Guinney, and glanced around at the others. "Right, boys—beat it."

Lavine grasped his arm.

"This way, Ben. There's a car—"

Guinney halted.

"Where are the boys," he demanded "the boys who went inside for me? I guess we can't leave 'em—"

"You don't have to worry about them," interrupted Lavine. "They've all got their getaway if they can make it. You've got no time—"

"Where's Tricks O'Regan? Nobody's touched him, have they?"

"Aw, listen, Ben, what's wrong with you? You can't stay here—"

"That's what I'm out for—to settle with Tricks O'Regan."

"Sure. He'll get his all right," agreed Lavine. "But come on, Ben. We've got to hit the Pike—quick." Guinney waved a hand excitedly towards the wall.

"If I thought Tricks O'Regan was behind that wall," he said thickly, "I'd go right back now to find him."

"Sure," said Lavine. "And we'd all go back, too. You're crazy, man. You're going to get us all caught, carrying on in this way. Come on—quick. There's a gun in your pocket."

He urged Guinney forward to where a big limousine car was waiting, bundled him into it and got in beside him, and the car went roaring along the road.

CHAPTER XXII

BEN GUINNEY might be treated by the prison authorities as a person of no particular importance, but the representatives of the Press took quite another view of him. To them he was always news. As an inmate of Smoky Cell who was about to provide columns of interesting reading by being executed for murder, he was front-page news. And by escaping in the nick of time from the Death House and disappearing he became the most important person in the country, to be honoured with captions spread right across the page in the largest type available. The telephone wires that night were heavily laden with Ben Guinney, and Lieutenant Spellman, listening in at Police Headquarters to the news being poured into the various newspaper offices to be prepared for public consumption and served up the next morning in time for breakfast, had ample food for anxious thought.

"Hallo!" came a voice. "Is that the Tribune? Give me the desk, quick. Hullo! Oh, shake it up, this is real news!"

"Go to it," said another voice.

"Ben Guinney," continued the first speaker, "racketeer and murderer, escaped from the chair tonight with the aid of gangsters—"

Spellman became instantly alert.

"Geissel!"

The sergeant appeared at the door of the glass-house.

"You heard that, Geissel?"

"Yes."

"Find the Chief. Try his club. If he's not there he may be at home. You've got to find him—and quick."

"O.K.," replied Geissel and retired within his office.

"... was booked for the hot squat at n p.m. tonight," the voice was saying. "The gangsters enter the prisons in the disguise of newspapermen. The real reporters are believed to have been held prisoners by Guinney's men, who took their passes and so gained admission without arousing suspicion. At 10.50 p.m. the alleged reporters were admitted to the Death House and were duly cautioned by Chief Guard Morgan that no cameras would be allowed. They were searched by Morgan, but one man, believed to be gang leader and carrying the arsenal of the party, pretended to be faint, and managed by this subterfuge to escape being searched. He found an opportunity of passing guns to the rest of the gang, and when Guinney entered the death room a shot was fired that put the lights out of action. Got that?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Chief Guard Morgan and two other guards were fatally shot and the electrician was wounded. In the confusion Guinney, surrounded by the gang, raced across the courtyard, where, on a prearranged signal, a rope ladder was dropped from the wall by confederates outside the prison who were disguised as police officers. One gangster was killed and another was captured at the main gate. Guinney and his rescuers escaped in a big limousine which had been seen waiting near the prison gates and which had brought the fake reporters to the gaol...."

"Geissel!" called Spellman. "Have you found the Chief?"

"He'd been at the club," Geissel informed him. "They say he left some minutes ago and is heading here." The door was flung open and Sergeant Reil came striding in.

"Squad car's ready," he announced.

"Send it off," ordered Spellman. "Take charge yourself, Reil. Stop every car on the Pike, and if you have to shoot, shoot good and plenty."

The sergeant hurried out and Spellman returned to his listening.

"... had been warned that a rescue might be attempted and extra guards were placed around the prison. At five minutes to eleven, Guards Wilton and Perlinger were approached by a man who pretended to be a captain of police. Deceived by this manoeuvre, one guard allowed himself to be sent away. The remaining guard was immediately knocked out with a black-jack. He is seriously injured, in hospital, but has been able to give a description of his assailant—"

Spellman rose from his chair as O'Regan came hurrying into the room.

"Got the news, Chief?"

"I have. Enough to last me for a long time. Ben Guinney free again! I wonder how many ordinary decent people have been killed to save friend Guinney from the chair."

"Four, as far as I've heard," replied Spellman; "the Chief Guard and three others. And the whole gang got clear away except two men. One was shot dead and one was captured."

"Poor devils! All for the sake of a brute like Guinney! Are the roads covered?"

"Yes. But I guess Guinney will keep clear of Chester County, Chief."

"Then you guess wrong, Spell," said O'Regan. "I'm willing to lay any odds he's heading for Chester County at this moment."

"He wouldn't dare—"

"He'd dare anything. And he'll have to risk coming into Chester County, anyway. He has been hiding that bunch of his in this county for over two years, and nobody has seen them, and you can bet he's got most of his money cached here, and—"

"Another message, Chief," announced Geissel, flourishing a paper from the door of the glass-house. "Guinney is believed to have got away'," he read, "in the uniform of a police lieutenant, accompanied by another of the gang who was similarly disguised. The second man was stoutish and evidently had police experience." O'Regan nodded.

"Police uniform, eh?" he said. "That's why nobody stopped him. Any idea who that may have been, Spell?"

The lieutenant smiled.

"It seems that six of the gang got into the prison, Chief—"

O'Regan made a gesture of impatience.

"Yes—I know it all!" he exclaimed. "I had the radio working in my car. They took the place of six reporters from the Middle West. Maybe they were in it; there's not much an American reporter wouldn't do to get a story. They kidnapped them and stole their credentials—fine! Good story—front-page stuff—the biggest story that ever broke! If I were a newspaperman I'd be happy tonight. But I happen to be a police officer and I'm not feeling so good."

"You'll be staying here at Headquarters tonight, won't you, Chief?" inquired Spellman.

"Till we get this situation straight, Spell—no longer."

"You're not thinking of going back to that apartment of yours, are you?"

"That's just where I am going—as soon as I'm through here. Guinney has got to be taken again and that's my best chance of taking him. I'm the best bait that was ever dropped in front of that shark, and he'll be after it straight away. If he didn't go after me, who would he go after? I know Guinney."

"You'd be crazy to take the risk, Chief."

O'Regan smiled.

"The only risk I ever took was when I first put on a policeman's uniform." He glanced at his watch. "It's a quarter after one," he said. "They must be going the long way round."

Geissel thrust his head into the room.

"Patrol post, Captain," he announced. "It's urgent."

"Put me through," said O'Regan, and picked up the receiver of the telephone on his desk.

"Hallo I... Yes... Yes . . ., O.K. Now, listen! Go right after that driver and bring him in. I've got to have him and you've got to get him somehow. It's up to you."

He replaced the receiver and turned to Spellman.

"A farmer up at Whitecliff saw a car with two men in police uniforms," he said, "and had the sense to 'phone the filling station. My opinion of farmers is going up."

"Whitecliff? Then they're not coming here, Chief."

"Yes, they're coming here. I've told you so and you'll see."

Spellman shook his head.

"I reckon even Ben Guinney won't have the nerve for that."

"Nerve?" O'Regan smiled. "When it comes to nerve, you've got to hand it to Ben Guinney. He had the nerve to cheat the wires all right, didn't he? You've got to hand him that—on a gold plate. He's the only man who ever did it."

"He knows that if he comes here he'll be taking the shortest cut back to the chair. He'll not dare risk that."

"We'll see," smiled O'Regan. "Listen, Spell, these men aren't all yellow. Get that idea out of your head. They do brute things and they take brute chances, but they're not yellow. They kill because they haven't the brains to think of a better way. And that, after all, is just what the law does—kills them because it doesn't know of any better way of dealing with them. The trouble is that the law doesn't kill nearly enough of them."

For several minutes he paced the floor restlessly.

"I'm wondering, Spell," he said at last.

"I know. About Miss Brady."

O'Regan nodded.

"There's no word of her?"

Spellman shook his head.

"We've done our best, Chief, but we've got no farther. She's left Chester County, I reckon. And Lavine—I can't get a line on him anywhere since he left Perryfeld's house with Miss Brady and the others. But they'd scarcely hang around here after Guinney's arrest—"

"Sub-station again, Chief," announced Geissel, and O'Regan snatched up the telephone.

"Hallo!... Yes, speaking.... You ditched the car?... You've got the officers?... Only the driver?... Where are you?... All right, bring him in quick." He replaced the receiver. "They ditched the car outside the town," he said, "and got the driver. The others weren't there. Changed cars, I suppose. But they're bringing in the driver and he's going to talk."

Spellman smiled faintly.

"He'll be as dumb as a rubber doll, Chief. Aren't they all?"

"I'll say he won't be this time," replied O'Regan grimly. "Guinney's got to go back to the chair and I'm going to send him there. He's been a sight too long in Chester County already, and I'm not standing for another visit. If this guy knows anything he's going to spill it. I'm not feeling soft-hearted tonight, and if he won't squeal, then I'll make him scream—"

"Message, Chief," announced Geissel. "A car broke through Preston going hell for leather. Shots were fired at the patrol car."

O'Regan glanced at Spellman and smiled.

