



THE

**saint**

119 35 c

MYSTERY LIBRARY

edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

# WITNESS TO DEATH

by  
**WENZELL  
BROWN**

and  
stories by  
**FRANK KANE**  
**ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE**







Page missing

THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY #2

Page missing

AUGUST 1959

# CONTENTS:

A Package for Mr. Big.....	Frank Kane..	<b>7</b>
Witness to Death.....	Wenzell Brown..	<b>43</b>
For the Good of the City		
	Arthur Somers Roche..	<b>81</b>
City in the Bottle.....	Hayden Howard..	<b>106</b>
I Want It Foolproof.....	Richard Deming..	<b>145</b>





# A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

by Frank Kane

JOHNNY LIDDELL TURNED off Park Avenue and headed east along Fifty-sixth Street. A fog, reminiscent of the clouds of smoke at the bar he had just left, had come up from nowhere. Passersby were ghoulish shapes behind an opaque curtain, street lights a yellow blur in its swirling depths.

His apartment was in a converted old brownstone house in the middle of the block. As he reached the steps leading to the vestibule, a girl materialized from the gloom, caught him by the sleeve.

"I thought you'd never get here, Johnny Liddell."

He had an evanescent glimpse of a small pert face, ash

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

blonde hair and wide blue eyes. She kept looking over her shoulder as though she feared and dreaded the shadowy fingers of the fog.

"If I'd known you were here, I'd have run all the way home," he grinned. "Trouble is, the finance company repossessed my crystal ball."

Her fingers tightened on his sleeve. "I need help, Liddell. Bad. I didn't know where else to go."

He could see her face more sharply in the vestibule glow, and the stark terror in her eyes alarmed him. He gripped her by the elbow, tried to propel her up the stairs. "Come on up and tell me about it."

The girl shook her arm free. "I can't. I've got to get back." She pushed a square package into his hand. "Just keep this for me. It's very important. They'd kill me to get their hands on it!"

Liddell turned the package over in his hand, slipped it into his jacket pocket. "If you're really in trouble, let me come with you and—"

The girl shook her head. "They mustn't know I've seen you. That would only make it worse." She caught him by the sleeve again. "All I want you to do is protect that package until tomorrow night."

"What then?"

"I'll have the rest of what I need. I'll call you then, and tell you where to meet me." Suddenly, she stiffened, her eyes searching the shadows at his back. "I think they're coming, Johnny," she whispered in a frightened voice, "remember what I said. Please, Johnny!" Then, before Liddell could stop her, she glided away into the fog. He made a half-hearted attempt to follow.

"Wait a minute. I want to talk to you," he called after her. The only answer was the tapping of her heels as she ran down the street.

Liddell pulled the package from his pocket, examined

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

it curiously. It measured about four inches wide by nine long, and was about a quarter of an inch thick. He weighed it in the palm of his hand, and decided it contained sheets of paper folded in half. He returned the package to his pocket, turned to start up the steps.

He stiffened as he felt the snout of a gun jabbed into his back.

"Don't go away, Chum," a heavy voice muttered into his ear. "You got something that belongs to me."

"That's a matter of opinion. *Your* opinion."

The muzzle of the gun bored deeper into Liddell's back. "Maybe. But I've got what it takes to back up my opinion. Where is it?"

Liddell shrugged. "I haven't the faintest idea what the hell you're talking about." He started to turn, but decided against it at the muttered warning from behind. "What's it look like?"

"Le's get back behind these steps, and I'll tell you all about it."

Liddell permitted himself to be guided to what had once been the entrance to the basement apartment under the steps. Now it was used for the storage of trash cans. As soon as they had melted into the deeper shadows, Liddell gambled on a desperate move. His hand streaked for his left lapel.

The tips of his fingers just brushed the butt of the .45 in his shoulder holster when the man in back of him swung. The first blow knocked Liddell to his knees. The second flattened him against the pavement.

It seemed hours before consciousness again came knocking at his skull. From a knock it developed into a tumultuous pounding that increased in volume until it threatened to deafen him. Liddell opened his eyes, groaned hollowly, and tried to rectify his mistake by closing his eyes again. But the display of multi-colored lights refused to go away.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

After a moment, he was able to open his eyes, was able to keep them from rolling back into his head. He even managed to sit up. Pulling off the dented fedora that had saved him from even more serious injury, he gingerly explored the tender area in the back of his ear with the tips of his fingers. There was a lump, but there was no sign of broken skin.

Laboriously he pulled himself to his feet, steadying himself against the wall until his head stopped spinning. Automatically, he felt for his gun, was mildly surprised to find it still in its holster. Then, remembering, he felt for the package the girl had given him for safe keeping.

It was gone from his pocket.

Liddell swore fervently under his breath, dug out a packet of matches, searched the areaway in the forlorn hope that it might have fallen out of his pocket. There was no package.

He was about to blow out the match when he noticed half a dozen half-smoked cigarettes scattered around on the stone floor. The match burned down, burned his finger. He shook it out with a muttered curse, lit another.

The cigarettes bore a faint red stain on their ends. Apparently the girl had stood here waiting for him to return, or hiding from the men following her. Liddell bent over, picked up an empty match packet. The cover was imprinted with an advertisement for a roadhouse called the Dude Ranch on Route 22 outside of Armonk.

He consulted his watch, found it to be a few minutes short of 9:30. He estimated that it would take him less than half an hour to drive to the Dude Ranch.

He shook out the match, climbed the stairs, headed for a cold drink and a hot shower.

The Dude Ranch was a sprawling white frame building



## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

set off the road roughly two miles north of Armonk. Johnny Liddell turned his convertible over to the doorman, a big six footer in a maroon uniform. The doorman motioned with his hands and an attendant stepped from the gloom, climbed into the car, swung it expertly away from the entrance in the direction of the parking lot beyond.

The reception hall was filled with small groups of chattering patrons dressed formally. Overhead a pall of smoke stirred restlessly in the breeze from the opened door. At the far end of the hall a staircase led to an upper floor while off to the left one of the original parlors had been converted into a lounge. A bar that ran the full length of the lounge looked inviting, seemed as good a place as any to start, so Liddell wandered in, found elbow room, leaned against the bar.

The white-jacketed barman came over, flashed a smile from a pair of thin lips that were having trouble restraining an oversized denture. His hair was parted in the middle and brushed down and back. His eyes were watery, red-rimmed. "What'll it be tonight?"

"Brandy, pal. Make it Masson," said Liddell.

The barman nodded, reached back to the back bar, snagged a bottle of Masson DeLuxe. He produced a glass from under the bar, filled it to within a hair's breadth of the top.

Liddell turned his back to the bar, looked around. The operators of the Dude Ranch had retained as much of the flavor of the original parlor as had seemed feasible. At the far end of the room an archway had been broken through the wall into what was obviously a supper room beyond. A broad-shouldered man in a tuxedo presided over a velvet rope that was stretched across the doorway.

Liddell swung back to face the bartender, studying him. "How are chances of getting inside?"

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

The man behind the bar shrugged. "I wouldn't know, mister." He looked down at the folded bill that had materialized in Liddell's hand, scratched his chin. "That for me?"

"It could be," Liddell nodded. "I just made myself a bet you wouldn't know who could pass me by that guy with the rope."

The bartender reached over, snagged the bill. "You lose. The guy to see is Angelo." He looked up and down the bar, dropped his voice. "They like to keep the inside room just for the dressed up stiffs. You tell Angelo you're in from out of town and the boys told you to drop by and look the place over. That'll do it."

"What boys?"

The bartender grinned. "The boys. He'll know." He flat-footed it down the bar, pushed a button on the back bar. After a moment, a tuxedoed man went up to the bartender, conferred with him. The bartender nodded in Liddell's direction, then seemed to lose interest. The man in the tuxedo walked down to where he stood.

"Good evening, sir," his voice had the faintest trace of an accent. His eyes hop-scotched over Liddell's informal attire disapprovingly. "You wished to see somebody?"

Liddell nodded. "Angelo."

"Mr. Angelo?" The tuxedoed man's eyebrows arched. "Is it something personal?" He tapped his teeth indecisively.

"Why don't you let him decide that. Just tell him one of the boys from out of town is passing through. Just thought I'd give the place a quick buzz."

The man in the tuxedo hesitated, then walked over to a phone set in the wall on the far end of the bar. He pressed one of the buttons on its base, held it to his ear. He replaced the instrument after a moment, walked back to where Liddell stood.

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

"Mr. Angelo will be out in a moment, sir."

Liddell nodded, swung back to the bar, signalled for a refill. The bartender picked up two bills from the bar, rang up the drinks, slid some silver back. He looked past Liddell's shoulder. "Here comes Angelo now."

Liddell turned to face a two hundred pound fashion plate in a midnight blue tuxedo, a red carnation in his button hole, a lazy smile pasted on his thick red lips. His eyes were round, flat, lustreless discs set behind two puffy discolored mounds of flesh.

"You wanted to see me?" The lazy smile did not reach the cold eyes as the newcomer looked Liddell over slowly, carefully.

"Yeah. If you're Angelo."

The big man bobbed his head. "What can I do for you?"

Liddell indicated the doorway with a toss of his head. "Haven't you got a back table in there where a peasant from the sticks can have a look around. The boys didn't tell me you were so particular."

The smile on the thick lips seemed more relaxed. Angelo dry-washed his hands, nodded. "Of course." He adjusted his cuffs, snapped over his shoulder. "What tables are available in the main dining room?"

The man in the tuxedo consulted a seating chart. "Nineteen and twenty-eight."

Angelo snapped his fingers, waited until the man in the tuxedo had passed him a menu, stepped aside, motioned Liddell to precede him. "I'm sure you'll be satisfied with the table we have for you."

At the entrance to the dining room, Angelo stepped ahead, led the way down three crimson carpeted steps, along the tables that skirted the dance floor. He stopped at one facing the bandstand, pulled back the chair. "Will this be satisfactory?"

Liddell nodded. "Fine."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Angelo nodded, opened the menu for him, waved down a waiter. "If there is anything else, don't hesitate to call." He bowed slightly, glided off. On the way to the door, he stopped to smile at a customer here, wave to a customer there or to bend over a table to talk to a favored one.

The waiter took Liddell's order for a sandwich and a drink, disappeared. Johnny leaned back, sighed, realized that he had come to the Dude Ranch with very slim hopes of seeing the girl. His eyes jumped from table to table in the crowded room, saw no familiar faces. He dug into his pocket, found he was down to his last cigarette. He hung it from the corner of his mouth, touched a match to it.

The waiter deposited his drink and sandwich on the table.

"Can you get me a pack of cigarettes?" Liddell asked.

The waiter shook his head. "I'll send the cigarette girl over." He looked up, scowled at the activity on the bandstand, shook his head. "It'll have to wait until the floor show's over. No serving during the numbers."

Liddell nodded. "Whenever she can."

The band broke into an introductory chord, the house lights went down. A long yellow spot stabbed through the dimness of the room to outline the figure of the girl emcee. She undulated onto the stage, made a production of waiting for the overhead mike to be lowered to within range, broke out into a brassy song of welcome. Her voice was heavy, roughened by whisky and overuse.

After her song, a line of girls scampered onto the floor in spangled brassieres and satin tights. They went through a tortured routine with approximate precision, twisted and squirmed under the colored spot, their bare legs flashing, their bare stomachs undulating. They ran off the stage to a smattering of applause, gave way to a piano single that played and sang a series of double entendre songs in a manner that left only one interpretation.



## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

The line of girls was back with different costumes but the same steps, the same bare midriffs and insufficient brassieres. This time they made way for the brassy voiced emcee. She leaned against the piano, threw her head back and gave herself over to a wail of unrequited love.

Liddell was debating the advisability of calling it quits when he saw a blonde with a cigarette tray suspended around her neck picking her way through the tables in his direction. She was loosely put together in a way that flowed tantalizingly when she walked. Her legs were unencumbered by a pair of breathtakingly brief shorts. Above, she filled a white silk peasant blouse to a point that endangered its seams.

There was no mistaking the corn-colored hair, the pert face. It was the girl who had given him the package.

She didn't recognize him until she stopped at his table. Her eyes widened, she sucked her breath noisily through her teeth. "You wanted some cigarettes, sir?" she asked in a loud voice. As she lowered her head her voice dropped. "What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

Liddell took a pack of cigarettes, dropped a bill on the tray. "I've got to talk to you."

"I can't. They may be watching me."

"You've got to. Something's happened. I was sapped. The package is gone."

In the dimness of the room, her face looked ghastly. Her make-up stood out as smudges against the sudden pallor of her face. She flashed a cheap counterfeit of her usual smile. "Thank you, sir." Her eyes were haunted, scared. "In the parking lot in ten minutes." She turned and picked her way through the tables toward a rear entrance.

Liddell casually tore the pack open, selected a cigarette. As he lit it, his eyes scanned the room. As far as he could tell, no one was paying any particular attention. He waited until the floor show was over and the house lights went

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

up. Then, he laid two bills next to his glass, got up, walked out through the bar to the parking lot beyond.

The fog had lifted, had given way to a light drizzle. The blonde was no place in sight. He lit another cigarette from the butt of the one he was smoking, stared around.

The hiss was so low he almost missed it. The second time it came he could make out the shape of the girl in the shadow of the building. He took his time walking over, made sure he wasn't being watched.

"What were you saying in there?" the girl asked breathlessly without preliminaries. "You weren't serious? About the package, I mean."

Liddell nodded. "No sooner had you gone than someone shoved a gun in my ribs, marched me under the stairs and conked me." He rubbed the sensitive spot behind his ear ruefully. "I thought maybe you could steer me onto whoever it was. I'd like to return the compliment."

"I don't know." There was a hopeless note in the girl's voice. "But I do know one thing. They must have followed me. They know what I'm trying to do."

Liddell dropped his cigarette, ground it out with his heel. "Look, baby. I can't hit anybody if I keep swinging in the dark. Tell me what this is all about and I may be able to help."

The girl hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "All right. But I haven't got time now. They mustn't miss me. Can you meet me later?"