"Hail the gang!" he said. "Through Preston, Spell. Didn't I tell you? Ben Guinney's on his way here. Well, that suits me. There's something Guinney's going to tell me before he goes back to gaol to take his medicine. I guess he knows where Miss Brady is, and if he comes here I'll make him speak if I have to—"

He stopped abruptly as the long wail of a siren reached him, strode to the window and looked out.

"The squad's car," he announced. "Reil certainly knows how to move. Bring that guy in, Spell, will you?"

With a nod Spellman hurried from the room. In a few moments he was back, and behind him came Sergeant Reil and two policemen, grasping the arms of a young man and dragged him roughly into the room. His coat was muddy, his collar torn, his hair dishevelled, and there was an ugly cut on his forehead.

O'Regan pointed to a chair.

"Sit down!" he ordered, and the young man, with a sullen scowl, sank on to the chair and sat staring doggedly at his boots.

"Name?" snapped O'Regan.

The driver made no reply.

"Name, do you hear?"

"I ain't got no name," said the young man dully.

O'Regan stepped quickly forward, grasped him by the collar, lifted him from his seat, shook him savagely until the teeth almost rattled in his head and flung him back into the chair so violently as to leave him gasping for breath.

"Name, you rat—quick!"

"Smith."

"You were driving two men dressed as police officers into this county—where did you drop them?"

"I never saw 'em, mister," replied the driver doggedly. "There wasn't no police officers in my car—"

"Where did you drop them?"

"I don't know nothing about 'em. There was only me in the car. Ditched me, they did, and I reckon they had no right—they had nothing on me—"

"Listen," interrupted O'Regan impatiently, "there's information I want, and you can give it to me, and you're going to give it. I may have to grill you for it, but I'm going to get it. Ever been grilled? Well, you can take it from me that you'd be wise to come as clean as your dirty tongue will let you. Those men you brought into this county are wanted for murder, and anything I do to you is going to get me a medal from Congress. Are you going to talk?"

"I've nothing to tell you, mister," said the driver doggedly.

O'Regan turned to the policemen.

"Take him out," he ordered, "and make him talk." They hustled him from the room and O'Regan seated himself at his desk and lighted a cigarette.

"You've got the right man, Reil?"

"Oh yes, Chief. We ditched the right car—anyway, the same one as the farmer reported. Maybe they changed cars."

"The driver knows something," said Spellman. "He's scared stiff."

"Aren't they all scared of squealing on a racketeer?" said O'Regan. "He's not the only one to be afraid to tell the truth about Ben Guinney. Show me a list of the rich people in this county and there's not a name there that hasn't been paying Guinney real money because nobody had the guts to walk in here and put us wise. And if another racketeer turns up with the same pretty scheme they'll all pay again. Some of them paid ten thousand dollars a year to be allowed to live, but a man who'll part with ten grand to save his skin has an exaggerated idea of his value."

The door opened and the driver was brought in again. His face was deathly pale and he staggered to the chair and sank on to it as if all his strength had suddenly left him.

O'Regan rose and went to him.

"Well, are you spilling it now?"

"You've got no cause to beat me up, mister," the driver whimpered. All the truculence had gone from his tone. "I ain't done nothing I've got my living to earn—"

"Are you going to talk?"

"This guy got me to drive him to the penitentiary and parked me near the river. That's all, mister."

"Where did you drop them?"

"Near the Brandt fork. There was another car waiting. The big guy gave me fifty dollars. But I don't know nothing about their racket. I don't know nothing at all about them—"

"You know the big guy?"

"No, sir."

"No idea who he was? Didn't hear his name, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't hear anything?"

The driver suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Listen, mister," he exclaimed excitedly. "He's going to get you—that's what! That's all he talked about—getting you. I'm telling you, ain't I? And you've got no cause to beat me up."

"Getting me, is he?" said O'Regan. "The big one, eh?"

"Both of 'em. I heard 'em talking. They're both set on getting you, and the big one wants to do the job quick and get away. That's all I know, mister, and it ain't no good beating me up—"

O'Regan turned away and went to his desk.

"Take him away," he ordered; "I'm holding him for the time being."

The officers led the driver out of the room.

"That's all he knows, Spell."

"It's enough to go on with," replied Spellman. "Where will they beat Guinney's house?"

"Will they? Will they be at the City Hall? No! But somewhere around Guinney's house is the meeting-place, you can be pretty sure of that. Watch out tonight, Spell."

"I guess it's you who needs to watch out, Chief," said

Spellman. "You heard what the driver said. Guinney means to get you. You know the man now and you know his record. He took a big chance when he went back to Canyon City, and he went to Denver to bump the stool pigeon who caught him."

O'Regan nodded.

"Ben Guinney never forgives the man who catches him."

"And he did the same in Sacramento."

"Sure he did, Spell. And he'll do the same here; I'm counting on that."

"Then it looks to me, Chief, as if our best move would be to raid Guinney's old home."

O'Regan glanced up at him and smiled.

"Anxious to see Sarah again?" he laughed. "There'd be nobody else to see there, I fancy. We don't have to trouble about raiding Guinney's old home. If I know Ben Guinney he'll raid our old home."

Spellman stared at him in amazement.

"You mean—here?"

"Where else? His nerve centre is Chester County. I wouldn't mind betting you, Spell, that it won't be long before we hear something from friend Guinney—"

Sergeant Geissel showed himself at the door of the glass-house.

"There's a personal call for you, Chief."

"Put it through," said O'Regan, and picked up the receiver. "Hallo!... Yes, yes.... Captain O'Regan speaking." He snapped his fingers to attract Spellman's attention and nodded, towards the glass-house. "Yes, I'm here, Guinney," he added, and smiled as he saw the Lieutenant start.

Spellman strode swiftly to the door of the glass-house. "Get the exchange, Geissel—quick, and trace this call."

"Yes, I'm right here, sitting at my desk," continued O'Regan. "I'll be here when you want me.... Fine, thanks. Kind of you to inquire, Guinney. Just a bit sleepy, but otherwise feeling dandy. I'll be seeing you in the morning.... Eh?... Oh, sure I will. I'm going to take you right back to Smoky Cell and put you in the chair with my own hands."

"Drug store at the corner of Main and Grey Avenue," reported Geissel.

Spellman nodded.

"Warn the third patrol."

"O.K."

Spellman hurried from the room.

"They'll be real glad to see you again, Guinney," O'Regan was saying... "Who?... Oh, Lavine's with you, is he? Nice fellow, Lavine; I always liked him. The kind of fellow I'd be proud of if I was his mother. Remember me to Edwin, will you?... You're going to what?... Get me? I'll say you are, Guinney! You've got that wrong. And shall I tell you why? Now, listen—"

He frowned and jerked the hook of the telephone impatiently, and then, as Spellman came hurrying back into the room, replaced the receiver.

"He hung up on me," he announced.

"Drug store—corner of Main and Grey," said Spellman. "I've sent the squad car after him—"

"Then stop it—quick, Spell. We can't afford—"

There came the wail of a siren and the roar of a powerful engine in the courtyard and Spellman, half-way to the door, halted.

"Too late, Chief," he said, "they've gone. But they might catch him."

O'Regan shook his head.

"They won't," he said. "That's what he hoped we'd think. Guinney's not fool enough to think we wouldn't check up that call, and he counted on us sending the car to try to catch him. He wanted to clear the station of two-handed shooters. Why else would he call at all?"

"I thought you wanted to know where he was calling from, Chief."

"Yes, I did. I wanted to time him—see how long he'd be likely to keep me hanging around here for him." He sat for a few moments frowning thoughtfully. Then: "Send away another car, Spell," he said, "but with only the driver on board. No men. How many men are there now in the station-house?"

"Ten," Spellman told him promptly, "and the sergeant and the gaoler. Most of the men are out on the road."

"And doesn't Guinney know it?" smiled O'Regan. "All right. Spell; pull in the outside guard and shut the doors."

"But, Chief—"

"Do it," ordered O'Regan, "and do it quick! We don't want any more dead policemen."

Spellman strode out, and O'Regan got up from his desk, crossed to the clicking tape-machine and stood studying the tape.

"Geissel!"

Sergeant Geissel came in.

"Yes, Chief?"

"Got a gun?"

"Sure."

O'Regan nodded.

"Keep it handy, and if you have to shoot, shoot plenty."

"O.K., Chief."

As Geissel returned to his seat in the glass-house, O'Regan crossed the room and leaned against the door.

"Grand sound that, Geissel," he said, with a nod towards the clattering instruments on the table. "It's like all the world moving—cars running, and trucks on the street, and people shouting and screaming—the talk of the world."

Geissel nodded.

"She's lively, Chief."

He was suddenly silent, staring with amazed eyes at the instruments; and then he glanced up at O'Regan.

"Say, Chief, they—they've stopped."

"Sure they've stopped. Mighty quiet it seems without their clatter, doesn't it? Get New York on the wire." Geissel seized a plug and thrust it into position, and as he did so Spellman came in, and O'Regan turned towards him.

"Say, Chief," said Spellman, "I'm a joke with the men, shutting the doors."

"Let them laugh at you, Spell, if they feel like it. They'll live to thank you."

"Chief!" It was Geissel's voice—excited, urgent. "Hallo!"

"The line's dead—say, all the lines are dead! I can't get any reply—"

"That's all right, Geissel—you won't get any reply on any line. The lines are cut."

"What!" exclaimed Spellman. "Guinney—"

"He's done it," interrupted O'Regan. "I've been waiting for it to happen. Remember Lavine saying how easy it would be to put this dump out of action? Well, it's out."

"And that means—" began Spellman.

"It means Ben Guinney won't keep us waiting much longer, Spell. He'll be along any minute now."

O'Regan went to the window.

"Nothing showing so far," he said.

He stood there, gazing out into the street for some moments. Then:

"Spell!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Hallo!"

"There's a car of some sort—no lights." He drew his gun. "It's coming along—slowly—this way—I guess this'll be Guinney...."

He turned abruptly from the window.

"Cover, boys—quick!" he snapped, and flung himself suddenly on the floor.

As he did so there came the rattle of a machine-gun, the crash of the shattered window, a shower of splintered glass. O'Regan, crawling on hands and knees, reached the cupboard in the corner, took out a machine-gun, thrust its muzzle through the broken window and loosed a stream of bullets at the big car that he could just see drawn up against the kerb outside. The door was flung open and police came rushing in; someone switched off the light; there came a crash as a table was overturned, and then suddenly silence.

O'Regan scrambled to his feet.

"Car's gone," he said. "O.K. now, boys. Put on the lights."

The switch clicked down and O'Regan glanced swiftly round. Spellman lay on the floor, and the Chief went quickly towards him.

"It's all right," said Spellman; "only my arm—nothing much."

He got up and waved a hand towards a still figure that lay limply across the overturned table, and O'Regan, crossing to the prostrate policeman, went on his knee beside him.

He was frowning as he got to his feet.

"Another badge for the case. Spell," he said quietly. "Send a man for the doctor; it's too late for this poor devil, but I guess you'll be glad to see him."

He stood for a time gazing down at the lifeless figure at his feet.

"My God!" he exclaimed suddenly. "And to think that Ben Guinney can only die once!"

CHAPTER XXIII

DURING the two days that followed the attack on the Police Headquarters, Sergeant Geissel lived with a pair of headphones clamped over his ears, tapping the wires in the hope that he might hear Ben Guinney's voice, or pick up some stray remark that might give a hint of his whereabouts. By the evening of the first day he was expressing surprise that, if people had nothing better to say than the kind of conversations to which he had been compelled to listen, they should spend good money on saying it by telephone. By the morning of the second day he was violently of the opinion that the telephone was a menace to the sanity of police officers and should be prohibited. By the evening of the second day he was blasphemous.

"What wire are you tapping now, Geissel?" inquired O'Regan, coming in alter dinner at his club and seating himself at his desk.

"Dutch Morgan's roadhouse, Chief—Seven Ways Inn."

O'Regan nodded.

"Seventy Ways Out would be a better name," he said. "Nobody using the wire?"

"Almost everybody, I should say, Chief."

"But there's not a word you couldn't write down in a kid's story-book," added Spellman. "Guinney has jumped for the West, I reckon, and won't be worrying us any more."

O'Regan shook his head.

"I know Guinney now," he said. "A man who'll shoot Petersen dead right inside a police office and under my eyes isn't the kind to jump till he bumps. And a man who'll come along and spray Police Headquarters with a machine-gun on the off-chance of getting me—well, he isn't going to stop trying to get me. And that gives me my only real chance of getting him. I guess I shan't have to wait long for it."

Spellman frowned.

"Maybe you're right," he admitted, "but I hope you're wrong. Guinney's an ugly customer, and Chester County would hate to lose its Captain of Police. Will you be sore with me if I say something?"

"Go ahead."

"Well, it's just this," said Spellman slowly. "What's wrong with sleeping here at the station-house tonight?"

"Nothing," replied O'Regan. "Sleep where you like, Spell."

"It's you I mean. Listen, Chief, there's no sense in going back to that apartment of yours. With Guinney hanging around, waiting for you, it's just asking for trouble. I've had two nights of jumps over your sleeping there already."

"I like the old block, Spell."

"Maybe you do," replied the Lieutenant, "but an apartment house that's half empty is no place for a police officer to sleep if he wants to stay alive. Sleep at the station, won't you?"

O'Regan smiled.

"You've said the same thing to me the last two nights, Spell," he said, "and I've turned up here each morning looking young and girlish. You don't have to worry. If Guinney has a mind to pay a visit to my apartment—"

"Men talking," came Geissel's voice. "The roadhouse. Chief."

O'Regan strode into the glass-house and slipped on a pair of headphones, and Spellman followed suit.

"You wouldn't like the corner lot, would you?" said a man's voice. "That land's going right up to the sky one day. I'll tell you somep'n' about this land you don't know. The National Bank's been in the market for the whole block. Yes, sir I But I'd rather sell it to you than to them—"

"The old army game!" said O'Regan, with a smile. "They've two lines, Geissel. Try the other."

Geissel altered a switch and they heard a woman's voice:

"Say, you're all wrong, Mrs. Hemperling. You certainly are."

"If I was as wrong as you," came another feminine voice, "I guess I'd go into a convent."

"That's highly detrimental to my character, Mrs. Hemperling, and I'm not standing for it."

"Is that so? Well, if I were you I'd be ashamed to let that telephone operator hear that you can't keep your own husband at home—"

"Chief—quick!" exclaimed Geissel suddenly. "The other line."

He turned the switch and a man's voice came through clearly.

"... You'll join me where we arranged?"

"Yes, I'll be there," came the reply. "Five o'clock. But listen Ben—you're plumb mad. We could leave tonight and be well away by the morning. There's no sense in hanging around—"

"I've got a job to do tonight."

"You'd best leave it, Ben."

"I'm not leaving till I've done it."

"But listen—"

"I'm owing somebody something, and I'm paying it tonight."

"Maybe you'll finish up owing a bit more, Ben. I guess I'll bring the car along right now—"

"You'll bring the car along in the morning as we arranged. If I'm not there to meet you, you can go without me. But I shall be. Got that?"

"Sure."

"And don't forget the passenger. She's too swell to be left behind."

"O.K. I'll bring her. Five o'clock prompt."

"If you don't bring her, we'll be driving back to fetch her. Now beat it."

The line went dead, and Spellman and O'Regan took off their headphones. Spellman was frowning.

"Guinney and Lavine, Chief."

O'Regan nodded.

"Sure."

"Leaving tomorrow."

"With a passenger," added O'Regan. "There's a lot to be said for telephones, Spell. That car's not leaving Chester County tomorrow, anyway—not until I've had a look at the passenger. Every car's to be stopped, and if Miss Brady is aboard she's to be brought right here."

"O.K.," said Spellman. "But you heard what Guinney said, Chief? He's doing a job tonight—paying something he owes to somebody. I reckon you know what that means."

"I hope I do."

"Then for God's sake, Chief, stay at the station!"

O'Regan shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Spell," he said, "if it worries you, but I just can't do that. I can't miss the chance of meeting Guinney again. I'm going home."

Nobody who saw Tricks O'Regan as he strode towards his apartment half an hour later would have guessed that he believed he was on his way to meet the most desperate gunman in the country, for it would have seemed impossible to reconcile the smile on his face with any such prospect. The smile, as a matter of fact, had nothing to do with Ben Guinney. His thoughts

were entirely occupied with Josephine Brady. Those last few words of Guinney's conversation with Lavine had given him just the clue he had been wanting. Since Josephine had disappeared from Guinney's house he had failed to find any trace of her and had almost been persuaded that she had gone away and that he would never see her again.

Guinney's message had given him fresh hope. He had no doubt who the passenger was who was too swell to be left behind, and now that he knew that Guinney and Lavine proposed making a bolt in the morning, it should not be difficult to stop the car from leaving the county. Spellman would see to that, and he could trust Spellman to see to it thoroughly. He felt fairly certain that he would be meeting Josephine again the next morning at Police Headquarters. He would get things straight with her then.

He had a feeling that if he could have seen her alone when he had called at Guinney's house matters would have taken a very different course. She had refused to go with him because she had not dared to do otherwise, because Lavine and the rest of them had been there, because, no doubt, they had threatened her. But she would have nothing to fear tomorrow; Guinney, if all went well, would be on his way back to Smoky Cell. At least, he hoped so—either that or dead.

As he neared his apartment, his thoughts turned to Ben Guinney. "A job to do tonight." O'Regan guessed what that job was to be. Well, Guinney should have his chance to do his job, even though it might mean that Spellman must spend another jumpy night. He would have the laugh of Spellman in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOSEPHINE had no idea where she was. Following Tricks O'Regan's visit to Guinney's house she had recovered consciousness to find herself in a car, with Lavine beside her. Her head ached abominably. She had no idea which road they were taking, and indeed was too dazed to try to discover. She was glad when eventually the car stopped outside a large house in the country and she was told to get out.

Lavine had taken her in, led her to a room on the ground floor, warned her that screaming wouldn't help her, and left her, locking the door behind him. The room was comfortably furnished as a bed-sitting-room. It had two big windows, but a swift inspection of them convinced her that escape would be impossible. The windows, she found, were heavily barred; and the door, even if it had not been locked, led into another room, through which, she realized, she would never be allowed to pass. Lavine and the others did not mean to give her a chance of leaving them, and there was nothing to be done but to accept the situation and await developments.