"Now, wait a minute. If these characters know that—"

"They won't try anything tonight. They think they can take care of me whenever they're ready. Meet me tonight and I'll tell you everything you've got to know."

"Okay. Where and when?"

"My place. The Hillcrest Court. It's about three miles north of here. Cabin Sixteen."

Liddell nodded. "Why don't I pick you up here when

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

you get through?"

"Do it my way. Meet me at the cabin. I'll be through here at two. And any time after that is okay."

Liddell started to argue, shrugged. "Okay. I'll be there." He waited until the scraping of a door and the soft click of a latch told him she was gone. Then, he pulled another cigarette from his pocket, stuck it in the corner of his mouth, lit it. He moodily contemplated the burning end of the match until it had burned down almost to his fingers, blew it out, swore softly.

Hillcrest Court turned out to be a mean little cluster of paint-peeled pre-fabricated cabins huddled off Route 22 about five miles out of Armonk. A noisy neon that spilled a red stain over the lawn and trees in front of the office chattered that cabins were available for transient or permanent guests. Liddell drove past the entrance to the court, pulled the car to a stop at the side of the road, consulted his watch in the dim light of the dash. It showed 2:20.

He cut his motor, doused his lights. Hillcrest Court was surrounded by a heavy growth of underbrush. He left the car at the side of the road, hit in through the bushes in the direction of the cluster of cabins. After a few minutes of stumbling through the bushes, he came to a small clearing that backed on the court. Liddell counted the cabins from the office, estimated that the eighth cottage on the left would normally be Cabin 16.

The weeds in back of the cabin grew knee high, effectively covering an accumulation of beer cans and bottles. Slowly, carefully, he picked his way to the rear of what he figured to be Cabin 16. He listened outside the paper-thin wall, heard no sounds. There was no car in the driveway separating Cabin 16 from the one on the right. He flattened himself against the wall, worked his way around to the front.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

He caught the knob, turned it cautiously. It was unlocked. He pushed open the door, stepped in, kicked the door shut with his foot. He tugged his .45 from its holster, transferred it to his left hand, felt along the wall for the light switch. He pressed it and the shabby room sprang into blinding brilliance.

There was a badly made double bed, a rickety wooden dresser with a speckled mirror hanging askew over it, a half open door that led to a lavatory. The only light in the room came from the unshaded fixture in the ceiling that spilled the yellow, revealing light into all but the corners of the room.

The blonde lay across the bed, her face turned to the wall. She wore one shoe; the other had been kicked into a corner. Her corn-colored hair tumbled over her face, the shoulder straps of her dress had been ripped away.

A handkerchief had been forced between her teeth as a gag. Red, angry welts across the whiteness of her back testified to the fact that her visitor had sought information. The gaping wound in her throat that had spilled a viscid, dark brown puddle onto the floor gave mute evidence that he had gotten every bit of information he sought.

Johnny Liddell stood at the door, cursed bitterly. He walked over, picked up the blonde's wrist, felt for a pulse. He shook his head, dropped the wrist, stared down at her. An odd shade of red in the pool of blood caught his eye. It seemed brighter than the rest. Liddell bent over, squinted at it for a moment, brought out his pencil and fished it out.

He held it under the light, glowered at it. It was a petal from a red carnation and it conjured up in his mind's eye the thick, sensuous lips, the blank expressionless eyes of Angelo. Sitting on the right lapel of his dinner jacket had been a red carnation.

He stuck the carnation petal between the leaves of his



## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

notebook, looked around. He decided it would be a waste of time searching the room since the killer had obviously gotten what he'd come after. He made certain he had left no trace of his presence, wiped the switch and doorknob, doused the light. He cut around back of Cabin 16, made his way through the weed-choked patch behind the court, headed through the underbrush toward where he had left the car . . .

The Dude Ranch looked old, tired like an old woman who had taken off her make-up. Without the flattery of the hidden battery of floodlights and the bright lights spilling out over the lawn it reverted to being just an old white frame house sprawling in the darkness. At this hour there were no cars in the parking lot, the giant who presided over the door was gone, there was no feverish pitch of conversation. Just a tired old white building relaxing without its make-up.

Liddell left his car under a big tree a hundred yards off the entrance to the Ranch. He cut around behind the building in the direction of the doorway in which the blonde had stood earlier, talking to him. There was no sound other than the rustle of leaves and the soft squish of his own footsteps in the springy turf.

Suddenly, he stopped, melted into the shadows. Coming toward him he could make out a tiny red spot that glowed into a coal, then died away. Liddell strained his eyes against the wall of darkness, tried to make out the figure of the man behind the cigarette. From the height of the glowing end, he estimated his height to be nearly six feet.

The man with the cigarette stopped. Liddell slid the .45 from its holster, waited. After a moment the man started walking again. Liddell edged back into the shadow, waited.

When the man reached the tree behind which he was standing, Liddell stepped out behind him, jabbed the

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

snout of the .45 in his back. The man stiffened, the cigarette fell from his fingers. He didn't move.

"What is this?" His voice was heavy, guttural.

"How many of you around the place?" Liddell wanted to know.

"Why?" The guard growled. "If you think—"

Liddell jabbed the snout of the gun into the man's back, brought a grunt. "How many?"

The guard seemed about to retort, shrugged. "Just me."

Liddell reached around him, tugged an automatic from his shoulder holster. In his side jacket pocket, he found a sap. He weighed it in the palm of his hand.

"And where do I find Angelo?"

The guard shrugged, didn't answer.

Liddell grinned humorlessly. "I know a guy does tricks with a sap like this." He pounded it against the palm of his hand. "He can break every bone in a man's body without breaking the skin. I've always wanted to try it."

"He's in his office," the guard growled. "Top of the stairs."

Liddell nodded. "Thanks." He was debating what to do with the guard when the big man took it out of his hands.

He whirled with unsuspected speed, lunged at Liddell. He was as fast as most professional killers. But not fast enough. The sap caught him high on the side of his face, split the skin over his cheekbone, knocked him to his knees. The second blow caught him flush on the top of the skull, flattened him out on his face on the ground. He didn't move.

Liddell caught him under the arms, dragged him back behind the tree. He stood in the shadows for a moment, waited. There was nothing to indicate that there was anyone else on the grounds.

Then, he walked across the lawn to the big french doors that led into the bar room. The room beyond was dark.

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

He gently tapped out a small pane of glass over the knob, stuck his hand through, opened the door and let himself in. He picked his way carefully across the room toward the big staircase in the entrance hall.

Slowly, testing each step as he went, he climbed to the head of the stairs. There was a thin thread of light under one of the doors. Liddell slid the .45 into his hand, crossed to the door, listened. There wasn't a sound.

Gently, he clasped his hand over the knob, turned it. The door wasn't locked, swung open easily.

Angelo was sitting behind a highly polished desk, studying some papers. He looked up with an annoyed frown, his jaw sagged, his eyes widened. His eyes hop-scotched from Liddell's face to the black, bottomless muzzle of the .45 and back. He seemed frozen, didn't move a muscle as Liddell stepped in, kicked the door closed behind him.

"What is this?" he finally managed.

"I've got a message for you, Angelo. From the cigarette girl in Cabin Sixteen."

A muscle jumped under Angelo's left eye. "You're a liar."

Liddell grinned bleakly. "You're right. She's dead." His eyes fastened on the right lapel. "What happened to your carnation?"

Angelo's eyes swiveled down to the right lapel, rolled upward, studied Liddell from under their lids. "I didn't wear one." He licked at his lips, to be getting the quiver under his eye under control. "Who are you?"

"The name's John Liddell. I'm a private detective."

Angelo sneered, leaned back in his chair, touched his fingers across his chest. "What are you here for? To talk business?" He pursed his lips. "How much?"

"You haven't got that much, friend. I came for a package a client gave me tonight. I'm taking it with me when I

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

leave. Whether you're in a condition to know about it when I do depends on you."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Liddell grinned. "If you're stalling for time, waiting for your boy to walk in on us, don't wait. I had a little talk with him. He was a little stubborn, but I pounded some sense into his head. Even though I had to make a hole in it to do it."

Angelo's tongue darted from between his lips, licked at them. "I haven't got any package that belongs to you or anybody else," he said. He struggled to keep his eyes off the pile of papers on his desk, lost the struggle. "Why don't you get smart and get out of here? That way nobody has to get hurt."

Liddell walked over to the desk, stared down at the papers on it. Angelo lurched upward, caught the edge of the desk, turned it over, knocked Liddell backwards. Before the private detective could recover, the big man had sprinted for the door, slammed it violently behind him.

Liddell struggled to his feet, started for the door. He realized that he would make a perfect target silhouetted in the lighted doorway so he snapped the wall switch throwing the room into total darkness.

Then, he turned the knob, pulled the door open, stood aside. There was no sound but the sound of his own breathing. Somewhere below he thought he heard footsteps, realized that if Angelo reached the grounds he could never hope to catch him.

Liddell threw caution to the winds, started after the big man on the run. He didn't see the outstretched foot, hit it full force, sprawled headlong. He hit the floor with a slam that knocked the breath out of his body, sent the .45 skidding from his grasp. He heard it hit the wall, go tumbling down the stairs.

Instinctively, he rolled as he hit, heard the thud as

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

Angelo's 200 pounds hit the spot where he had fallen. Liddell lashed out with his heels, heard the other man grunt as they made contact. Liddell managed to get to his feet, crouched in the darkness, waited for the next assault. He could feel the perspiration running down his back as he strained his eyes against the darkness, tried to locate his adversary.

Suddenly, he caught the dull glint of a knife blade. Angelo's shoe scuffed against the floor as he shuffled in for the kill. He held his knife waist high, point up in the manner of a skilled knife fighter. Liddell kept his eye on the knife blade, waited for the other man to close in the distance.

As soon as Angelo was close enough, Liddell kicked out with his heel at where he estimated the big man's shins to be. Angelo muttered a curse, growled with pain. Before he could get set, Liddell chopped down at the hand holding the knife with the side of his hand. He made contact, the knife clattered to the floor. Both men dived for it, struggled in the darkness of the hall. The only sound was their labored breathing.

Angelo managed to get his hand on the knife, rolled over on his back to be in position to use it. Liddell was on top of him, caught his wrist, tried to force it back where he could pound the knuckles against the floor. Perspiration beaded on his forehead, rolled down into his eyes, stinging him. Angelo caught his breath in gasping sobs, clawed at Liddell's throat with his free hand.

Liddell relaxed his pressure on the knife hand, tried to tear the fingers loose on his throat. The grunting and gasping grew louder. Liddell's fingers around the other man's wrist grew slippery and wet.

Angelo grunted, threw all of his 200 pounds into a desperate effort to dislodge Liddell, threw him off balance. He lunged at where Liddell was, slashed at him, missed

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

by inches. Liddell pulled himself to his feet, backed up against the wall. He could hear Angelo scrambling to his feet, knew that this time the big man wouldn't be sucked into a trap.

He decided on a bold counter attack. Before Angelo could move in on him, Liddell threw himself at the big man. With his left, he deflected the knife blade, put everything he had behind a right smash. He could feel the big man stagger as it pounded into his face. Liddell didn't give him time to get set, kept throwing rights and lefts into the big man's face and stomach. He drove him backwards relentlessly.

Suddenly there was a crashing of wood, a scream from Angelo, then a series of dull thumps and silence.

Liddell stood at the head of the stairs, squinted down into the blackness of the stairwell down which the big man had disappeared when the bannister gave way behind him. He strained his ears, heard no sound. After a moment, he staggered back to the office, reached in, snapped on the light. By it, he was able to locate the hall switch, snapped it on, spilled a brilliant yellow light into the upper hall.

Angelo lay at the bottom of the stairs, his neck twisted at a crazy angle to his body, one arm bent under him, the other stretched out at right angles. The dull expressionless eyes were open, seemed to be staring sightlessly at where Liddell stood at the head of the stairs looking down at him.

Liddell turned, walked back into the office. The papers that had been on top of the desk were scattered across the floor. He picked them up, rifled through them, stuck them into his jacket pocket. Folded up, they were the exact size of the package that had been taken from him earlier in the evening.

He went through the drawers of the desk, the small wall cabinet, found nothing else. Then, he snapped off the light, walked down the stairs, stepped over the dead man. His

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

gun was in the corner against the wall. He picked it up, snapped it into its hammock, let himself out.

Johnny Liddell sat with his desk chair tilted back, stared out his office window over Bryant Park, eight stories below. After a moment, he pulled himself out of his chair, stamped across the room to where an old water cooler hummed softly to itself. He took a drink, crumpled the paper cup in his fist, threw it at the waste basket. Then, he walked back to his desk, stood stirring the pile of papers on it with a stubby forefinger.

After a moment, he picked them up, ran through them. They consisted of a list of names, with dates and amounts of money alongside them. Some of the names were vaguely familiar, names that made him a little ill—names of men on the Police Force. He spotted several lieutenants, three captains and at least one inspector's name. He scowled at the list, tossed it back on the desk, walked over to the window, resumed his study of the lowering skies.

What had an "ice" list to do with the girl that had risked her life to get it? If she were a reporter, it was a little anticlimatic. The newspapers had worked the "police corruption" story to death months ago. Even a list of the names of the cops involved wasn't hot enough to breathe any life back into that yarn.

He turned as the door to his office opened. His red-headed secretary walked in, deposited a pile of mail on the desk. "What time did you get in? Or didn't you go home?" she wanted to know.

"I had some things to clean up." He nodded his head at the mail. "Anything interesting?"

The redhead shrugged. "A couple of checks." She pursed her lips. "A letter that didn't make too much sense." She picked a folded sheet from the top of the pile. "A gal named Doris Benson. Familiar?"

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Liddell shook his head. "What's she want?"

"She wants to hire you. Says she's got the evidence to clear her brother." She looked up. "Who's he?"

Liddell grimaced. "How do I know? I haven't even talked to her yet. She's probably just a—" He broke off, screwed his brow into ridges of concentration. "Benson? Wait a minute. That name does ring a bell." He walked over took the letter from the between the redhead's fingers, glanced through it. He looked up, nodded. "It could be."