And there, since the night of her arrival, she had remained, seeing no one but the negress who attended to her wants and answered every remark addressed to her with an uncomprehending stare; and spending most of her time listening to the wireless set or reading. There seemed nothing else to be done.

There were visitors to the house—always at night. She heard cars stop outside, and voices in the adjoining room, among which she recognized the voices of Mike and Sheriff. She discovered that by placing her ear close to the door she could hear what was being said, but what she heard had no meaning for her. They seemed to be planning something, but she could not make out what it was, except that it in some way concerned Ben Guinney. Time and again she heard his name mentioned, and once or twice she caught the sound of Tricks O'Regan's name. She thought a great deal about Tricks O'Regan, and several times a day she would open her bag and take a look at the crumpled picture cut from the newspaper. She thanked God a dozen times a day that Ben Guinney was in prison.

And then came the night when she sat, with pale cheeks and clenched hands, listening to the wireless as it told of Guinney's escape. She did not sleep at all that night. Ben Guinney free again—escaped from the Death House— and it was Tricks who had sent him there! All her fears returned. What would Guinney do now? Would he keep his promise that no harm should come to Tricks?

Her answer came in the morning, when the wireless told of the attack on Police Headquarters. Tricks O'Regan was unharmed, she learned, but the

knowledge was small comfort. She understood the meaning of the raid on the station. Guinney had no intention of keeping the promise he had made her. He was bent on revenge. Tricks had sent him to the Death House, and Guinney would never forgive him for that. Tricks was in deadly peril, and there was nothing that she could do.

Most of that day she paced her room restlessly, and the lunch which the negress brought her was left untouched. Perhaps, after all, she was exaggerating the danger. Guinney would hardly dare remain in the district. He was well known as Perryfeld and could hardly hope to escape detection. That raid last night on Police Headquarters was perhaps his last desperate attempt to square his account with Tricks before bolting for safety, and he would not risk another attempt.

Perhaps he had already bolted. The house had seemed deserted last night; no cars had arrived and she had heard no voices in the adjoining room. The gang, perhaps, having carried out their rescue of Guinney, had scattered. If so what about herself? If they had gone off and left her—forgotten her, perhaps...

She hurried to the door and carefully tried it. But it was still locked, and she turned away and flung herself on her bed. There was still nothing to be done but wait, and if only Ben Guinney had really gone nothing else was of much importance.

It was late in the afternoon that she fell into a restless sleep, and when next she opened her eyes she found that the room was in darkness. For a time she lay still, trying to remember where she was; and then, as memory returned to her, she sat up, slipped off the bed and began to grope her way towards the electric light switch by the door. Half-way across the room she suddenly stood still. A thin line of light showed beneath the door and she caught the sound of voices in the adjoining room. They were men's voices—two of them; but they were speaking in subdued tones and she could not hear what they were saying.

She tiptoed to the door, went down on her knees and peered into the keyhole. But the key was in the lock on the other side, and she could see nothing. She rose cautiously to her feet, hesitated a moment, frowning thoughtfully, and then pressed her ear against the door.

"... Just asking for trouble," said a voice which she recognized as Lavine's, "and you've got no right to do it. There's others to think of besides yourself. You must have been crazy."

"Sure I'm Crazy."

Josephine's hands were suddenly clenched, and it was all she could do to prevent herself crying out. There was no mistaking that voice—it was Guinney's. Guinney was in there—talking to Lavine—he hadn't gone away....

"And I fancy you'd be crazy, Lavine," continued Guinney, "if you'd had my experiences. You've never been in Smoky Cell, have you? You've never walked into the Death House and seen the chair ready for you to sit in, and the electrician waiting to pull the switch, and the doctor waiting to sign your death certificate, have you? Well, I have, and you can take it from me it's the kind of experience a man doesn't easily forget. I'm not forgetting it, and I'm not forgetting the guy that put me through it."

"You're crazy," repeated Lavine. "With all the police in the United States searching for you, to hang around here—"

"You bet I'm hanging around," interrupted Guinney. "Do you ever have dreams, Lavine, about the things you want to do? Well, I dreamed that way when I was in the Death House, and now I've the chance of seeing my dreams come true and I'm not going to miss it. I'm going to get Tricks O'Regan. Once I've done that I reckon I could die happy—but if I die doing it. I'm going to do it!"

"You've got no sense, Ben," said Lavine irritably. "O'Regan doesn't matter. It'll do you no kind of good to get him, and maybe it'll do you every kind of harm. You just leave O'Regan and clear out right now—"

"I'll be clearing out in the morning. You've got my instructions, Lavine: you're to have the car at the cross-roads at five o'clock, and we'll be away before it's light."

"Far better to leave tonight, Ben—"

"I tell you I'm not leaving," Guinney interrupted angrily. "I'm getting O'Regan—see? I'm getting him tonight."

"Then get him in the street, Ben."

"What a chance!" exclaimed Guinney. "O'Regan's taking no trouble to protect himself, but at the first shot every road out of town would be blocked. He wants to get me—that's his game. But his game won't come off this time. I'm getting him, you see. And I'm getting him in the only place where I can be sure of getting him. I'm getting him in his own apartment."

"You're mad, Ben, to run the risk. You can easily drop him in the street—"

"Maybe I can; but I'm not doing it. Being dropped in the street isn't the kind of death I've planned for Tricks O'Regan. There's nothing in being dropped that way, without knowing it's going to happen. O'Regan's going to know—see? He's going to see it coming to him, watch it get nearer and nearer, the same as I did in the Death House. And before he gets it I've a few things to

say to him, and the pleasure of saying 'em is going to be worth the risk. Besides, there's going to be mighty little risk. He'll get the works in his apartment, and before Spellman hears that he's due for promotion we'll be out of the country."

"Say, listen, Ben," urged Lavine. "O'Regan may have somebody home with him—"

"Then I'll wait till that somebody goes."

"You've a nerve, Ben, going to his apartment—"

"Maybe I have. But my luck's in just now, Lavine, and I guess I'm backing it. And the risk isn't as big as you fancy. O'Regan's apartment is the one place where he'd count on being safe and won't be expecting me."

"Perhaps you're right. But I think dropping him on the street—"

"Then you drop him."

"Not me!" said Lavine promptly. "I'm no killer, Ben—"

"Who's asking you to be? All you've got to do is to have the car where I told you at five o'clock. I'm counting on that, mind you. If I'm to make any get-away you've got to be there prompt."

The voice grew fainter and Josephine could hear no more of what was said; but she heard the door opened, and a few moments later the sound of a car being driven away told her that Guinney had left.

She switched on the light, noticed that her hand was shaking, and suddenly realized that the room was swaying around her. She sank into a chair and pressed her knuckles against her temples. She mustn't faint. She must think. Tricks was in terrible danger, and she must warn him. Somehow she must get to him, tell him not to go to his apartment, that Guinney would be there waiting for him, determined to kill him....

She sprang to her feet, hurried to the window, flung it wide open, grasped the bars outside and shook them furiously. But she only hurt her arms and wrenched her shoulders. She turned away from the window. It was stupid to try that sort of thing—stupid to lose her head. She must keep cool at all costs and think. There must be some way....

She heard the door unlocked and glanced quickly round as Lavine came into the room.

"Good evening, Miss Brady."

She stared at him in silence.

"I've come to tell you that we'll be moving on in the morning," said Lavine, "and you'd best be packing up anything you want to take. We'll be starting just before five, so if you want a few hours' sleep you'll have to take it soon."

"Starting for where?" she asked.

"Quite a long trip," he replied. "Maybe we'll go as far as Canada. It depends."

"On Ben Guinney?"

"Of course."

"And if I'd rather not make the trip, Mr. Lavine?"

He smiled.

"You'll make it all the same," he told her. "My orders are to take you along, and I'm taking you. If you've anything to say about it, you can say it to Ben Guinney."

She sighed.

"I don't understand in the least what it is all about," she said. "Why take me at all? And why keep me shut up here? I can't do Guinney any harm now, can I? Everybody knows all about him, and nothing I could tell the police could possibly make things worse for him than they are. Even if I did tell Captain O'Regan that it was Guinney who shot Mr. Schnitzer—I suppose that's what he was afraid of, wasn't it?"

"Maybe," admitted Lavine. "But that isn't of much account now."

"Then why not let me go? Why keep me locked up here and then want to cart me off to Canada—"

"Guinney has his reasons, Miss Brady, and I don't blame him. He's got an idea he'd like to lead the quiet life in future."

"But what has that to do with me?"

Lavine smiled.

"He doesn't fancy leading it alone, that's all," he said. "You see, Miss Brady, you're a mighty pretty girl, and Guinney's kind of taken a fancy to having you with him—"

She cut him short with an angry gesture.

"Then if you've any decent feelings at all, Mr. Lavine, you'll let me go now."

He shook his head.

"Decent feelings?" he said. "No, Miss Brady, I guess I haven't any. I'm not a policeman any longer." He went out, and she heard the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER XXV

JOSEPHINE did not try to sleep. When she had packed her bag she continued her restless pacing of the room. She felt desperately helpless. Several times she went to the door and hammered on it with her clenched fists, but nothing happened. She knew that nothing would happen.. It was useless expecting any help from Lavine; he was hand in glove with Guinney and even if he had been willing to help her she knew that he would not dare.