"If you say so," the redhead humored him. "Now, about those checks—"

"Where's the envelope for this?"

"Out in the basket with the rest of the envelopes. Why? You taking up stamp collecting?"

She smiled at Johnny.

Liddell brushed past her, rummaged through the waste basket in the outer office, came up with a small envelope. He studied the postmark, nodded. "Take a look, Pinky. It was mailed in Armonk."

"Fascinating," she agreed. "I guess. So what?"

"I've already met this girl, Pink. She was waiting for me outside my place last night. She gave me a package to hold for her." He nodded toward the papers on his desk. "Up to now they didn't make sense."

"But they do now? From that?"

Liddell nodded. "Yeah. They make sense. It's a list of 'ice'—graft payoffs to some cops. Now do you remember who Benson was?"

The redhead chewed her lower lip, shook her head. "I don't think so."

"He was a police lieutenant. Had a first rate reputation until this graft investigation broke. He committed suicide." He tossed the letter down on his desk. "At least that's what they thought."



## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

"But you don't? The police were right on the scene, they investigated and thought it was suicide. And here you are on West Forty-second Street a couple of months later and you decide it isn't. What do you use, a crystal ball or a needle?" she said. "Come on, Johnny. There's still a report to be made in that Carter case, and we have the bills for—"

"Benson didn't kill himself, Pink. If he had been guilty of taking ice, his name would have been on this list. And it isn't. They made him the patsy, knocked him off so he couldn't clear his name. That's why it was so important to his sister."

The redhead nodded. "Okay, so you kept it all nice and safe for her. Now give it back to her and let her hire somebody else. You've got more cases than you can handle, and besides—"

"I can't give it back to her, Pink. She's dead. They murdered her when they found out she had stolen this."

"Who murdered her?"

Liddell dug into his pocket, brought up two cigarettes. "A guy named Angelo. Runs a place called the Dude Ranch outside of Armonk." He lit the two cigarettes, handed one to the girl. "She worked there as a cigarette girl. Probably so she could get at his records."

Pinky turned her palms up. "Then it's simple. Turn Angelo over to the police and let them take over."

Liddell blew twin streams of smoke from his nostrils. "Not so simple. Angelo's dead, too. I killed him—taking these back."

"Oh, fine," the redhead groaned. "Now what?"

Liddell smoked for a moment. "Now to prove who these lists belong to. When I prove that, I've got Angelo's boss. That's the one I want."

"What gives you the idea he has a boss?"

"The lists. They're all city cops. So was Benson. If the list belonged to Angelo, they'd be upstate cops. Maybe

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

there are some on that list. But there are also city cops. That means somebody down here."

"How do you figure to find out?"

Liddell walked over to the window, stared down at the park below. "I don't have to find out. I already know. There's only one operator big enough to carry an ice list that size. The big guy."

"Al Zito?"

Liddell nodded. "Al Zito. Mister Big." He turned, stared at the redhead glumly. "If I'm going to get him, it'll have to be fast. Because as soon as he finds out I have this list—"

"Johnny, don't be crazy. You can't go up against Zito. Nobody can. He owns this town body and soul and everybody in it. You'll never make it."

Johnny Liddell put his fingers to his lips, pointed to the shadow on the corridor side of the frosted glass door that said *Johnny Liddell—Private Investigations—Entrance Room 825*.

It was a man's shadow. A small man's. It stood for a moment, was joined by a second man, then both headed down the corridor in the direction of 825. Liddell scooped up the papers, pulled out a book in the bookcase, shoved them behind it, replaced the book.

The door from the outer office swung open, two men stood framed in the doorway. One of the men was heavy shouldered, his face battered, his eyebrows thickened. The other was slim, dapper, pretty in an effeminate way. He was hatless and his hair, beginning to show signs of thinning at the temples was light and wavy. His hand was sunk deep in a bulging jacket pocket, but on the wrist a heavy gold identification bracelet was visible.

"The waiting room is outside," Liddell told them.

The heavyset one twisted the corner of his lips into what passed for a smile. "Yeah, but we're not waiting. There's someone wants to see you, pal."

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

Liddell shrugged. "Have him call my secretary and make an appointment."

The big man crossed the room, caught Liddell's arm with a ham-like fist. "Very funny. The guy I'm talking about ain't particular what condition you're in when you come, just as long as you come."

The light haired man intervened. "That won't be necessary, Luke," his voice was low, intimate. "Liddell will come along. I'm sure he wouldn't want to keep Mr. Zito waiting."

Liddell reached over, crushed out his cigarette. "The big guy, eh? What would he want with me?"

The slight man drew his hand out of his pocket far enough to reveal that the bulge was a .45 calibre. "Maybe he needs a fourth for bridge—you, him, Angelo and the cigarette girl."

"Sounds more like solitaire to me."

Wavy Hair exposed a perfect set of teeth in a fixed smile. "It could end up that way, at that."

The man who lounged on the couch was fat and soft looking. Dark, damp ringlets tried futilely to cover the bald spot that glowed pinkly in the indirect lighting of the room. His eyes, two shiny black marbles, were almost lost behind the puffy balls of his cheeks. He seemed half asleep as he sat there, hands clasped across his middle, regarding Johnny Liddell.

"Nice of you to come see me like this, Liddell." His voice sounded choked by the heaviness of his jowls.

"You mean I had a choice? What's it all about, Zito?"

"Mr. Zito." Pretty Boy jammed the snout of his gun into Liddell's back.

The fat man's eyes rolled from Liddell to the gunman. "I'll handle this, Joey. Wait outside."

A faint color tinged the gunman's neck. He started to

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

retort, checked himself, minced out. He slammed the door after him.

"I've heard a lot about you, Liddell. All good," Zito told him.

Liddell nodded grimly. "I've heard a lot about you."

The fat man chuckled deep in his chest. "Very good. Very good, indeed." He leaned back, studied Liddell from under the heavily veined lids of his eyes. "I thought maybe we could do a little business."

"What kind of business?"

Zito hunched his shoulders upwards, submerging what little neck he had. "You're a private detective. I want you to find somebody for me." He reached over with a grunt, picked two cigars from a humidor, held one up. Liddell shook his head, Zito dropped one back, closed the lid. "He took off for Arizona or Montana or one of those places." He dropped his eyes to the cigar, carefully denuded it of its cellophane wrapper, rolled it into a ball. "Might take a long time. A year, maybe."

"I'm pretty well tied up with a couple of cases now."

Zito bit the end off his cigar deliberately, spat it at an ash tray. "I'll make it worth your while to give up those cases. I'll find someone to handle them for you." His eyes rolled upwards. "Well worth your while."

Liddell fished a cigarette from his pocket, touched a match to it. "One of those cases has blood on it."

The fat man shrugged. "Angelo's? He fell down stairs. Very careless of him. The girl?" He pursed his lips, frowned. "Angelo was always too quick on the trigger. It's too bad."

"She was a client of mine. She wanted my help in clearing her brother's name. His name was Benson. Remember?"

Zito rolled the unlit cigar in the center of his lips between thumb and forefinger. "I remember Lieutenant

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

Benson. Sad case, wasn't it?" He eyed Liddell coldly. "He was one of those headstrong young men who wouldn't listen to reason. Quite a bit on your type, matter of fact."

Liddell nodded glumly. "Too bad I didn't know him better."

"He would have bored you." The fat man shrugged. "He was stupidly stubborn. We tried to reason, but he was determined to be stubborn." He snapped a lighter to flame, touched it to the end of his cigar. "Certainly you must understand that we avoid violence as much as possible. It isn't good for business." He blew a heavy stream of feathery blue-gray smoke at the ceiling. "That's why I hope you'll accept this assignment."

"And if I don't?"

The fat man sighed. "It would put both of us to a certain amount of discomfort. Yours, to be sure, would be for a much briefer period." He reached over, jabbed at a button with a stubby forefinger. The door opened and the heavy set man walked in. "Luke, Liddell here is being a little hesitant. I wonder if you could give him a sample of what might be in store if we can't reach an agreement?"

Luke twisted the corners of his misshapen lips upward in a gross caricature of a smile. "It'd be a pleasure, Mr. Z. Tough guys are my meat." He shuffled toward Liddell. "Let's dance, sweetheart. They're playing our song."

He threw a beefy fist at Liddell's head. The private detective blocked it easily, slammed his right against the side of Luke's jaw. The big man blinked, licked at his lips, shuffled closer. He feinted with the left again, crossed his right against Liddell's jaw. It slammed Liddell back against the wall, where he slid to a sitting position. There was a dull ringing in his ears, the floor seemed to be slanting crazily as he struggled to his feet.

He was dimly aware of the fat man draped comfortably on the couch, the big cigar tilted from the corner of his

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

over-ripe lips, surrounded by a broad grin. Luke stood over Liddell waiting for him to get up.

Liddell shook his head, tried to dislodge the cobwebs. He got to one knee, pretended to topple forward, got his legs behind him and plowed into the bodyguard's midsection, shoulder first.

Luke let out a strangled oath as Liddell's lunge caught him unaware and bowled him over. There was a crash as the big man hit a chair, splintered it. As he went down, he took a small end table and chair with him. He lay in the debris and cursed angrily.

By the time Luke got to his feet, Liddell was ready for him in a half crouch. The big man moved in again, apparently impervious to Liddell's Sunday punch that opened a half inch gash on the cheekbone. He threw a hamlike fist at Liddell's face, missed, gasped as Johnny sank his left to the cuff in his stomach.

Luke started to go for his hip holster. Before the gun could clear leather, Liddell was all over him. He caught the gun hand in a vise-like grip and bent it.

Luke struggled, tried to bring his knee up, lost leverage as Liddell stuck the top of his head under the other man's chin, pushed upward. Perspiration gleamed on the bodyguard's face as slowly, inexorably Liddell bent him backwards over his own arm.

Luke screamed out in pain, the gun slipped from his damp fingers, hit the floor. Liddell released his hammerlock, let the big man fall to the floor. Luke was up in a moment, tried to butt. Liddell sidestepped the rush, chopped down at the back of the other man's neck with the side of his hand. Luke hit the floor face first, didn't move.

The fat man on the couch growled angrily, stabbed for a button. Before the door could open to admit the wavy haired gunman, Liddell had Luke's gun pointed at Zito's midsection.

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

"What's the mat—" The wavy haired man's eye hopped from the unconscious man on the floor to the fat man on the couch to the gun in Liddell's hand.

"Tell him to come in," Liddell said.

Zito nodded. "Do what he says, Joey."

The thin man walked in, gun in hand.

"Drop the gun and kick it away," Liddell told him.

Zito nodded, his face hard.

"I always told you you depended too much on Luke's muscle," Joey told the fat man. "If you had let me handle him it would have been different." He dropped his gun to the floor, kicked it away, stared at Liddell through narrowed eyes. "There'll always be another time."

Liddell wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "Don't push it too hard, Pretty Boy. I'm letting you walk away from this one. I'm not always that good natured."

Zito pulled the cigar from between his teeth, examined the soggy end, pasted back a loose leaf with the tip of his tongue. "Funny. Guys like you and Benson—you always talk alike. You end up the same way, too."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Don't forget, I have that ice list of yours."

Zito smiled at his cigar, replaced it between his teeth. "Have you?" His eyes rolled to Joey. "Tell him, Joey."

Joey grinned viciously. "That red-headed female in your office. She talks very easily. But then, the boys we sent over to talk with her are very persuasive."

"You don't miss a trick, do you?" Liddell grunted. "But don't forget, the game isn't over until the last trick is played out."

The city room of the DISPATCH was just beginning to come to life. Half a dozen reporters, their hats shoved on the backs of their heads, jackets hanging over the backs of their chairs, sat with ears glued to telephones. At other

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

desks, typewriters chattered about the day's doings for the early City Edition. From the other room, the teletypes added their deeper tones to the clatter with the occasional pinging of a bell.

Johnny Liddell picked his way down an aisle between desks to a glass door that bore the legend *Managing Editor*.

A thick, squat man with a shock of untidy gray hair looked up from the room's only desk as the door slammed shut. His face was tired, deeply lined under the green eyeshade he wore. In his mouth he clamped a short-stemmed bulldog pipe. He nodded as he recognized his visitor.

"Well, well. Haven't seen you in a dog's age, Johnny. What've you been doing?"

"About three rounds with Zito's muscle man. Guy named Luke." He pulled up a chair, dropped into it. "I'm in trouble, Ed. Zito's out to get me."

Ed Lewis pulled the pipe from between his teeth, whistled softly. "That's Big Casino. When he's on your tail, you cash in your chips."

"What's his weak spot?"

The managing editor shook his head. "If he had one, we'd have put the finger on him years ago." He knocked the dottle out of the pipe, pulled a pouch from his pocket. "The guy can't be touched. He's got too much on the right people." He dug the pipe bowl into the pouch, started to pack it with his index finger. "You better make tracks. By the way, what put him on your tail?"

"Remember the Benson case?"

Lewis nodded. "The copper who was supposed to have killed himself?"

"He didn't. He was murdered and made to look like he did the Dutch."

The managing editor scratched a match, touched it to the pipe bowl. "Figured as much. Can you prove it?"



## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

Liddell shook his head. "His sister tried to. She went to work for one of Zito's stooges. Got her hands on a copy of Zito's ice list. Her brother's name wasn't on it."

"Can she prove it?"

Liddell grinned glumly. "She had her throat cut last night in a tourist court up near Armonk. I got the list back from Angelo—the creep that runs the Dude Ranch up there. Incidentally, get a flash on him?"

Lewis consulted the stack of galleys at his elbow, shook his head. "Should I have?"

"You will. Anyway, two of Zito's goons took me out of my office this morning and they went over it with a fine tooth comb. I haven't got the list any more."

The managing editor sighed, took a deep drag on his pipe, formed a blue cloud of smoke with pursed lips. "See what I mean?" He shook his head. "Neither you nor I have a prayer of a chance of going up against Zito."

"How about his babe?"

Lewis ridged his brows. "His babe?"