It was useless expecting any help from anyone—useless expecting a miracle to happen. Nothing would happen until five o'clock in the morning, and then it would be too late. Guinney by that time would have done what he wanted to do, and she would be with him in the car, heading for Canada. It did not seem to matter what might happen to her. All that mattered was Tricks O'Regan—to get to him, to warn him, to prevent his going to his apartment. And that she could not do. He would walk into the trap blindly, unsuspecting, and find Guinney there—Guinney with his gun in his hand, smiling, gloating, jeering....

She sat for a long time on the edge of her bed with her elbows resting on her knees and her face buried in her hands. It was the ringing of the telephone bell in the next room that roused her. She heard Lavine's "Hallo!" and instantly tiptoed across to the door and pressed her ear against the panels.

"Sure it's me, Ben," Lavine was saying. "Going along there now? There's no knowing what time he'll arrive. Might be any time, and he might not go at all. I've known him stay at his office all night.... Yes, I'll be there. Five o'clock. But listen, Ben, you're mad! We could leave tonight and be well away by the morning. There's no sense in hanging around.... You'd best leave it, Ben.... But listen.... Maybe you'll finish up owing a bit more, Ben. I guess I'll bring the car along right now.... Sure.... O.K., I'll bring her. Five o'clock prompt."

The bell tinkled as Lavine replaced the receiver, and she stepped quickly from the door and seated herself in an armchair. Scarcely had she done so when the door was unlocked and Lavine came in.

"Packed your things?"

She nodded.

"All ready to start?"

"I shall be ready at five o'clock."

Her eyes were on the door that stood open behind him. She could see the telephone from where she sat. If only she could reach it...

"We're not waiting till five o'clock," Lavine told her. "We're leaving now."

She glanced at him in surprise.

"But you told me—"

"Never mind what I told you," interrupted Lavine irritably. "I'm telling you now that we're not waiting till five."

If only she could get him away from that door! But she mustn't keep looking at it. She mustn't let Lavine guess what was in her mind. She must somehow get him away—farther into the room....

"Is—is Guinney ready?"

Lavine frowned.

"Guinney won't be coming," he said. "Not tonight, I mean. He'd be leaving on his own, and we'll be picking him up later."

His eyes avoided hers as he spoke, and he seemed awkward and ill at ease. She looked at him steadily. "Does Guinney know that?" she asked.

Lavine took a quick step towards her.

"Say, what do you mean by that?" he demanded angrily. "What do you take me for? What do you mean by 'Does Guinney know?' He's a friend of mine, isn't he? I wouldn't let him down, would I?"

"Probably you would, if it suited you."

"You've got no cause to say that—"

"You let Tricks O'Regan down, and if you'd let him down you'd let anyone down."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You must think what you like," he said. "It makes no difference. But I give you my word I wouldn't let Ben Guinney down. It's all on the square. Ben's just been on the telephone. He prefers to make his own getaway tonight, and we've fixed a place for me to pick him up in the morning. I'm not ratting."

But he was. She knew he was leaving Guinney in the lurch because he was scared, because he didn't dare wait until five o'clock, because he thought Guinney was mad to hang around after Tricks O'Regan when by five in the morning they could be safely out of the country. That was Lavine, the dishonest ex-policeman, all over, she thought scornfully. But it was no concern of hers. After all, she would rather travel without Ben Guinney than with him.

Guinney was not a coward, anyway, as Lavine was, and it would be easier to handle Lavine alone if it came to the point. Ben Guinney wouldn't hesitate to shoot if he wanted to, but Lavine would. Yes, she'd be better off without Guinney, and if he got caught again it would be no more than he deserved.

And if only she could reach that telephone he almost certainly would be caught. . . .

"All right, Mr. Lavine," she said; "it's no use quarrelling anyway. We can't quarrel all the way to Canada. How soon do we start?"

"Right now."

"Shall I get my hat and coat on?"

"Yes; the car's ready."

She got up, crossed to the cupboard, took out her hat and coat and put them on. Then, picking up her handbag, she waved a hand towards the suitcase that stood at the foot of the bed.

"Will you bring that for me, please?"

"Sure."

He stepped quickly towards the case, and as he did so Josephine suddenly darted to the door, flung it open, slipped through and slammed it behind her. She grasped the key and tried to turn it. The lock refused to turn, and she tried again, straining desperately at it so that the key bit into her fingers. She joined her left hand to her right and twisted with all the strength she could muster; and as she did so the door was wrenched open and Lavine's hand gripped her arm.

"Very cute, my dear," he said. "Going to have a word with O'Regan, eh? Sorry to disappoint you."

She tried to pull her arm free, but he held it fast, smiling.

"Take my advice," he said, "and forget Tricks O'Regan. He's no kind of use to you now, and if you're counting on him coming along and working a gallant rescue, you're going to have a severe disappointment. He didn't manage it last time, and it would be just the same again. You can rule O'Regan right out—for good and all."

She made no reply, and, with his hand still grasping her arm, he led her from the room.

There was a saloon car at the door, and Lavine, opening the rear door, urged her in and dumped her suitcase beside her.

"Don't try getting out," he said, "unless you fancy a broken neck. We'll be doing seventy most of the way. And if you try screaming as we pass a policeman ..." He pulled a gun from his pocket, showed it to her, and slipped it back.

Her smile was scornful.

"That would be very impressive, Mr. Lavine," she said, "if you had the pluck to use it. But you haven't."

"No? Well, I wouldn't bank on that, my dear, if I were you."

He shut the door, got into the driver's seat and set the car in motion.

The blinds were not drawn this time, and Josephine peered eagerly through the windows, trying to discover her whereabouts; but what little she could see of the country through which they were passing was quite unfamiliar, and after a few minutes she leaned back in her seat and made an effort to think clearly.

If anything was to be done, it must be done quickly. Every moment she was being carried farther away from Tricks O'Regan, and every moment Tricks was getting nearer returning to his apartment and finding himself gazing at the muzzle of Guinney's gun. She had no idea what she could do; she only knew that she must do something. Should she jump for it? She glanced out of the window and shuddered at the thought. They were travelling at a furious speed, and jumping would almost certainly mean a broken neck. No, jumping would be of no use. She would never reach Tricks that way. She must find some better way than that. If only she had a gun!

She closed her eyes and was very still, because she felt that the stiller she could keep the better she would be able to think. She mustn't get restless and excited; her only chance was to remain quite cool and keep on thinking. There must be some way....

Lavine shot a swift glance over his shoulder and smiled as he caught a glimpse of her huddled, with closed eyes, in the corner. She had fallen asleep, he imagined, which was the best thing she could do. He wanted no trouble at this part of the journey; he would probably have trouble enough with her later. There were other matters to be considered just at the moment. Guinney, for instance. Guinney was not the kind to forgive a man who let him down, and if he got clear away from O'Regan's place tonight, it would be necessary to avoid meeting him again. But that should not be very difficult. Guinney had himself to look after and would hardly start scouring the country for him. Nor for Josephine. No woman mattered to Guinney that much. Not for long, anyway.

O'Regan was a different proposition. If O'Regan came through tonight's encounter with Guinney—and you never knew with Tricks; he had come through worse encounters before this—he would methodically comb the world if he had set his heart on finding Josephine. He was that sort; and if it came to the point, there wouldn't be much to choose between meeting O'Regan again and meeting Ben Guinney. It was too much to hope, he supposed, that Guinney and O'Regan would kill each other, but that

solution would suit him better than any. Still, there wasn't much chance, if he was careful, of running into either of them. He would lie low for a while, and as long as he kept a sharp eye on Josephine and didn't trust her too far...

Something touched the back of his neck—something hard, smooth, cold. He started, and was about to turn his head when he heard Josephine speaking to him. Her voice was as hard and cold and smooth as the thing that was pressing against his flesh.

"Keep your hands on the wheel, Lavine," she said, "and do just as I tell you. If you don't, I shall press the trigger. I shan't miss you at this distance."

Lavine's hands gripped the wheel more tightly, but otherwise he remained motionless.

"Say, Miss Brady, what's the great idea?"

"You'll see in a second. Keep still."

She leaned forward over the back of his seat, thrust her hand into the pocket of his coat and took out his gun. She glanced at it and saw that it was loaded.

"And now, Lavine," she said, "you'll do just as I say."

"For God's sake," he exclaimed, "take that darned gun away. It might go off. If we just find a bump in the road... Take it away, d'you hear? I'm not moving."

He felt the pressure leave his neck.

"Sure," said Josephine. "And you can have it if you like, Lavine, instead of your own gun. I'm keeping that."

Again she leaned forward and thrust her hand into the pocket of his coat.

"You can take your left hand off the wheel, Lavine," she said, "and get the gun out if you want to."

He hesitated for a moment, frowning; and then his hand went to his pocket and his fingers closed over the cold, hard object within. Suddenly he jerked it out and glanced at it. It was a box-spanner.

"Not so bad, eh?" said Josephine. "I found it in the back seat—tucked behind the cushion. Felt just like a gun, didn't it?"

Lavine made no reply. He tossed the spanner on the floor.

"But I've got a real gun now," continued the girl, "so just listen carefully. Stop the car."

Lavine was silent, and the needle of the speedometer crept up another five miles an hour.

"Stop the car, d'you hear?"

"Oh yes, I hear."

"Stop it at once, or I shall shoot."

"I guess I'd think twice before shooting, girlie. We're doing sixty. What happens when you shoot the driver of a car that's doing sixty?"