"The one that testified before the crime commission. The big black haired blister that wouldn't even give them her name."

"Mary Lister? She's not Zito's babe. Hell, that hot pepper would burn him to a crisp."

"What's the tie-in?" Johnny wanted to know.

Lewis shrugged. "She used to run errands for the Syndicate. Carried a lot of orders and messages that couldn't be trusted to writing or telephone wires. Every time she visited a city, some hood got knocked off. She was pretty valuable to the boys."

"And now?"

"They've put her out to pasture."

"Gal like that should know plenty."

"But plenty. Why do you think she's still alive? She knows too much."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"Yeah."

"That's usually fatal."

The managing editor grinned humorlessly. "Not with little Mary. She saw too many guys get theirs—guys who knew a lot more than she did. So she took out life insurance."

"Meaning?"

"The way I understand it, she's planted photostatic copies and full confessions naming names, places and dates with about ten people around the country. The day anything happens to her, they're delivered to the FBI and about twenty of our top hoodlums keep a date with the electric chair."

Liddell pursed his lips, whistled soundlessly. "She sounds like the kind of gal I'd like to meet."

"You're wasting your time, Johnny. She wouldn't crack. Why should she? She's sitting too pretty."

Liddell stood up. "You'd be surprised how persuasive I can get."

The managing editor took his pipe from between his lips, tapped at his teeth with the stem. "It's a dry run, Johnny. Even if she wanted to talk, she couldn't. They've got as much on her as she has on them. You mentioned Benson. Ever meet him?"

Liddell shook his head.

"Nice tall, good looking kid. He turned the charm on Mary. Thought he could get enough dope out of her to smash the top mob. He was a smart cop."

Liddell shrugged. "Not too smart. They got to him."

"Ever wonder why a smart cop got himself into a position where he could be knocked off and have it made to look like suicide? And with no signs of a struggle?"

"Go on."

"Figure it out for yourself. He knew he was playing with quick death. Yet, the guys who were out to hit him get

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

their hands on his gun to do the job with. What's it sound like to you?"

"It sounds like he should have taken his gun to bed."

Lewis nodded. "It sounds like that to me, too. Don't forget, Johnny. Mary Lister's specialty is putting guys on the spot. There are twenty eight gang killings in the past five years—and all twenty eight were playing footsie with little Mary before they stopped the big one."

"Where do I find her?"

Lewis stared at him for a moment, shrugged. "No use trying to talk you out of it?"

Liddell shook his head.

"Okay. She's got the penthouse in Barkley Towers."

The Barkley Towers was an expensive pile of rocks and plate glass at the river end of 57th Street. Johnny Liddell crossed a modernistic lobby furnished with brightly colored couches and chrome chairs which complemented the soft pastel carpeting.

He headed for the elevator bank labeled *Penthouse*, pushed the top button. After a moment, the car slid to a noiseless stop, the doors opened. He stepped out into ankle deep pile of the rug, crossed to the steel door leading to the penthouse.

He knocked, waited. On the second knock, he heard sounds from within the apartment, the door opened an inch.

"Who are you looking for?" The voice was low, sultry, still retained a faint trace of a southern accent.

"My name's Liddell. I'm looking for Mary Lister."

There was a slight pause. "What for?"

"It's about a mutual friend. A man named Benson. He's dead."

The door closed. He could hear sounds of a chain being removed, then it swung wide open. "Come in." The sultri-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

ness of her voice hadn't quite prepared him for what he saw. She was tall, utterly striking in her beauty. Her hair was silky black, caught behind her ears by a blue ribbon, allowed to cascade down over her shoulders. Her lips were full, wet and soft looking. She wore a tight fitting dressing gown that clung seductively to the well-formed, full bosom, the rounded thighs and hips.

She waited until Liddell had walked past her, closed the door. "Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. I'm trying to clear Benson's name. You're the only one left that can help me."

She ran the tips of her fingers across her forehead. "You're sure Al Zito isn't behind your coming?"

Liddell slowly shook his head.

The girl led the way in to a sitting room. The gown was drawn tightly across her hips, seethed rhythmically as she walked. She motioned him to the couch. "I knew Benson. I knew him well. We were getting ready to go away together when they did it to him." She caught her full lower lip between her teeth. "He never killed himself."

"Can you prove it?"

The brunette shrugged, the sway of her breasts traced patterns against the fabric of her gown. "What good would it do? They'd kill me."

Liddell shook his head. "Not if we can smash them first. You'll always be in danger until we do. That's why I came to you."

"You mean you'd go up against them alone?"

"If I have to."

The brunette turned the full power of her green eyes on him, took in the rugged jaw, the heavy shoulders. She seemed to like what she saw. "I believe you would." She pursed her lips, then nodded. "I'll play along." She reached over, picked up a decanter and two glasses. She poured

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

some liquor into each, handed one to Liddell. "We'll need luck." She lifted her glass.

Liddell sniffed at the glass, tasted it. It tasted as good as it smelled. He drained his glass. The girl followed suit, coughed, spilled her glass down the front of her gown.

"Damn!" She set her glass down. "I won't be a second. Let me get into something fresh." She smiled, disappeared in the direction of the bedroom.

Liddell slid out of his jacket, tossed it across a chair, folded his shoulder holster over it. Then he went back, stretched out on the couch.

He was on his second cigarette when she returned. She had changed the robe for a nightgown that brought a catch to his throat. She was full hipped and had short legs. Her stomach was flat. She walked over to where he sprawled on the couch.

"As long as we're going to be partners—" She smiled lazily, looking down at him.

He sat up, reached up, ran his hands over the smoothness of her hips, the flat of her back. She sank to her knees, her lips sought his, covered them hungrily. Her hands were at the back of his neck, her nails digging into his shoulders.

Gently, he got up from the couch, pulled her to her feet. Her eyes were glazed, her lips wet, shining. "I'm crazy for big men," she murmured. Her mouth sought his again.

After a moment, he held her away, consulted his watch.

"Am I boring you?" she pouted.

"Never, baby." He checked his watch again. "I just want to know when fifteen minutes are up."

"Why?"

Liddell grinned. "I figure that's how long it would take a couple of guns to get across town from Zito's place."

The girl's lids half covered her eyes, her teeth glistened through half drawn lips. "What are you talking about?"

"The telephone call you made to Al Zito, telling him you

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

had me on the spot. Just like Benson."

"You're crazy," she snarled. "If that's what you think, get out of here. Get out!"

Liddell made no move. He looked at the girl, at her beauty. "It's not that easy, baby," he told her. "I can't keep running forever. Sooner or later there's got to be a showdown."

"You think you can buck the Syndicate?" she sneered. "They'll break you in two. Just like they break everybody that tries to buck them."

Liddell nodded. "That's why it's got to be smashed no matter who gets hurt."

The brunette backed up to the chair where his .45 lay in its holster. "I've heard that song before. But the ones who sang it are all worm food. I'm still around. So is the Syndicate."

"And you fingered the ones that sang the song."

"That's what I get paid for." She swept her arms around the apartment. "I like living like this. You think I'd let you or anyone else stand in the way of it? What's it mean to me if some jerk gets out of line and has to get hit? Sure, I finger them. And you're right about me calling Al Zito. He told me to keep you here."

She ran her cupped hands under her breasts, then down over her stomach, along her thighs. She licked her lips. "You can't live forever, so—" Her eyes widened at the sight of the .38 that had suddenly appeared in his hand. "What are you going to do?"

"There's a forty-five in the holster, baby. Get it."

"What for?"

"I'm going to give you the chance you never gave the guys you bird-dogged. I'm going to give you first shot. Then, I'm going to do something that should have been done years ago. I'm going to smash the Syndicate."

"You can't. Look, be reasonable. I'll get you out of here.

## A PACKAGE FOR MR. BIG

You can go down the back stairs. They'll never get you. They'll—"

"There's nothing personal in it, baby. If it would do any good to take you in, I would. But you'd be out before the ink got dry."

"You'll never get away with it. Zito has connections higher than you'll ever reach."

Liddell nodded. "That's just it. They won't come out of the woodwork until those letters of yours reach the FBI and the police."

The color seeped out of the brunette's face, leaving her make-up dark patches against the pallor. She grabbed for the .45, was squeezing the trigger almost before it was out of the holster. Liddell heard a lamp smash at his ear, felt the impact as one of the heavy slugs hit his shoulder. He squeezed the trigger. The little .38 jumped in his hand.

The brunette stiffened, went up on her toes. A bright red stain appeared on the front of the gown. She looked down incredulously, dropped the .45, grabbed at her middle.

She went to her knees, fingers laced over the wound. "You shouldn't have done it, Johnny Liddell."

"I had to. There's a mad dog running loose in this city and it's got to be stopped no matter who gets hurt. It was the only way I could." He caught her as she fell forward, eased her to the floor. After a moment, he got up, walked to the phone.

He dialed the DISPATCH, asked for the managing editor. "Lewis? This is Liddell. You'd better contact the FBI and tell them to watch their mail for the next few days."

He dropped the receiver on its hook, wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. The phone shrilled at his elbow. He lifted its hook, held it to his ear.

"Mary. This is Joey. We're coming up. Keep him away from his gun."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

There was a click as the receiver was tossed on the hook. Liddell hung up on his end, picked up his coat and gun, headed for the back staircase, shoulders held straight.



# WITNESS TO DEATH

by Wenzell Brown

CRADDOCK was frightened. He stared about him at the terraced lawn long gone to seed. Grass grew knee high. A few shaggy yellow flowers clustered along the sides of the buildings. The sun, almost ready to set, sent elongated shadows across the grass and shimmered with unnatural brilliance on the dusty windows of the old house.

Craddock shivered, partly from the crisp autumn air but mostly through fear of this unknown place. He wanted to run. But in what direction? Behind him was the wall with the locked gate. In front was the deserted Lassiter house, its windows watching him like unblinking eyes. The house was rumored to be haunted. Craddock didn't be-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

lieve in ghosts, but all the same there was something forbidding, sinister, about the Lassiter place. He didn't want to put his beliefs to the test.

He hunched forward a little and uttered a soft whimper. Pain rasped through his shoulder where he had struck it when he fell. What crazy impulse had made him come here? If the bunch of boys on the corner had only left him alone, he'd be at home now, safe in his room.

The boys were to blame, he thought with a spasm of hot, futile anger. They were always taunting him because he was so tall and thin and because of his hare-lip that turned his speech into ludicrous bumbling sounds. They thought he was a freak or a half-wit just because of how he looked and because there was no way for him to express himself.

The gang who hung around Talbot's store weren't much younger than he—fourteen or fifteen to his seventeen. Yet the tallest of them wouldn't come up to his arm-pit. He couldn't make friends with them. He couldn't fight with them either. He'd learned that the hard way. A couple of times when they had jumped him, he'd struck back. But he was clumsy and awkward and besides he didn't really want to hurt anybody. They had borne him to the ground, ripped off part of his clothing, laughing all the time. Usually they were content just to gibe at him, to mimic his gurgling speech or to pretend to chase him as he ran away, his long arms flapping at his sides.

This afternoon there had been three of them in front of Talbot's. He had known he was in for trouble right from the beginning. The kid called Tommy had shouted, "Hey, look, here comes Craddock, the Haddock," and the others had picked up the refrain.

He'd tried to pass by them, pretending not to hear, but they had blocked his path. He'd tried to speak to them

## WITNESS TO DEATH

then, to placate them. That was the worst thing he could have done. The words came out slurred, meaningless, and the boys had imitated him, making grotesque animal sounds.

He'd felt the tears sting his eyes and he'd had to run, even though he knew that they'd give chase. His flight turned into headlong panic as he heard the clatter of the boys' feet and their jeers behind him. He had outdistanced them easily because, for all his clumsiness, he was fast and he was accustomed to flight. Then up ahead of him, he had heard more shouts. Two other boys were racing toward him and he was trapped midway in the block. Across the street was a solid row of houses, each with its little garden, its narrow driveway. The hill was steep and each house would have a high back fence to be scaled. If he darted into one of the driveways, some indignant householder might seize him by the collar, demand an explanation for his trespass. In that case the boys would watch, holding their sides with laughter, while all he could do would be to gibber and try to pull away.

On his left, the massive stone walls of the Lassiter estate rose like a fortress. The gate loomed up ahead of him. If he could climb it and drop to the other side, he'd have a respite. The boys wouldn't dare follow him inside. How high was the wall? Twenty-five feet. Maybe thirty. He'd never make it. But it was better to try than to let himself be mauled by the boys.

The sunken doorway made the first part of his climb easy. Then jagged rock gave him a foothold and he swung himself higher, out of reach of the boys below. He could hear them shouting up at him and he sensed that their jeering was tempered with fear. "Hey, Skinny, have you blown your top? Come back down. We won't hurt ya."

He didn't dare turn or look over his shoulder. Beneath him was the solid brick of the sidewalk. His fingers

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

clutched at crumbling stone and he pulled himself up a few more inches. His body flattened against the wall. The voices seemed to fade away. There was no room in his mind for them. His knees pressed hard against the sharp edge of a rock. Cloth ripped and it felt as though a knife had slashed across his thigh.

He inched up higher and now his palms were slippery with sweat and his fingertips bloody where he had scraped them on the corroded concrete surface.

Dizziness took hold of him, almost sent him crashing backward to the sidewalk. He clung on blindly. He couldn't get back down now. Somehow he had to keep on climbing. Pain left him and the sense of time too. He was unaware of anything except the sick giddiness that enfolded him and the urgent need to climb higher and higher.

His hand gripped the top of the wall and his fingers circled something hard. Relief surged through him. He pulled himself up, indifferent to his torn clothing, the abrasions on his legs, his thighs, his chest. He was safe for a while, lying flat on the narrow ledge. He glanced down at the boys who stood in a semi-circle peering up at him. Their bodies were curiously fore-shortened and they seemed far, far away. They were calling to him but their words made no sense. He turned his face away from them and was sick.

He still had to get down, but that shouldn't be so difficult. The terraced lawn was beneath him and huge maples spread thick branches close to the wall. He pulled himself along to the nearest tree. A limb jutted out, nearly parallel to the wall. He reached for it. The bark was firm and smooth. He grasped the limb with both hands and swung outward, his body dangling in mid air. He had been confident that the branch would hold his weight and that he could move hand over hand to the trunk. But he had forgotten the blood that coated his palms. He felt his

## WITNESS TO DEATH

fingers slipping slowly and there was nothing he could do. He hurtled downward. The branches lashed at him but they helped to break his fall. He landed on matted grass. He was winded and his shoulder felt as though it were licked by flames, but otherwise he was uninjured.

He lay still. After awhile his breathing became more regular and the fire in his shoulder died down. But now he was aware of his many cuts and bruises, the throbbing in his hands and knees. He twisted to one side and buried his head in his arm, trying to choke back the sobs that racked his thin body.

Maybe he'd blacked out or maybe he'd slept. He didn't know which. He came to with a start, not remembering where he was at first or what had happened to him. He arose shakily. His clothes were in a mess and there was blood all over him. He'd have to find a way out of the grounds. But now the wide overgrown lawn and the looming gray house seemed to hold a threat. He moved forward slowly, his feet tangling in the thick grass. He ought to hurry but he could not force himself out into the bright sunlight. Instead he hugged the shadows, despite the cold wind that chilled him.

He stumbled across a pathway of sunken stones and fell to one knee. He could see the strip of cement that led from the garage up the sharp incline, past the side of the house. A tall wrought-iron gate separated the drive from the sidewalk. The gate was spiked but it wouldn't be too hard to climb. Anyway, the retaining wall was low at the front of the house. All he had to do was run along the drive and take a leap and he'd be out of the place. So why was he waiting? Why didn't he get out into the open?

Supposing someone was lurking outside the gates. Maybe the boys had told the cop on the beat about his climbing the wall and dropping into the Lassiter grounds. He remembered the time he'd ducked in back of old Mrs. For-

rester's house. He'd thought it was a safe place to hide. But Mrs. Forrester had called the police and told them that there was a prowler on her back lawn. Officer Kelly had come in after him and pulled him out from behind some bushes. Kelly had twisted his arm in back of him until he'd screamed shrilly. Kelly's broad red face had been filled with disgust and he'd said, "Okay, Craddock, this time I'm letting you go. But if I catch you snooping around any more backyards I'm pulling you in, see? I ain't having any freaks around my beat. This time I'm giving you a break. But next time I'm handing you the book."

Craddock had tried to explain but the words got all jumbled up and his tongue had seemed as though it were inches thick. Kelly had spat onto the sidewalk. "Maybe I ought to take you in after all. Scram out of here before I change my mind."

Craddock had run then, the way he always ran, with his long arms flapping, not daring to look behind.

Kelly could be out in front now, watching for him. Just a little longer and it would be dark. He'd stand a better chance of getting away unseen. No one would notice his torn clothing in the darkness either and start asking questions. And when he got home, the flat would be empty because his mother would be at work, cleaning up in the big office building downtown after business had closed for the day. He couldn't take any more nagging from her, not tonight. By morning, maybe he'd be able to mend the rips in his jacket and trousers. Or if he couldn't, he'd get rid of them.

A clanging sound made him raise his head. Someone was at the gate, fooling around with the padlock, the heavy chain. Could it be Kelly searching for him? Craddock flattened himself on the grass and peered toward the gate. The wrought-iron decorations almost hid the figure, but he could tell it was that of a man. Not Kelly,

## WITNESS TO DEATH

because he could catch a glimpse of a black coat, a Hom-burg hat.

The gate swung open and the figure receded. A minute later a big black car nosed into the driveway. Craddock scarcely dared to breathe. If the car headed for the garage, it would pass within a few feet of him and he'd be spotted for sure. The car braked at the side entrance and just as it did, Craddock felt the first spatter of rain. He glanced up. Gray clouds scudded across the sky, bringing swift darkness with them. When he looked back toward the car, the man was already at the side door of the house, fitting a key in the lock. The man's back was turned but he gave the impression of strength. He was only of medium height but his shoulders were broad and there was something cat-like in his crouched stance.

The man pushed the door inward then half-turned and called to someone in the car. A woman stepped out and hurried through the spattering rain to the steps. Her face was averted and she was wrapped in a cloak but Craddock judged from her liteness, from the confident way in which she held herself that she was young and pretty. She gave a tinkling laugh as she brushed by the man who held the door for her. The sound was cut off as she went inside and he followed, closing the door behind them.

Now was the time to get out. The gate was unlocked. All he'd have to do would be to turn up the drive, squeeze past the car, fling the gate open and he'd be in the clear. Even if the man or woman spotted him, what could they do? He'd be out and away before they could stop him.

He half rose and a cry was wrenched from his lips. His knee had stiffened and agonizing pain shot along his shoulder. If he tried to make a dash for it, he'd go flat on his face. Maybe if he waited, the pair inside the house would leave. Then he could take his time getting out. Besides, there was something else he wanted—to see

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

the girl's face. He wasn't snooping, he told himself; he just wanted to prove that he was right, that she was young and pretty, like the girls you saw in the movies.

He licked his lips. The raindrops were cold and slightly sweet on his tongue. Pretty soon he'd be soaked unless he found some shelter. A garage was nearby. It had a second story, probably designed as quarters for the chauffeur. High, narrow steps led up to a recessed porch. Craddock crept to the stairs. The wood was rotting, but he thought it would hold his weight. He started to climb, holding on to a rusted metal balustrade. The wood shifted beneath him, creaked a little, but the sound was covered by the splattering of rain. A roof shaded the porch. Craddock moved backward into the deep shadows and stood still, waiting.

A light glimmered somewhere in the ground floor of the house. Craddock strained his eyes but all he could see was a pale yellow blur as though the light were shining dimly through a transom. A door swung open and he could see into a hallway. He caught a glimpse of the man's silhouette, then there was shadowed movement farther along the hall. It was the girl. But before Craddock could really see her, the door closed and left only darkness.

What were these two people doing in the Lassiter house which was supposed to be deserted and haunted? Craddock tried to pull out of his memory the stories he had heard about the Lassiters. Old Mr. and Mrs. Lassiter used to live alone in the big, rambling house with only a serving couple, nearly as old and feeble as themselves. There had been a son, Steve, but he'd got into trouble of some kind and the old people had disowned him. Craddock had never understood exactly what Steve had done. There had been talk about women and something called sadism. Craddock had been curious but he sensed that he'd better not ask questions, even if he could make anyone understand.



## WITNESS TO DEATH

Craddock had never seen old Mr. Lassiter but he'd seen his wife a few times. She had been gray-haired, slender, with a thin pale face and colorless lips. She had dressed in black. It must be seven years ago, maybe eight, since Mr. Lassiter had died. Steve had come home then to the funeral and he and his mother had made up. The two of them had lived in the house together for nearly a year and everyone said young Steve had changed, that he'd settled down, put aside his wild ways.

Then one morning the old serving woman had found Mrs. Lassiter dead. She had been held by the throat and her head struck again and again against the heavy mahogany foot-board of the bed. Suspicion had rested on Steve for awhile but he'd had an alibi, one that stood up. He'd claimed that he spent the night in the nearby town of Hardwick with a girl. And she backed his story. A window in the back of the house had been found broken and there were signs that several of the rooms had been ransacked. In the end the police had put the slaying down to prowlers. But there were still some people in the town who claimed that Steve Lassiter had got away with murder.

The old house had been closed down after that and Steve had left the city. Rumors had it that the ghost of Mrs. Lassiter roamed the house at night and sometimes came out into the grounds moaning. But that was all nonsense, Craddock told himself. All the same he sucked in his breath as the wind whistled in the corners of the balcony.

Craddock searched his memory for a picture of Steve Lassiter. Maybe he'd seen him sometime but if he had, he couldn't remember. A light snapped on on the second floor, bathing the porch in a yellow glow. The sudden glare of it took Craddock by surprise. He ducked down behind the railing and peered through the bannister.

He could see into the brightly lighted room. The girl

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

was standing near the foot of the big fourposter bed. She was as pretty as he'd imagined but not so young. Perhaps she was twenty-seven or eight. She was wearing a dark-green dress with a low neckline, that made her throat and arms look firm and white. Her face was oval with a rounded chin and a small, pouting mouth. Her high, narrow cheekbones gave an Oriental cast to her eyes. Her hair was swept up over her high forehead and Craddock caught the glint of red in it. And now he remembered something else. The girl who had given Steve Lassiter his alibi had been a redhead.

The girl seemed to be looking directly at him. Her lips were moving and Craddock had the impression that she was speaking to him, but of course he couldn't hear any words. Her hands spread out in a gesture of pleading, as though she were asking for some favor that she knew would be denied. The man came into Craddock's range of vision then. Not all of him, just his shoulder and his arm. The man was between the girl and the window, close to the wall. He reached back suddenly and pulled down the shade. The porch was dark again but not completely so. A rip in the shade let out a rough triangle of light. A section of the dark-green cloth hung down below the sill. By shifting his position, Craddock could still see a part of the room.

The man's back was toward him, almost concealing the girl. He took a step forward and the girl was visible once more. Something about her had changed. Her lips had gone slack and her face turned pale. Her hands clutched the footboard of the bed and her eyes stared straight ahead. Craddock had been frightened often enough to recognize fear when he saw it. Only terror could make a woman stare like that.

Again the man came between them. He was crouched forward a little, moving slowly, surely, like a huge cat about to pounce on its prey. The girl shrank away from

## WITNESS TO DEATH

him, edging along the bed. Craddock could see her bare arm, her throat, then her face. It had changed into a mask of horror. Her mouth opened to scream. A thin sound, high-pitched and shrill reached him for a moment, then it was cut off.

The man had leaped forward and his hands were about the girl's throat, pressing hard. She crumpled under his weight and started to fall but he pulled her to him. Then with a heave of his shoulders, he sent her spinning backward, to crash against the heavy footboard. Craddock saw her head strike the dark, carved wood, saw the spurt of blood. Then blind panic seized him. He rushed for the narrow stairway and without thought of caution started to race down it. The rotting wood splintered beneath his weight. A step gave way and sent him sprawling into the driveway below.

He was hurt but there was no time to see how badly. He forced himself up and was running again. His shoes made a clattering sound on the cement but he no longer cared. Only one thing was important—to get away. The car almost blocked the driveway but he managed to squeeze by it. Then he was in the clear. Behind him he heard a door flung open, the bellow of a man's voice. He half-turned. The man was coming through the doorway, moving fast. Craddock's hand snatched at the gate, pulled it open. He was on the street now, running. Were there footsteps following him? He couldn't tell. The sound of his own feet, the thud of his heart, drowned out every other sound.

Only when he reached the corner two blocks away did he dare to slow down. The night was silent. He peered back through the tunnel made by the trees. The asphalt glistened black where the street lights shone upon it. The rain played a muted tattoo on the thick leaves. Other than that there was no sound, no movement.

He ought to find someone, tell them what he had seen.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Maybe the girl was still alive, maybe he could save her. But who would listen to him? Who would take the time to decipher his burbling speech? He ran on. The streets were all but deserted. The few passersby hurried against the wind and rain. In front of Talbot's he saw Officer Kelly. He'd have to try to make him understand. He rushed toward Kelly, calling out to him. But excitement made his voice more unintelligible than ever. The words came out in sharp, squealing sounds that he could not control.

Kelly looked him over contemptuously. "What's the matter with you Craddock? You been prowling backyards again? Honest to God, I ought to run you in as a peeper."

Craddock clutched at his arm. Kelly drew away in disgust and his eyes took in the soiled, ripped clothing. "You been in a fight or something. Is that it? Well, I can't do nothing about it. Geeziz, if you weren't such a creep, the boys would leave you alone. Now beat it before I get sore."

Craddock fell back. Even if he could make Kelly understand, what then? He'd have to admit he'd been snooping around the Lassiter grounds where he had no business. Besides, who would take his word against that of the man who must be Steve Lassiter. Craddock choked off his words, turned and shuffled away, feeling Kelly's eyes on his back.

He let himself into the tiny flat which he shared with his mother. The place was dark. His mother wouldn't be home until after midnight. He went to the icebox and poured himself some milk but he couldn't drink it. He ought to try to clean his clothes but he was too tired and his whole body seemed to ache. He stumbled to his own room, stripped his clothes off and threw himself down on the bed. He pulled a blanket over him and buried his head in the pillow. He went to sleep without even turning off the light.

When he awakened the next day it was past noon. His

## WITNESS TO DEATH

mother was standing over him. She had found the pile of ripped, bloody clothing on the floor, the light burning. Her voice rose as she railed at him. Did she work all night so he could tear up his clothes, waste electricity? He wanted to tell her about last night. Sometimes she'd listen patiently, helping him as he stumbled over the words. But today he couldn't pierce through her anger. Besides, he wasn't sure of himself any longer. What if he'd imagined the terror in the girl's face last night? What if her scream had really been the wind? Maybe Steve Lassiter had brought the girl there to make love to her. Maybe they had wrestled around the room. Maybe she had fallen against the bed. No, he didn't believe that but it was what everyone else would think. And how could he prove differently?

When his mother finally left him, he got up and dressed slowly.

His shoulder was throbbing and the gashes on his thigh and knees made him limp. He wanted to go back to the Lassiter house, see if the gate was still open, the car still there. But he didn't dare. He'd be too easy to spot if he started hanging around the place. The man must have got a good look at him last night. If he had really killed the girl he'd know that Craddock was a threat to his safety; he'd be on the lookout for him.

Craddock heard the door of the flat slam and the heavy tread of his mother's feet as she clumped down the stairs. He went out into the kitchen and filled a bowl with corn-flakes, poured milk over it and sprinkled it with sugar. The cereal tasted like sawdust but he gulped down half of it. The rest he flushed down the toilet so that his mother wouldn't know that he'd wasted it. Maybe he should just forget the whole thing. It was like the kids said at school, if you kept your lip zipped and your nose clean you saved yourself a lot of trouble. But he couldn't get the picture of

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

the girl out of his mind. What if she was lying there wounded? What if the man had been frightened away when he heard Craddock outside? What if he'd bolted and left the girl where she was? Somehow Craddock had to see into the room again. But he didn't dare go back to the Lassiter place in the daytime. Maybe tonight he could bring himself to do it.