Josephine frowned. She hadn't thought of that.

"All the same, if you don't stop I'm going to shoot."

"O.K. shoot," said Lavine, with a grin, "and when they clear us up they won't know which is me and which is you."

Josephine bit her lip. He was right. If he kept the car going at that speed, she dared not shoot. The certain result would be a ghastly smash, and getting smashed up wouldn't save Tricks O'Regan.

She turned to the window, let it down and thrust out her head. It was raining slightly now and she saw the road slipping by like a black, oily stream. It would be safer to jump for it than risk a smash by shooting Lavine. Even if she only shot him in the arm, the crash was inevitable. Safer? But if there was one faint chance in a million that she might not be killed, she must take the risk. There was no other way. Lavine did not intend to stop, and every second was precious. Her left hand found the handle of the door.

"The road's mighty hard," said Lavine. "I wouldn't risk it if I were you."

She made no reply. She leaned out of the window, peering ahead, her eyes suddenly bright with excitement. There was a danger sign ahead—rushing towards them. She could see it clearly now in the light of the headlamps—a dangerous bend. Lavine could never get round it at this speed....

Lavine, too, had evidently seen the sign. She felt the car slacken speed slightly, and leaned still farther out of the window, her right hand, with the gun in it, swinging free. She saw the corner clearly—a sharp bend to the right; saw the hedge leaping towards them, felt the car swing violently as Lavine turned the wheel. And as the car turned sharply she caught a glimpse of the off front wheel, raised her gun, aimed as deliberately as she could at the tyre, and pressed the trigger.

She heard a loud report and felt the car lurch and slither sickeningly. She saw sky and road and trees swirling crazily round her, and then, with a crash of breaking metal and shattered glass, the car was suddenly still.

Josephine found that she was lying on the wet road, her hand still grasping the gun. She sat up, knelt, and then got carefully to her feet. She glanced swiftly around. She saw the car lying on its side against the bank, looking strangely helpless, and went unsteadily towards it. Lavine was still in the driving-seat, lying limply across the steering-wheel, motionless. His hat had fallen off and she noticed that his hair was full of tiny sparkling fragments of glass from the windscreen. There was a long, jagged cut in his forehead. She saw that he was breathing, and turned away. He must take his chance. She could do nothing for him, anyway, and she had no time to waste. She must get to Tricks....

She turned and set off at a run along the road, praying that a car might come along. She had no idea where she was, and for all she knew she might be running in the wrong direction. But she felt that she could not stand still and wait. She must keep moving, keep doing something. She ran on and on....

For almost half an hour she struggled on, and then, as she saw the headlights of a car approaching from the direction in which she was moving, she stepped into the middle of the road and stood still, waving her hand. The car pulled up within a few yards of her and a man got out and came towards her. He was wearing police uniform.

"What on earth—" he began; but she cut him short.

"You must take me—please—at once—to Police Headquarters. It's terribly urgent—how far is it?"

"Maybe it's ten miles," replied the policeman. "But I guess I can't take you without a mighty good reason."

"You must," she insisted. "You mustn't waste a second. I must get to Captain O'Regan and tell him... Oh, for God's sake don't waste time talking! Take me." The policeman scratched his head.

"The trouble is, miss, I've got my duty to do, and unless it concerns—"

"This is your duty," she interrupted, "and it does concern you. Ben Guinney concerns you, doesn't he?" The policeman stared.

"Ben Guinney?"

"Yes. I've information about him to give to Captain O'Regan, and there's not a second to be lost—"

"If it concerns Ben Guinney, miss," said the policeman, waving a hand towards the car, "the quicker you hop aboard the better."

She got into the seat beside him and the machine moved off; and for the next quarter of an hour, as she sat staring through the windscreen, she said nothing but, "Faster—for God's sake go faster!"

Before the car had stopped outside the Police Headquarters, she jumped out, sped in past the policeman on duty outside, and flung open the door of Tricks O'Regan's office.

Lieutenant Spellman, seated at his table, glanced up, saw her, noted the mud-splashed clothes, the dishevelled hair, the pale face, the scared, anxious eyes, and the gun in her hand, and opened his eyes and mouth very wide.

"Wanting anything?" he inquired. And then he sprang to his feet. "Say, Miss Brady, I'm sorry; I didn't recognize—"

"I want Captain O'Regan. Is he here?"

"Afraid he's not. If there's anything I can do—"

"Where is he?"

"He's gone," Spellman told her. "But I'm in charge here, and if there's anything wrong—"

"Gone?" repeated Josephine, in a queer, strained voice. "Gone—where?"

"Home," said Spellman, "to his apartment. The best part of an hour ago."

CHAPTER XXVI

AS he approached the entrance to the apartment-house O'Regan glanced quickly around. But there was no car in sight, and the sidewalk was deserted. He strode in without another glance to right or left, entered the elevator and went up to the second floor. Outside the door of his apartment he paused, listening, then, drawing his gun, he suddenly flung open the door and stepped swiftly aside, half expecting, as he did so, to hear the crack of a revolver.

But nothing happened, and after a moment's hesitation he switched on his electric torch, stepped into the doorway and sent the beam sweeping round the room. Then, pressing down the switch of the electric light he went in and shut the door behind him.

He stood for a few moments with his back to the door, while his eyes searched the room for some sign of an intruder. But everything was just as he had left it, and with a smile he stepped forward, tossed his hat on to a chair and moved towards the door that led into his bedroom.

The telephone bell rang, and he halted, turned, strode to the small table on which the instrument stood, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"That you, Chief?"

"Yes."

"Spellman here. You all right?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"I guess you know why, Chief. Listen: I'm coming right along now. You ought to have stayed here, and I'm coming along to your place—"

"To take care of me?"

"Well, I'm uneasy," replied Spellman. "I don't like the idea of your being there on your own. I've got a feeling there's something wrong—"

"So have I, Spell, and that's why I don't want you butting in and spoiling it. You stay just where you are. That's an order—understand?"

"Say, listen, Chief—"

"And if you disobey it, I'll be firing you in the morning."

"You've got too much nerve, Chief," replied Spellman.

"You're running a mighty big risk—"

"Isn't that what I'm paid for?"

"O.K.," said the Lieutenant. "But I guess I'll be ringing you up from time to time—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Spell," interrupted O'Regan. "I'm counting on a good night's rest, and if the 'phone bell rings it'll go on ringing as far as I'm concerned. So long! I'll be seeing you in the morning."

"I hope so, Chief. So long!"

O'Regan replaced the receiver and took a step towards his bedroom door, then paused. Spellman was right. Ben Guinney was an ugly customer, and there was no sense in running unnecessary risks. He crossed to the switch and turned off the light; then, going to the door of the bedroom, he flung the door open and stood aside as he had done before.

Again nothing happened, and, after sweeping the room with the beam of his torch, he switched on the light and went into the bedroom. He closed the door, locked it, and stood, gun in hand, for a few seconds, as he took a quick survey of the room. Here, too, everything was as usual. He went to the bed, peered beneath it, and straightened himself, with a faint smile. He was behaving like a nervous old woman! The blind rustled, and he spun round, crossed to the window and shut it. Then, placing his gun and torch on a small table beside him, he seated himself in an armchair, picked up a newspaper and began to read.

He did not read for long. Within five minutes he glanced at his watch, tossed the paper aside, picked up his gun and rose from his chair. Crossing to a small corner cupboard he took out a decanter of whisky, poured a little into a glass, splashed in some soda, placed the glass on the small table, laid his gun beside it and seated himself again.

For some moments he sat upright, alert, listening; and then he relaxed, picked up the glass of whisky, took a sip and replaced the glass on the table. He settled himself comfortably in his chair, folded his arms and closed his eyes. A few moments later his head nodded and his breathing was deep and regular.

There was a large cupboard in the corner of the room, used by Tricks as a wardrobe. The door had been open a few inches when he had entered, and he had given it no more than a casual glance. Now, slowly and noiselessly, the door of the wardrobe opened and the muzzle of a gun appeared. A hand, an arm, and then the door was opened wide, and Ben Guinney stepped swiftly and silently into the room. With his gun pointing towards the motionless figure in the chair, he backed towards the door, unlocked it, advanced to the small table on which lay O'Regan's gun and torch, and pulled it beyond his reach.

"You can wake up, Tricks O'Regan," he said, with a smile.

O'Regan gave no sign that he had heard.

"You can wake up, Tricks O'Regan," repeated Guinney quietly. "You didn't drink the doped whisky and you're not asleep!"

A smile appeared on O'Regan's face, and he opened his eyes.

"Keep your hands right where they are," ordered Guinney. "If you try reaching for your gun it's the last thing you'll try." He smiled amiably. "Kind of surprised, eh, O'Regan?"

Tricks shook his head.

"No," he said.

"No?" Guinney's smile broadened. "Maybe I haven't been watching you?"

"Maybe you have," agreed O'Regan. "I saw the cupboard door moving and could have shot you if I'd felt inclined."

"Is that so? Well, if you weren't a badly scared man, O'Regan, I've never seen one."

"I'm rather proud of my acting, Guinney. I've always felt I'd have made a big hit on the stage. But I've done a good deal of acting in my job one way and another."

"Huh! Ever acted a dead man?"

"It's my favourite part. No lines to learn, Guinney, and nothing to do but lie still. But you'll be finding out all about it before long. If I'd felt disposed to cast you for it you'd be playing the part now—in the cupboard."

"You could have shot me, could you? Maybe you'll start shooting now?"

"Nobody will do any shooting now."

"Sure of that, O'Regan?"

"Quite. There'll be a whole lot of talking done, but there'll be no shooting."

Guinney nodded.

"There'll be some talking, anyway," he admitted. "I've got something to tell you, Tricks."

"I knew it," said O'Regan. "I banked on that. If I hadn't believed you'd have something to tell me I'd have killed you in the cupboard."

"I'll believe you. Don't move!"

"There's nobody in Chester County quite so still as I am Guinney ."

Guinney stood gazing at him for some moments, smiling in obvious satisfaction.

"Well, Tricks O'Regan," he said at last, "I guess you've played your last trick."

"Maybe," agreed O'Regan. "But do you remember what I once told you—when you were still Perryfeld? I said that most gangsters died of overconfidence."

"Huh! But this particular one ain't dying at all—see? It's you who's booked to do the dying, Tricks."

"We shall see," smiled O'Regan. "You never know in this uncertain world, Guinney. It's just possible there's still one last trick that hasn't been played."

"There is," said Guinney; "there's my last trick—and it's a better one than you'll ever play again." His eyes narrowed. "Send me to Smoky Cell, would you, O'Regan? Well, I've got you in my Smoky Cell now, and the executioner is waiting for you, and there's no reporters to hear what's said."

"That's rough on the newspapers, Guinney. I could give them real good copy."

"Keep your hands just where they are," snapped Guinney. "Don't you try any kind of trick—see? You've not got many more minutes in this world, anyway, and I guess you don't want to cut them short. Just think up any messages you'd like to leave behind you, and I'll see they're delivered. Maybe you'd like to leave a few words for Spellman?"

"Sure I would," said O'Regan. "You might tell him I'd like my badge kept in a frame by itself and not mixed up with the others. Future generations will be interested to see it—Captain O'Regan, the man who sent Ben Guinney to the chair. Tell Spellman I'd like a little brass plate in the frame saying all the nice things he can think of to say about me, will you? But I shouldn't call to see him—just send him a line. Spellman can be mighty rude to anyone he doesn't like, and he has never liked murderers. How many times, if you'd got your deserts, should you have been in Smoky Cell, Guinney?" The gangster made a gesture of impatience.

"You don't want to waste time asking questions now, O'Regan," he said. "I'm telling you you're in Smoky Cell right now. Want to see any visitors?" He showed his teeth in a malicious smile. "I'd like to have two cages here, O'Regan," he said, "with you in one and Spellman in the other. It'd give me real pleasure to stand outside and watch you saying good-bye. I'd like to put you behind fifteen bars—long enough for you to count them."

"I've no head for figures, Guinney."

"Fifteen bars," repeated Guinney, "so as you'd count 'em and count 'em and keep on counting 'em until it drove you crazy. That's what you did to me,

O'Regan—maybe it didn't quite come off the way you intended. That's what you've done to God knows how many others. But you'll never do it to another man. I've got you now—got your life and your soul at the end of my finger. It's a grand feeling, O'Regan. Here's Tricks O'Regana—live, breathing, feeling, thinking; and when I go out of that door you'll be slumped on the floor all shapes, and they won't know what your face looked like." O'Regan's eyes never left the man's face, but he gave a slight shrug and carelessly crossed one leg over the other.

"That'll be of no importance," he said "There's some fine pictures of me in my office."

"You see that bed," continued Guinney. "Try to get a grip on the idea, O'Regan, that you'll never wake up in it again, and see how that strikes you." He nodded towards a chest of drawers that stood against the wall. "Who's the jane in the frame, Tricks?"

"She's a lady. But you don't know the meaning of that word, do you? How could you?"

Guinney scowled.

"Say, listen, O'Regan," he began furiously. "You'd best not start talking that way. Unless you want to get it over quick—"

"It's a matter of indifference to me," O'Regan interrupted. "The hour of man is appointed. You never go to church, you poor heathen, or you might have remembered that bit of Holy Writ."

Guinney, still carefully keeping O'Regan covered, crossed to the chest of drawers, glanced at the photograph and turned again to the Police Captain with a smile.

"So it's Josephine Brady, eh?" he said. "Mighty fond of little Josephine, aren't you? Sure you are. Who wouldn't be? She's a swell kid. And I'll tell you something, O'Regan—she's mighty fond of you too."

O'Regan found it hard to smile, but he managed it.

"Which just shows her good taste, eh, Guinney?"

"Mighty fond of you," repeated the other. "I reckon you don't know how fond. Maybe you won't believe it, but she fought like a devil when I tried kissing her."

"Which just shows her good taste, eh?" said Tricks again.

"I'll tell you why," added Guinney. "Because she just couldn't bear being kissed by anyone but Tricks O'Regan. She's got your picture pinned on her wall, and I'll lay any odds she never goes to bed without kissing it good night. You probably don't believe me so I'll tell you something else. That

evening, in little Josephine's apartment—I could have shot you then, O'Regan. I certainly meant to, but she shouted to you, and you just turned round in time. That gave me an idea. When a girl risks getting shot herself to save a fellow from getting a bullet—well, she's mighty fond of him."

"And that gave you the great idea, Guinney?"

"Yes," nodded Guinney. "I guess there's no harm in telling you now. She knew about Schnitzer—see?"

"You mean that Miss Brady knew that you killed Schnitzer?"

"She was there in Schnitzer's house and saw me give him the works. But she didn't dare tell you, O'Regan, did she? And when I sort of took a fancy to having her up at my place, she didn't dare refuse go. And when you went there to fetch her away, she didn't dare go with you. And why? Because she was scared of getting shot?"

"Presumably," said O'Regan. "And presumably you wouldn't have hesitated to shoot her. She had every reason to be scared."

"Is that so? Listen, O'Regan. She wasn't scared—not for herself. Told me I could shoot her if I wanted to, but she wasn't going to my place. But when I told her that if she didn't do as I said I'd bump you off—"

"You told her that?"

"Sure I did. And what did she do? She just went quiet as a lamb and promised she'd do all I said if I'd give my word not to touch Tricks O'Regan. That's how much she cares for you—the same as you care for her. And you're never going to see her again. Get that into your head. Ever kissed her, Tricks?"

O'Regan made no reply.

"You'll never kiss her now, anyway," continued Guinney. "I guess it won't make dying any easier to know she's been waiting for you and you could have had her for the asking if you'd been going to live. But you're not going to live, and maybe you'd care to know that when I've done my job here I'm going away, and Josephine is coming with me. If there's any thinking in the next world. Tricks, you can think of me and Josephine; you can think of me kissing her, holding her in my arms—"

"No!"

Guinney grinned.

"Kind of hurts, eh?"

O'Regan shook his head.

"It'll never happen. Try if you like, Guinney, and see. You won't be the first yellow dog that's scratched at the door."

Guinney's face became livid.

"Listen, O'Regan," he exclaimed furiously, "I guess you want to live, don't you?"

"I'm not so sure."

"Aren't you? Well, I am. You can't bluff me with your play-acting. O.K., I'll give you a chance to live. Go right down on your knees and beg me to let you go on living, and maybe I won't refuse. Go to it—quick!" O'Regan shook his head.

"Thanks, Guinney," he said, "but I don't somehow fancy doing that."

Guinney shrugged his shoulders.

"AH right," he said. "Will you take it sitting or standing up?"

"On my two feet, I guess."

"Then get out of that chair." Then, as O'Regan sat upright: "Wait! Before you move out of that chair, stick your hands above your head."

"Must I?"

"You must. There's going to be no tricks this time."

"All right. I don't blame you," replied O'Regan. He slowly unfolded his arms and raised his hands. And as he did so Guinney started suddenly back, his gaze fixed on O'Regan's right hand.

"What's that in your hand?" he exclaimed. "Drop it—do you hear?"

"If I drop it, there'll be no more of you or me. You know what it is, don't you? You've seen it before, at all events. I remember showing it to you in my office. It's a bomb—and the pin's out."

Guinney stared at it with horrified eyes.

"For God's sake, O'Regan, put it down!"

"It's not in your way, is it? But I'll take my hands down now if you've no objection." He lowered his hands and stood smiling thoughtfully at the bomb. "You see, Guinney," he said, "I'm a bit of a philosopher, and it doesn't matter to me which way I go out; but being a man of highly religious sentiments, I think maybe I'd have a better chance if I went out through the roof. The trouble is, from your point of view, that you could hardly avoid going with me."

"For God's sake, what's the matter with you, O'Regan? Are you kidding me?"

"Sure," smiled O'Regan. "I've a great sense of humour."

"You're crazy! Put it down, you mad fool! Suppose you let it drop?"

"Why worry? We'd know nothing about it."

Guinney forced a laugh.

"Up to your tricks again, eh, O'Regan?" he said. "Well it's a real good one this time—I'll hand you that. You've got me fair and square and I guess we'll call it a deal. I'll be going along."

He turned and went towards the door. O'Regan followed him.

"I'll stay right close to you, Guinney," he said, "just in case you should think of shooting from the door."

Guinney paused and stood for some moments, evidently at a loss. Then he pulled a cigar-case from his pocket and held it out.

"Have a cigar?"

"Thanks—no."

With a frown Guinney thrust the case back into his pocket.