He thought of Jimmy Hay who worked behind the counter at Talbot's. When the store was empty, Jimmy sometimes talked to Craddock, even took time to make sense out of his burbling speech. Jimmy came closest to being a friend of anyone Craddock knew. If Craddock could only tell his story, Jimmy would know what to do. But he'd never manage to tell it all without being interrupted. And even Jimmy wouldn't believe him if he blurted out a lot of stuff about murder and a beautiful girl.

The thing to do was write it all out and then try to persuade Jimmy to read it. He went to a desk and took out some paper and a ball-point pen. He folded the paper into his pocket. He'd better find a quiet spot to do his writing. If he stayed here, his mother might interrupt him at any moment. And now it seemed important that he should have the whole story prepared before anyone saw it.

He jerked open the door and started down the stairs. Halfway down he came to an abrupt stop. A new fear gripped him. The man must have got a good look at him last night. And Craddock with his bean-pole body, his flapping arms, wouldn't be hard to trace. What if the man had found out where he lived, was waiting outside for him to appear? The man had to be Steve Lassiter. Craddock had seen him kill once. How many more murders had Lassiter committed? Craddock had no way of knowing. But if Lassiter realized what he had seen, Craddock was sure he would not hesitate to kill again.

Craddock crept down the stairs with exaggerated cau-

## WITNESS TO DEATH

tion. The hallway was dark and a man could be crouched in the shadows beneath the stairs ready to strike. Craddock leaned across the bannister and gave an involuntary cry as shadows merged together to form a black pattern on the wall. Then he realized that it was his own body, blocking the light from above, that had given shape to the shadows. He fought to repress the high-pitched giggle that rose in his throat.

He speeded up his descent but at the door he stopped again. Old jalopies and a truck or two lined the ugly street but near the corner was a big black car—a Packard. Was this the car that had been in the Lassiter driveway last night? He couldn't be sure but it looked like it. A man sat at the wheel, his back turned, his body partly concealed by the metal frame of the car. The dark overcoat, the Homberg, the big hand resting on the wheel, even the set of the shoulders all made him think of Lassiter.

While Craddock watched the man stirred, opened the side door. Craddock didn't wait to get a look at him. He was running. A few feet along the narrow sidewalk was an alley. He ran the length of it and then squeezed between two houses to a side street.

Instinctively he headed for the park. There were trees there, thick shrubs, a low bridge under which he'd hidden many a time from Tommy and the gang. He was running too fast and when he reached the embankment, he stumbled and fell sprawling, rolling over and over until he was at the very edge of the icy stream that trickled beneath the bridge. He sat up slowly. His fall had opened the wound in his thigh. Blood was soaking his trousers leg. He squatted on the hard earth, bending forward, his head between his bony knees.

He had thought of this place as a refuge but suddenly he realized that it might well be a trap. On a cold windy day like this the park would be practically deserted. If Lassiter

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

had followed him and should find him here, he would be at the older man's mercy. Craddock's hand stretched out to feel the concrete buttress of the bridge. Lassiter could crush his head against the rough surface and no matter how Craddock cried out, there would be no one to hear.

He scrambled to his feet and stood there swaying, uncertain in what direction to move. He forced himself to calm down a little, then started to crawl up the embankment. There were bushes at the top. He pushed them aside and peered out. No one was in sight. The asphalt roadway was a quarter of a mile away but he could see a stretch of it through a clearing in the trees. A big black car idled along, not going more than ten miles an hour. Craddock ducked back into the bushes and waited. A few minutes later the car appeared again from the opposite direction, still cruising along slowly.

Craddock watched the car out of sight. Then, his body bent almost double, he started a zigzag flight across the park, keeping close to the shelter of the thick pine trees that dotted the grass. He didn't dare go out through the gate but vaulted the hedge that lined the park. As soon as his feet touched the brick sidewalk, he ran fast and straight toward the main street of the city. He would be among people and that would give him a modicum of safety.

He slowed down in front of the garish marquee of the big moving picture house. The theatre would be warm and he'd be surrounded by people. He'd see to that. He edged toward the cashier's cage and reached in his trousers pocket for the quarter his mother had given him the day before. The pocket was empty. He drew out his hand and stared at his palm incredulously. He started a flurried search of his pockets. The quarter was gone. He must have lost it in the climb last night or in one of his falls. A woman pushed by him, staring at him curiously. Words formed on his lips and he uttered a burble of sound. The



## WITNESS TO DEATH

woman's hand flew to her mouth and she backed away from him.

A man's voice said, "Hey, what's wrong? Hey, what goes on here?"

Craddock stared up into a beefy face. His eyes blinked and he turned and walked away rapidly. He couldn't walk forever, he thought. Not with the cold wind lashing at him. He'd have to find some place to go. He stood still, shaking his head, trying to clear his thoughts. Then it came to him—the library. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He felt almost calm now that he had a destination. He didn't have far to go anyway. Only a few blocks. Then he'd be safe. He kept his eyes on his feet, refusing to obey the impulse to look around, to see if he was followed. Even if Lassiter was on his trail, what could he do here in an open street?

The two-story brick building that was the library loomed up in front of him. He mounted the stone stairs to the heavy glass door and stepped inside the warm corridor. He hadn't realized he'd been holding his breath but now it came out with a little whooshing sound. He turned to the right toward the reference room. Sometimes he'd come here to study before he'd left school. It was better than home. The big flat-topped tables, the indirect lighting, the stacks of leather-jacketed books had always given him a sense of confidence.

He nodded to the stout, white-haired lady behind the desk and she smiled back at him. He went to the encyclopedia rack and chose a volume at random. It would be better if he pretended to be busy. Not until he'd been seated for some minutes did he remember his original plan to write out the events of the previous evening so that he could pass them to Jimmy Hay at the drugstore.

The paper was still in his jacket pocket though some of the sheets were rumpled and stained. He smoothed them

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

out on the table and got out his pen. But when he tried to put the story down on paper, it didn't seem to make sense. Besides he didn't know where to start. If he just wrote down the facts, Jimmy would think he was nuts, probably he'd laugh in his face. He wrote a few lines, then crossed them out and started over again. Each attempt was worse than the one before. After awhile he crumpled up the two sheets of paper and dropped them in a wastebasket. He opened the encyclopedia and stared down at it. The words on the page blurred before his eyes. The room was too warm and it made him drowsy. He cupped his chin in his palm and let the hushed silence creep over him.

He must have dozed. He came back to wakefulness with a jerk. He wondered how long he had slept. Outside darkness showed beyond the window pane and, as he watched, the streets lights came on. The clock above the librarian's desk said a few minutes before six.

His earlier terror seemed unreal to him. He'd go home, get himself something to eat and go to bed. In the morning everything would be normal. He pushed back his chair and started to rise. Then he saw the man. He couldn't be sure, of course, that it was Steve Lassiter. But the shoulders, the big hand resting idly on the table, the slight arrogance of the man's bearing all reminded him of the man he'd first seen in the doorway of the Lassiter house.

The man didn't turn, didn't raise his eyes from the book in front of him, yet Craddock felt certain that he was aware of his every move.

Craddock hurried to the door. He didn't dare turn around but out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of the big man rising, moving leisurely in his direction. Craddock was in flight again, down the marble steps, through the front door of the library and onto the street. There was no time to think out a plan of action. He ran instinctively without any sense of direction until the air

## WITNESS TO DEATH

rasped in his lungs and his legs felt leaden.

He stopped then, leaning against the side of a building, staring about him like a hunted animal. The street was stippled with light from store windows but there were so many dark places from which Steve Lassiter could be watching him. Standing still like this was making himself an easy target. He'd have to keep moving, no matter how tired he was.

In the block below he could see the blinding neon signs of Talbot's Drugstore. That was where Jimmy Hay worked. He'd better go back to his original plan, try to tell Jimmy his story. He walked along with his strange, jerky gait trying to keep to the shadows, ducking in and out of hallways.

The drugstore was too bright, with its fluorescent lights reflected on the tiles of the floor, the white formica of the long counter. The place was half full. A bunch of giggling high school girls crowded the booths and some older people were seated on the stools that lined the counter. A couple of boys were looking over the paper-back books in the rack. Jimmy Hay was behind the counter, rushing back and forth with plates and glasses, calling out his orders.

Craddock stood just inside the door, feeling as though an arc light were playing upon him. There was no place to hide here. It was like being on a stage. A stool at the far end of the counter was empty. Craddock moved toward it, wrapped his lanky frame around it. This was the least conspicuous spot he could find but even so if Lassiter were combing the streets for him, he wouldn't be hard to locate.

Jimmy hustled by, a hot plate in either hand. He gave Craddock a quick grin but didn't stop. Craddock waited, drumming his fingers on the counter. How could he make Jimmy understand the urgency of his need. He dug out one of the crumpled sheets of paper from his pocket. He tried to write carefully, clearly, but his fingers were shaking and

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

the letters went every which way. All the same he managed to get the message down in big block print—I GOT TO TALK WITH YOU. IT IS IMPORTANT. PLEASE, JIMMY.

Jimmy was approaching him now, his square freckled face lit up by a warm smile. He said, "Hi, kid. What'll it be, a coke?"

Craddock shook his head mutely and shoved the paper across the counter. Jimmy read it and the smile left him. He said, "Look, kid, you know better than that. I can't talk with you now. Not during the rush hour. You come back later when things quiet down."

Craddock gurgled a protest but Jimmy wasn't even listening. Some more high school girls had come in and were goofing around, demanding all of Jimmy's attention. Craddock wanted to start yelling, to grab Jimmy's arm and make him listen. But he knew it wouldn't do any good. He'd just get bounced out of here, back onto the dark streets of the city where somewhere Steve Lassiter was on the prowl, looking for him.

He slumped over the counter, twisting his face away from the window, shielding it with his hand. A voice beside him startled him. Jimmy was back again. "Hey, kid, the boss is giving you the eye. You know he don't like you hanging around here. Why don't you broom off and come back in an hour?"

Craddock tried to protest but already Jimmy was halfway down the counter. He'd have to try again, make his message more urgent. He flattened out another sheet of paper, worked laboriously over it—JIMMY, I SAW A MURDER. YOU GOT TO BELIEVE ME.

It sounded cock-eyed, like something he'd dreamed up. Even Craddock could see that. But he'd have to give it a try. He straightened up, trying to draw Jimmy's attention but Jimmy had his back turned, was filling up cups

## WITNESS TO DEATH

of coffee from the big urn. Craddock tried to call his name but all that came out was a thin squeak that was lost in the babble of the girls.

A hand shot over his shoulder and landed on top of the crumpled paper. Craddock looked down at it, seeing the fine black hairs that matted the finger joints, the heavy gold signet ring. A starched blue cuff shoved just above the wrist and then there was the dark-gray tweed of the overcoat sleeve.

Craddock just sat staring at the hand, watching the fingers twist the paper around so that it could be read. Then the fingers closed, crumpling the sheet into a wedge, concealing it in a thick palm.

His eyes lifted slowly to the face of the man beside him. The man was Steve Lassiter, there was no doubt of that, but he didn't look particularly dangerous now. His face was broad and swarthy, with dark brown eyes and a neatly trimmed little mustache. His expression was one of amusement rather than threat. His eyes sparkled and his lips were parted, showing his overly white teeth.

Jimmy had moved up to the opposite side of the counter. "What'll it be?"

"A cup of coffee for me. One for my young friend, too." Lassiter's voice was rich, smooth, filled with assurance.

Jimmy raised a quizzical brow at Craddock but he turned away, drew the coffee and set it on the counter. Craddock tried to say something then but all that he could get out was a burble of sound. Lassiter laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. It looked like a friendly gesture but the strong fingers bit painfully into the flesh of Craddock's upper arm. He gave a little whimper but no one seemed to notice.

He thought of throwing the steaming coffee into Lassiter's face and dashing for the door. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. Not when he looked into the man's

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

eyes. The good humor had vanished from them and they had become dark pools of cruelty. Craddock sensed he wouldn't get far anyway. Lassiter's arm had dropped from his shoulder and now the strong fingers circled Craddock's wrist.

Lassiter's voice was pitched low but there was no mistaking the threat in it. "Don't try any tricks, kid, because if you do I'll snap your wrist like it was a match stick. Just tell me this. Who've you been talking to?"

Craddock tried to say, "No one. No one at all." But the spluttered words were unintelligible even to his own ears.

Lassiter gave a barking laugh. "Is that the best you can do, kid? Is that all you can say? No wonder you had to write it out. You didn't pass any notes to anyone else, did you?"

Craddock shook his head. Lassiter studied him. "I guess that's the truth or you wouldn't still be trying. So nobody knows about the redhead but me and you. Is that right?"

Craddock gulped and nodded.

Lassiter was smiling again. "That makes things real cozy. Just you and me. We've got nothing to worry about. Not if you're a smart boy. I tell you what. I'll pass you fifty bucks if you forget all about last night. What do you say? Is it a deal?"

Craddock's protests issued from his lips as a shrill whinny, but its meaning was unmistakable. Lassiter's eyes narrowed into slits. His fingers twisted on Craddock's wrist so that pain shot up the length of his arm. Tears filled Craddock's eyes, almost blinding him. He slumped forward and the pressure of the man's fingers eased.

Lassiter took a sip of his coffee and looked around. No one was paying any attention to them and no one was near enough to overhear. Still he kept his voice low-pitched but now he spoke in a confidential manner. "Look, kid, you got things all wrong. You must have got an eyeful

## WITNESS TO DEATH

through that window last night. I was a dope to forget about that torn shade but nothing very serious happened. The little redhead was trying her hand at blackmail so I slapped her around a bit. She fell and got a bump on her head. That's all there is to it. If you'd hung around a bit longer you'd have seen her get up and me take her away in the car. I don't want to be tough, kid, but don't try pulling anything on me because if you do you're going to get roughed up worse than the redhead."

He hesitated but Craddock didn't raise his eyes. Lassiter's voice grew harsher. "You're a real crazy kid, passing around notes about murder. Do you think anybody's going to take your word against mine? You pull any more screw-ball tricks like this and they're going to lock you up and throw the keys away."

Lassiter had his wallet out and was fingering the bills when a shadow fell across the counter. A booming voice called out, "Well, well, Mr. Lassiter, I didn't know you was in town."

Craddock swung around and looked up into Officer Kelly's beet-red face, his thick lips and beady eyes. Lassiter thrust his wallet back into his pocket and smiled blandly at the policeman. "I just got in last night. I'm looking the old place over, thinking of opening it up again."

"That's good. That's fine. I hate to see the old estates get run down." His pig-like eyes slid to Craddock, squeezed in between Lassiter and the end of the counter. A look of puzzlement crossed over his face. He said, "Hi, kid. What you doing here?"

This was the time for Craddock to speak. Either he'd have to make Kelly understand somehow or he'd have to give up once and for all. He clawed at the policeman's sleeve and concentrated on the effort to speak clearly. But his lips seemed thicker than ever and none of the words would come out right. He pointed a finger at Lassiter. "He

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

—he—I saw him murder—” the word “murder” was just a mumble. He tried it over again but Kelly wasn’t even listening by this time; he’d turned back to Lassiter.

“Is this kid bothering you, Mr. Lassiter? He’s a real weirdy, a trouble-maker. You say the word and I’ll run him out of here.”

Lassiter’s manner was bland, kindly. “Nothing like that, Officer. I was just having a chat with the boy. You see, when I came home last night, I saw him prowling around the grounds, so I was just giving him a warning to keep out.”

Kelly swung back to Craddock. “Prowling again, Craddock? Didn’t I warn you if you didn’t keep out of people’s backyards I was going to throw the book at ya?”

Lassiter interrupted. “Don’t be too hard on him, Officer. Anyone can see the boy’s handicapped.”

“Handicapped or not, I don’t want no peeping Toms on my beat. You want to file a complaint against him for trespass?”

“No. I feel sorry for the boy.”

Kelly shrugged. His hand went to Craddock’s shoulder, and he pulled the boy upright. “Okay, you heard what Mr. Lassiter said. He’s giving you a break you don’t deserve. So beat it now before he changes his mind. Go on. Scram.”

He was beaten, Craddock realized. Even if he could make someone listen and understand his words, they’d never believe him. The police had him tabbed as a psycho already. Lassiter was right, if he tried to tell a story about murder they’d lock him up and wouldn’t even bother to check.

He didn’t try to say anything more but shambled through the shop, aware of all the eyes centered upon him, of the girls in the booth tittering at his scuttling walk, of Jimmy Hay’s glance of pity. Out on the street, he turned at random, keeping close to the buildings to avoid the



## WITNESS TO DEATH

chill wind. At least he didn't have to run any more. Steve Lassiter would know that he was harmless, helpless, a guy who couldn't possibly be a meance to his safety.

He could go home now, get some sleep, forget all about Lassiter and the red-headed girl. But his footsteps weren't taking him home. They were carrying him back to the neighborhood of the old Lassiter estate.

He came to an enclosed stairway and sat down in the sheltered spot to think things over. Maybe Lassiter had been telling the truth about the girl. Maybe he'd just slapped her around and then taken her away. But that didn't make sense. Lassiter must have been frightened to spend the whole day trailing him. He'd been waiting outside Craddock's tenement when he got up, had followed him to the park, the library, the drugstore. He wouldn't have done that unless he'd had something serious to hide. Something as serious as murder.

Lassiter had made one mistake, the same mistake that everybody made about Craddock. Lassiter thought that because he couldn't talk and walked funny and looked like a bean pole that he had to be stupid. A stir of anger passed through Craddock's body, warming him up, giving him a desire for action, a sense of confidence. There had to be a way to prove that he was right, that the girl had been killed.

The warmth died out as suddenly as it had sprung to life. If the girl was dead, Lassiter wouldn't dare to let Craddock wander about free. No matter how stupid he thought Craddock might be, he couldn't afford to have a first-hand witness to his crime. Everything that had happened back in the drugstore had been an act, a preliminary to another murder. And this time Craddock would be the victim.

There was no safety anywhere. Not unless he could find

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

some actual proof of what he had seen. And there was only one proof—the girl's body. How could Lassiter have disposed of her? Maybe he hadn't. Maybe she was still lying where she had fallen. Lassiter must have spent almost every minute of his time tracking Craddock down. So maybe he hadn't got rid of her yet. There was one way to find out. To go back to the balcony where he'd been last night. If he could see the girl, maybe he could persuade Jimmy to return with him after the drugstore was closed. Jimmy must have sensed there was something wrong, that Craddock wouldn't go off the deep end over nothing.

He still had a chance to beat Steve Lassiter. Excitement walled up within him, making him forget his bruised body, his chattering teeth. It even drove away the fear for awhile. The Lassiter place wasn't far away, only a few blocks. He swung along, moving fast, until he was in sight of the bleak old house. He crossed the street to look the place over. Trees blocked off his view of most of the house but as far as he could see all the windows were dark. The gate was closed and he guessed that it was locked but getting into the grounds from the front provided no problem. The wall there was low enough for him to leap it and there was hardly anyone around on such a chill night to see him.

His nerves were tingling and he knew that if he stopped to think he'd abandon his plan. He forced blankness into his mind, closing off the thoughts of danger. He started across the street and he was over the low wall before he fully realized what he was doing. The grass was thick and silent beneath his feet. He stopped to listen. No sounds except the crickets and the muted roar of traffic on the highway half a mile beyond.

He steered clear of the driveway, skirting the house in the opposite direction. He continued walking rapidly,

## WITNESS TO DEATH

knowing that his resolution would fail him if he hesitated. The moon was bright and he had no difficulty finding a path that sloped to the back of the house. Pretty soon he could see the garage casting its black shadow across the lawn.

In his own mind the balcony had become a harbor of refuge, the one spot where he would be immune from danger. He started running, tripped on the tangled roots of a shrub, fell, got up and then he was at the base of the rickety stairway. He scrambled up to the balcony and lay there panting. A sense of exaltation passed through him in spite of his mounting panic. For the moment he forgot his reason for coming here in the blind pleasure of having achieved his goal.

He peered through the banister, searching for the window through which he had seen the girl. The window was dark but he could see the shade pulled down as it had been the night before. He could even see the dark triangular patch of the tear. But that was all. His exaltation died as suddenly as it had risen and was replaced with a numbing dread. He was right back in the same position that he'd been last night. Only this time it was worse. If Steve Lassiter should spot him now there'd be no bargaining. It would be curtains for sure.

There was nothing more to see. What he ought to do was get out fast. But he couldn't force his limbs to move.

Despite the dim glow from one of the windows on the lower floor, the house had the air of being deserted. But Steve Lassiter must be close at hand because Craddock could see the black hulk of his car parked in the shadow of the portico. As Craddock watched a light flicked on in the cellar. He sucked in his breath and crouched lower against the banister.

Something was going on in the house. If he only had the nerve to explore, he might find out what it was. But he

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

didn't want to move any closer to Steve Lassiter. As long as he remained here on the balcony, he told himself, he was safe. All the same, he knew that was crazy thinking. There was danger for him here, danger everywhere unless he could put Lassiter behind bars. He'd have to get a grip on himself, or he'd spend the rest of his life running.

He got up slowly and tiptoed down the stairs. He didn't make much noise crossing the lawn but even the tiny sounds of a twig snapping, of gravel beneath his feet, seemed to explode in the chilly silence. When he reached the window he found it was coated thickly with dust. All he could see was a vague blur beyond. He squatted down on his hands and knees and pressed his face against the pane. Steve Lassiter was only a few feet away. Craddock jerked back in sudden terror, losing his balance, almost falling over. The cinders beneath the window scraped his palm and made a soft crunching sound.

He would have fled then but he was paralyzed with fear. What if the sound had alerted Lassiter? What if he were leaping up the stairs now in pursuit of the trespasser? Craddock had to know. He pressed his face against the window again. Lassiter was right where he'd been before, his back turned to Craddock. He'd taken off his coat and hat and even his jacket. The sleeves of his blue shirt were rolled up above the elbows.

It took Craddock a few moments to realize what the man was doing. He was standing in front of the open door of a tool closet. He lifted something in his hands, then put it back again. He crouched low, then rose. He turned then and Craddock saw what he had picked up—a spade. Even from where Craddock watched it looked rusty. Lassiter ran his fingers along the edge of the spade and his shoulders gave a little shrug. He leaned the spade against the wall and looked back in the closet. He picked up something else, then tossed it down again.

## WITNESS TO DEATH

Lassiter swung around slowly and it seemed to Craddock that his eyes rested directly on the window. Craddock cringed away. When he peered through the window again, Lassiter was halfway across the cellar, walking slowly, as though wrapped in thought. Craddock watched him until he disappeared up the stairs.

The spade was still propped against the wall. It could only mean one thing. Craddock had been right after all. The girl's body was here in the house and Lassiter was planning to bury it. But where? Would he dig a grave in the cellar? Or somewhere on the grounds? Or would he take her out in the country in his car? No matter what he planned, he'd have to come back for the spade. This was the place to watch because once he knew where the body was he'd force Jimmy or somebody to help him dig it up.

Lassiter was gone for a long time. To Craddock it seemed as though hours passed although common sense told him that it wasn't more than fifteen or twenty minutes. Then suddenly Lassiter was on the stairs and the girl was in his arms. Her face seemed to be snuggled up against the man's chest so that all Craddock could see was the mass of her red hair, the smooth skin of her back and the careless drape of her dark-green dress.

Her skirt swayed across her slender legs, giving the illusion of movement. Had he been mistaken? Could the girl still be alive?

At the foot of the stairs, Lassiter stopped. A battered old couch stood close by. Lassiter dropped the girl on it. As he stepped back, the girl toppled to one side, then rolled to the floor, her body landing in a strange stiff posture, face downward on the grimy cement. Lassiter stood looking at her for a moment before moving away. Craddock didn't notice where he went. His face was glued to the window, his eyes wide with horror. He was unable to tear his gaze from the gruesome sight.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

He was still staring through the window when a trifling noise made him look up. Lassiter was towering above him. Craddock couldn't see much of his face, only a pale blur in the darkness and the glint of his eyes. But he didn't need to see any more to know that he was close to death.

Lassiter's voice was almost a whisper. "You couldn't leave it alone, could you, kid? Okay, so now you know. What good's it going to do you?"

Craddock inched away, falling backward on his elbows. He would have cried out if he could but no sound would come. He scrabbled crab-wise on the cinders, unaware of anything except the black fear that filled him.

Lassiter grabbed for him then. His heavy, spatulate fingers clasped the leather collar of Craddock's wind-breaker, forcing him up. Craddock's foot rose instinctively and Lassiter's tug added momentum to the clumsy, kicking movement. Craddock felt the jarring impact of his heel on Lassiter's groin. The man uttered a sharp cry and his fingers released their hold of Craddock's collar. Both of them went crashing backward to the earth.

Craddock was up first. Lassiter had fallen so that the light sliced across his face. It was contorted with pain. Lassiter rolled over, struggled upward, bracing himself against the wall. Craddock spun about and began to run. Too late he realized he was racing in the wrong direction, down the slope toward the high wall that bound the end of the grounds. He didn't dare turn back toward the driveway. Somewhere amid the tall matted grass, the overgrown shrubs, the shadows of the maples, surely there had to be a place to hide.

He rounded the garage. There was a tiny grove of trees beyond. He ran toward them, stumbled and fell. He lay still, stunned. He was in a narrow ditch, half filled with leaves still damp from last night's rain. Water soaked into his clothing but he dared not move.

## WITNESS TO DEATH

He could hear the clump of footsteps, Lassiter's muttered curses. Craddock buried his face in his arms so that the whiteness of it might not reveal his hiding place. He remained taut, motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. The footsteps drew closer, then passed him by. Lassiter would think he'd headed for the grove. Wait just a little longer until Lassiter was a safe distance away, then leap up and run like mad. Run along the driveway, leap the front wall and escape to the street. Keep on running then, because you'd never know how long Lassiter would be on your heels. Never stop. Run for the rest of your life. Craddock couldn't help the whimper, the little cry of despair that forced its way past his lips.

Lassiter must have heard because the footfalls stopped and there was nothing but silence. Then the harsh whisper seemed to echo all about him.

"Come on, Craddock, get up. I know you're there."

There was a hypnotic quality in the whisper. Craddock felt the need to rise, to go cringing on his knees to the older man.

"I can wait here forever, Craddock, if I have to."

Craddock fought the impulse to give himself up. Sounds echoed here in the deserted grounds. Lassiter couldn't know where he was, not exactly.

The man's voice took on an eerie, sing-song note. "Craddock, Craddock, where are you, Craddock?"

Craddock sunk his teeth into the leather arm of his windbreaker to hold back his cries. How had Lassiter learned his name? Kelly must have told him. Now the night seemed to echo from every direction. "Craddock—Craddock—Craddock."

It wasn't only Lassiter who was calling him but all the people who had ever tormented him. The boys who hung around Talbot's store. The giggling girls in the schoolyard. Officer Kelly. Eyes must be watching him too. Maybe

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Lassiter was standing right above him. He rolled over and stared up into the sky.

The voice had stopped. When Lassiter spoke again his tones were wheedling. "I won't hurt you, Craddock. We can get together, talk things over. You don't need to be scared of me. I'm your friend, Craddock. Listen, I won't even turn you over to Officer Kelly for prowling. I'll be nice to you. You can trust me, Craddock."

He'd heard it all before, Craddock thought. Tommy, Kelly, his teachers, all used these wheedling tones when they wanted something from him. Talking down to him as though he were an idiot. Something hardened inside of him. Did Lassiter think he'd fall for such a stupid trick? He'd outwit Lassiter. Then he'd run, the way he'd always run. Faster than Lassiter. Faster than anybody. Nobody'd ever catch him.