"Listen O'Regan," he said in his usual friendly tone; "you're not blaming a fellow for getting out of Smoky Cell, are you?"

"Indeed I'm not; I'm only blaming him for getting in."

"Then put that machine down and let's talk."

"If I leave go of this handle, Peter will do all the talking."

"Let's get down to cases anyway, O'Regan. I came here tonight to get you. I could have plugged you any time after I left the cupboard—keep away from that table. If you reach for a gun I'll shoot."

"Why should I want a gun?" He brandished the bomb. "I've got a whole dynamite factory right here in my hand."

"Listen, Tricks," urged Guinney. "Let's call it square. I'm through with rackets. I'm getting away to Canada."

"They'll hang you in Canada, Guinney. Why not be a hundred per cent American and go to the chair?"

"That's just where I'm not going. I'll blow you to hell first."

O'Regan gave a shrug.

"Well, you're not going to Canada," he said. "I've got you and I'm not letting you go again. I've been waiting for this minute too, and took the risk of your shooting. I've got the pull on you, because you're scared of death and I'm not. Put your gun down."

"Like hell I will!"

"Then I shall have to blow you to pieces, that's all," said O'Regan. "I shall be blown to pieces with you, but it'll be a grand death—a front- page funeral, with the mayor and the alderman riding an horseback and the Stock Exchange closed out of respect for Captain Tricks O'Regan, the national hero. How's that sound, Guinney?"

"Can't you talk sense? Put that damn' thing down and be reasonable. You don't want to die. You've got everything you want—"

"Yes—I've got you. And you haven't got me, Guinney. Don't you think you have. You daren't shoot me, because if you do off goes the pineapple and you might just as well have shot yourself. But I dare drop this bomb, so you lose either way. It's not much of a chance, Guinney—men don't escape from Smoky Cell twice—but the only chance you've got of living is to put that gun down."

"I tell you I'm not doing it—"

"I'll give you until I've counted five," said O'Regan. "If your gun isn't on the table by then you'll have a chunk of pineapple."

He raised the bomb and began to count, while Guinney stood motionless, staring at him with irresolute eyes, watching his face.

"One—two-three...."

Guinney saw O'Regan's eyes move. Just for an instant they glanced towards the door, and the faintest smile came to his lips.

"Four," said O'Regan.

And then:

"Hands up, Guinney, and don't move!" said a voice.

Guinney stood motionless.

"Better do as you're told," advised O'Regan. "There's a gun covering you!"

Still the gangster hesitated, and then, very slowly, he raised his hands above his head. O'Regan stepped forward, took his gun and slipped it into his pocket.

"Damn you, O'Regan!" muttered Guinney furiously. "Damn you and your tricks!"

"No trick this time," O'Regan assured him, "it's nothing to do with me. Turn around and have a look."

Guinney turned towards the door and found himself staring at the muzzle of a revolver. Grasping the revolver, very pale and very still, stood Josephine.

"You, eh?" exclaimed Guinney. "A woman! My God! Me—Ben Guinney—the biggest gunman in the States—held up by a skirt!"

He half lowered his hands, cringing his fingers, and seemed about to spring at her.

"Don't move, Guinney," said Josephine. "Don't think I'd be afraid to shoot you, because I'm not scared of you now."

Guinney's hands went back to their original position.

"A woman!" he muttered. "Who squealed, eh? Who told you I was coming here? Lavine, did he? O.K., I'll settle with Lavine, the dirty rat! I'll teach him to squeal on Ben Guinney. Tell him that from me." He turned and faced O'Regan. "And I'll get you yet. Tricks O'Regan. Send me back to Smoky Cell, will you? Well, I got out once and I'll get out of it again. You're not the only one who knows a few tricks, O'Regan. There's not a jail in this country that can hold me if I don't want to stay. The boys will get me out. They're good boys—see? They aren't going to let Ben Guinney take the hot squat—not for all the police in the country."

"We'll see," replied O'Regan. "You'll have your chance to show us, Guinney. I'm sending you back to jail. Just stay right there without moving while I 'phone Headquarters. Keep him covered, Miss Brady; if he moves, shoot."

She nodded.

"But there's no need to 'phone, Captain O'Regan," she said. "Lieutenant Spellman is here with two men—"

"All right," said Guinney, "fetch 'em in. I'm making no trouble. You win so far, O'Regan, but you can take it from me that the fight isn't over yet. We'll be meeting again and the next time we meet I'll call your bluff all right."

"Bluff?"

"Sure—bluff," said Guinney. "You're not afraid to die, eh, O'Regan? You'd have dropped the bomb rather than let me go? Like hell you would! You wouldn't have dared to drop the bomb."

O'Regan shook his head.

"That wasn't bluff," he said. "I'd have dared to drop that bomb all right—if it would have done the least good, but it wouldn't." He glanced at the bomb in his hand and smiled. "The poor sap who sent it to me by post thought he'd scare me, I suppose, but he didn't manage to do it. Say, look, Guinney."

With a quick movement he raised his hand flung the bomb on the floor. It bounced.

"Just rubber—painted," he said, as he caught it again, "but good enough to scare you, Guinney."

Guinney's face was livid.

"Not so bad for my last trick, eh?"

Guinney mastered his fury with an effort.

"Your last trick, O'Regan?" he said. "Well, maybe you're right. I guess you'll have no chance of playing any more tricks on Ben Guinney. I've still got a trick left. I guess I've got a real good trick that's worth a dozen of your rubber bombs...."

His left hand swept down to his pocket; there came the gleam of a revolver and the next instant there was a sharp crack. Guinney staggered, swayed and collapsed in a heap on the floor, and Spellman, his smoking gun in his hand, strode into the room.

"The only way, Chief," he said. "He had another gun. You ought to have searched him. He'd have got you sure as fate."

O'Regan knelt beside the prostrate figure.

"There's nothing wrong with your shooting, Spell," he said. "That's the end of Ben Guinney."

He stood up.

"Thanks, Spell," he said. "I fancy, after all, Ben Guinney was right; he said I didn't want to die."

He glanced across at Josephine and met her eyes. "I don't—now," he added.

He went to her, took the gun from her hand and passed it to Spellman.

"Carry on, Spell, will you? I've business to attend to."

"Sure," grinned Spellman.

"I'll be along at Headquarters later."

Spellman nodded.

"No need to rush things," he said; "there's a car outside if you want one."

O'Regan turned to Josephine and grasped her by the elbow.

"Come along, Miss Brady," he said and led her from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THERE was a police car waiting by the kerb outside the house, and O'Regan, after saying a few words to the driver, opened the door, waved Josephine in and seated himself beside her. As the car started he took out his cigarette-case and offered it to her.

"Cigarette, Miss Brady?"

She took one and he gave her a light; and then, lighting one himself, he leaned back in his seat and puffed at it furiously. It was Josephine who eventually broke the silence.

"Captain O'Regan!"

"Most people call me 'Tricks', Miss Brady. Even Ben Guinney called me 'Tricks'."

"Most people call me 'Josephine'," she smiled. "Even Ben Guinney called me 'Josephine'."

"And we've kind of been through things together, haven't we?"

"We have."

"Well, then, why not 'Tricks'?"

"And why not, 'Josephine'?"

"Because I guess 'Jo's' better."

She leaned towards him and laid a hand on his sleeve. "Listen, Captain—Tricks."

she said; "there's a whole lot I've got to explain to you—"

"You've got to explain nothing, Jo," he interrupted; "not about Schnitzer, anyway."

I know all about Schnitzer. Guinney killed him and you were there and you didn't dare tell me anything because you were scared stiff of Guinney.

I know all that."

"But I want to tell you—that night we found Guinney in my rooms—"

"I know all that."

"Do you? Everything?"

"Sure. Forget it."

"And then—at Guinney's house—when you came to fetch me and I said I never wanted to see you again—"

"That was real good acting, Jo."

I couldn't have done it better myself. But I know all that."

Josephine smiled.

"Is there anything Tricks O'Regan doesn't know?"

"Mighty little," he said complacently. "I know no end of things you'd never imagine I'd know, Jo. For instance, I know you've got my picture—cut out of a newspaper—stuck on your wall with a pin. I know that because I saw it. What I don't know is why you've got it stuck on the wall at all."

"And I know," smiled Josephine, "that you've a photograph in a frame on the top of your chest of drawers. I saw it there. But I don't know how you got it." "I took it, Jo—pinched it—that night I visited your rooms. It's just another case of corruption in the Police Force. Anything else you want to know?" She glanced out of the window and then turned again towards him. "Yes," she said; "I'd like to know where we're going." "To Police Headquarters." "We're going a long way round." "Are we?" She nodded. "We've passed Police Headquarters twice already. We seem to be just driving round and round the block." "We are," grinned O'Regan. "Feeling giddy? I'll tell you something, Jo; we're going to keep on driving round and round. Those are the driver's instructions." She stared at him in amazement. "Instructions from you?" He nodded. And then, sitting upright, he took her hand in his. "Round and round and round, Jo," he said, "until—" "Until?" "Until I've kissed you, Jo." "Oh, I see." "And then round and round again, until you've promised to marry me." She was silent for some moments. Then:— "Tricks!" "Yes, Jo?" "There goes the Police Headquarters again." "I saw it. Well?" "Well," said Josephine softly, "the next time we reach it, I'd like—to be ready—to stop."