There was a faint scratching sound, then a pale glow that disappeared almost immediately. Matches. Lassiter was striking matches. Craddock hadn't thought of that. There wouldn't be much time left. In minutes, Lassiter would spot him. And if he were lying here in the ditch what chance would he have to escape the man's crushing fingers?

He leaped to his feet and started to run. He heard Lassiter's bellow, the trampling of his feet. His loping stride carried him to the edge of the garage, across the strip of shadow, back to the lawn. The driveway and freedom stretched ahead of him. How close behind him was the man? He tried to listen but his grating breath, the clatter of his shoes and the thump of his heart blended into a symphony of fear that obliterated every other sound.

He couldn't believe it when he saw the figure ahead of him, rushing toward him. It couldn't be Lassiter. Then he realized what had happened. Lassiter had cut across the front of the garage to head him off from the gate and the



## WITNESS TO DEATH

driveway. He almost crashed into the man, but pivoted and swung away just in time. Lassiter's hand clawed at his wind-breaker but the damp leather slipped through his fingers and Craddock was free once more.

Now he must run blindly, without plan, back toward the high wall that offered no escape. The man was right behind him and there was no time to think of anything but how to escape the snatching fingers. He ran, arms flapping, his chest forward, his head down. Bushes whipped at him and the low-hanging branches of a tree lashed his face. He ran in a half-circle among the trees with Lassiter never far behind. If he tripped, even stumbled, he'd be through. He'd have no chance against Lassiter.

But it was Lassiter whose foot tangled with the thick vines. He fell heavily with a grunt and a curse. Craddock should have leaped over him back to the clear space that led to the drive. But Craddock couldn't check his headlong flight and the angle of the wall loomed up ahead. He was caught in a trap and as he swung about, he saw that Lassiter was on his feet again, not running any longer, but walking slowly to where Craddock stood with his back against the wall.

Craddock sidled into the shadow of a tree. The leaves brushed against his forehead. He knew what he had to do then. His hands reached for the thick branch and he pulled himself up awkwardly, his thin body dangling. Lassiter rushed him but Craddock's leg lashed out, caught the man on the chest, sent him reeling back.

Lassiter didn't try to stop him a second time but stood in the pale moonlight just beyond the tree's shadow, watching.

"Come on down, boy," he called softly. "You can't stay up there all night and I'm sure going to be waiting for you."

Craddock pulled himself up higher, pressing close to the

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

gnarled trunk. Lassiter leaned down, picked up a stone and flung it. The heavy foliage deflected the stone and it went clattering against the wall. From the street beyond Craddock could hear the hum of a car, slowing for the intersection. It he could only call out now, help might come. He opened his mouth and the soft burbling sounds spilled out. He choked them off and let the stillness settle about him.

The sky was clouding up and as the night grew darker, he could scarcely make out the man's squat figure, patiently waiting below him. He clutched the trunk of the tree more tightly and felt the thin sobs wrack his body. There had to be a means of escape, some way out. He crept a little higher, peering up into the sky through the lattice-work of leaves and branches. The stone wall was more than twenty feet high at this point. Could he work his way out onto one of the high branches? Make a leap for the wall? Cling to it?

Even if he were able to hoist himself to the top of the wall, how could he get down? He remembered his desperate climb of yesterday. He had had the gate to help him then, the projecting cornice, the ragged stones to give him hand holds. But here the wall would be smooth, a sharp descent to the bricks and concrete of the sidewalk. He'd have to try it though. It was his only chance.

The branch dipped and swayed as he edged out upon it. He let out a startled little squeal. Beneath him, he heard the movements of the man, coming closer, but he could not see him through the leaves.

He'd have to go higher, try again. He inched back, groped his way upward, then moved with infinite caution along the swaying branch. He was close to the wall now, only a few more inches and he could reach out for it. But that would mean releasing his grip. He'd have to make the leap all in one motion. He lay along the branch, his

## WITNESS TO DEATH

body drenched in sweat despite the chill night air.

He'd count to ten and when he reached that number he'd make the try. The numbers ticked away in his mind but when he reached ten his body refused to react as he wanted it to. Perhaps he could move closer. even an inch would help. He wriggled along the branch. Then he heard the ominous crack of dried wood. Time was running out and with a sudden desperate effort he flung himself forward. His hands caught the sharp edge of the wall. A rough stone, an uneven spot, gave him a grip. His body dangled loosely against the parapet, but he pulled himself up until finally he straddled the coping.

The empty street glistened darkly beneath and the wind whipped at his face. Blocks away the headlights of a car cut a swathe of light through the darkness. Other than that there was no movement. It was as though a dead city lay beneath him. Dizziness seized him and with it the almost uncontrollable impulse to fling himself to the bricks below. Descent was impossible here. He'd have to squirm his way along to the big gate. He flattened out on the ledge, pulling himself along with his hands, his chest scraping on the jagged surface.

He had gone only a few feet when a taunting voice drifted up to him. "You can't make it, boy. You're going to fall. You're going to be killed." Lassiter, standing somewhere in the shadows, was mocking him as the boys had mocked him the day before.

Then far away footsteps echoed, only a light tapping at first but growing louder, like the steady rising tattoo of a drum. A figure emerged into the circular pool of light cast by the street-lamp at the far end of the block. Even from here, Craddock could recognize the man as Officer Kelly. If he could only call out, he'd be safe. He raised himself a little and gibbering animal cries left his throat, only to mingle with the whine of the wind, the crackling night sounds.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Kelly stopped at the corner and his head twisted from side to side scanning the streets. If he'd only look upward, up to the wall where Craddock's body made an elongated silhouette against the coping. Craddock propped himself up and raised one arm high in an awkward waving motion.

"Craddock!" The voice on the lawn below was sharp, commanding. Craddock turned involuntarily. Lassiter was there. Enough moonlight shone on him so that Craddock could see the glitter of his eyes, in the white patch of his face.

"Craddock!" Lassiter called again. His hand went back, then shot forward. Craddock didn't see the stone, only felt the shattering blow on his chest. Instinctively his body jerked backward. Too late his hand clawed at the wall's edge. He was going back, back into the darkness, then falling, head downward, whirling and twisting. The scream that he could never utter before came rushing through his lips, a shrill piercing shriek that was broken off by a sickening crash as Craddock's body struck the sidewalk.

Officer Kelly whirled at the sound. For a moment he was motionless, staring incredulously in the direction of the scream. Then he gave a shout and ran with ponderous speed to the spot where Craddock had fallen. He knelt beside the broken figure, swearing softly.

The Lassiter home was dark when Kelly passed. No sense going in there anyway. Even if Steve Lassiter was home, he'd have no telephone and the first thing Kelly had to do was notify his chief, then summon an ambulance. The Willoughby house opposite was lit up and he went in there to use the phone.

When he came back, a light shone in an upstairs window of the old mansion. So Steve was there after all. Kelly had better route him out, get him to identify the body. He gave a halloo and a few minutes later Steve came to the front door. He had on trousers, leather bedroom slippers, a

## WITNESS TO DEATH

corded red silk dressing gown.

Kelly gave him the story fast and straight. After all, there wasn't any time to waste. He'd have to get back to the kid before somebody stumbled across his body and started having hysterics. Steve caught on quick. He didn't ask any questions, just went along with Kelly.

The wail of the siren could be heard in the distance by the time they reached the kid. Steve dropped down on one knee beside him, then averted his face. He stood up, stripped off the dressing gown and laid it over the boy. He was naked from the waist up. Kelly, watching him, saw a tremor pass through his body. Steve Lassiter was okay, he thought, a real solid citizen in spite of all the gossip that had made the rounds when his mother had been found murdered.

Steve turned toward him. "Maybe there was something I could have done for the boy. Maybe—"

Kelly cut him off. "He was prowling your place, wasn't he? I tell you the kid had itchy fingers. He takes a tumble and kills himself. So what? Forget it."

Steve's eyes dropped to his feet. A loose rock showed under the edge of the robe. With one slippered foot he sent it spinning into the gutter.

Kelly didn't say anything more. The ambulance had swung around the corner and he stepped out to the curb to signal it. The next fifteen minutes were too confused to leave room for thought about Lassiter. But when the ambulance finally rolled away, Kelly saw that Steve was still there, standing by the wall, shivering. Hell, the guy would probably catch his death of cold, maybe get pneumonia. He should have gone up to the house long ago. Why should a big shot like Lassiter have to be bothered with a no-good little punk like Craddock? The kid had never been anything but a trouble-maker, a prowler, a peeping Tom. He'd probably planned a bit of petty thiev-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

ing tonight. Maybe something worse. What the hell, it wasn't such a bad thing that the kid had bumped off. He was getting screwier all the time. You couldn't tell what a kid like that would do, he thought angrily. Give him time enough and he'd probably end up by committing murder.

# FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

by Arthur Somers Roche

**"HOW-DO, Inspector?"**

Police Captain Michael Tressiger looked up from his plate of "ham-and." His ears, long attuned to subtleties of tone as well as of word, caught the slight emphasis on the title. Faint wrinkles showed on his lower eye-lids, as they drew up, narrowing his glance. Only a fraction of a second elapsed before he replied, but that was long enough for him to catalogue the speaker as follows: "Too jolly; eyes don't fit the rest of his face; fine indoor tan; electric lights did it; spends big money on his manîcure; but why are the nails on his little fingers pared to the quick? 'Gam.'"

The last word is an abbreviation; Captain Tressiger

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

meant that the gentleman who had accosted him with a title not his made his living by serving the goddess of chance. A professional gambler. Perhaps one errs in coupling the fickle goddess's name with the vocation mentioned. Pared fingernails mean that the delicate nerves of the finger tips will telegraph to the brain any slight inequality in the edges of the cards. Chance has nothing to do with the affairs of gentry such as he who dropped smilingly into the chair across the table from the police officer.

Aloud the captain said, politely, "Afraid you've made a mistake, sir."

He smiled ingratiatingly as he spoke. The wrinkles disappeared from beneath his eyes; the eyes themselves were round and simple now; he looked hopeful, ingratiating, very much like a Newfoundland puppy that wants to make friends. One almost expected him to wag his tail.

The smartly-groomed stranger frowned; he pursed his lips.

"I never forget faces—or names," he said. "I met you at the police lieutenant's banquet. Aren't you Inspector Michael Tressiger?"

"I wish I was," replied Tressiger with a grin. "I'm *Captain* Michael Tressiger."

The stranger made a grimace.

"The laugh's on me. But I'm right, at that. I didn't forget your name or face. Just the title. But—maybe I'm not so far wrong about that. It's a short step from a captaincy to the other, eh?"

"If your legs are long," grinned Tressiger.

"Or if you have plenty of push—or pull," amended the other. "My name's Brennan, Captain. You've forgotten me?"

"Well, now, if you'll excuse me," said Tressiger, embarrassedly, "I meet so many—It was the lieutenant's banquet, you say? Well, Mr. Brennan, that was a big night,



## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

you know, and I was a guest and treated like one, so—" He broke off, grinning sheepishly.

It was excellent acting. As a matter of fact, Tressiger had never drunk a drop of liquor in his life. Equally as a matter of fact, there was not a single person in the world who knew that he was a "teetotaller." Had they been asked, his friends would have admitted that they had never seen him take a drink, but still they would have thought that he occasionally took one. The reason was simple; Tressiger was always "off the stuff" today. His manner and words always indicated that yesterday it had been different and tomorrow it would be different. To be a total abstainer was a very good thing in Michael Tressiger's profession. To be *known* as a total abstainer—that was another thing. Sometimes a captain of detectives likes to pretend slight or great intoxication. A "teetotaller" could not get away with such a play. Absolutely colorless, no high lights anywhere, in person, in manner, or in mode of living—that was to be an efficient detective, according to the theories of Captain Tressiger, and he lived according to his theories.

"Not a word," said Mr. Brennan, with a roguish wink. "Banquets don't count. Especially in a town as dull as this has got to be."

"Is it?" queried Tressiger, innocently.

"You know it," asserted Brennan. "Dull as ditchwater, yet with the opportunities and the material—" He smacked his lips. "A live man could turn a million here in twelve months, Captain."

"More than that, maybe," assented Tressiger, lamblike of countenance.

"If he were let alone," supplemented Brennan.

"Who'd disturb him?"

Brennan shrugged his shoulders. "Like arithmetic, Captain?"

How Tressiger managed to impart a shine to his eyes

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

at this moment, only he himself could explain. But they did shine, with greed.

"Ever try to figure ten percent of a million?" asked Brennan.

"I could figure fifteen easier," said Tressiger.

"Twelve and a half," said Brennan.

"I could do that," admitted Tressiger.

For a good twenty seconds the keen eyes of the gambler held those of Tressiger. But all that Brennan saw was stupid greed, cheap cunning, a weak-willed man's dishonesty. He looked satisfied when he released Tressiger's eyes.

"We'll do business," he said shortly. "Any suggestions?"

"Cash. No checks," said Tressiger, eagerly. He caught himself. "But I'm only a captain. I haven't got control of—"

"You should worry, *Inspector!*" laughed Brennan. He looked around the dingy restaurant. "We don't need bother about details. You said it in one word; 'Cash.' Besides, the newspaper boys drop in here. Good afternoon, Inspector."

He nodded, smiled, arose, and walked briskly from the place.

*"...the facts given in this story will doubtless be immediately denied by both the Commissioner of Police and the Mayor. Nevertheless the Star obtained them from a source that has hitherto proved accurate and honest, and this paper reiterates that it is planned that within the next two weeks Inspector Michael Tressiger will ask and be granted leave of absence for a fortnight or a month. While on his vacation he will become ill and obtain an extension of leave. His illness will terminate in a nervous breakdown; on his return to duty after six or eight months he will find that the work of the detective bureau has been so ably carried on by his successor, present Captain Grayson, that,*

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

*in justice to the efficiency of the department, it will be inadvisable to remove Grayson. Tressiger will be out of the detective bureau.*

*"This premature exposure may cause to be altered some of the above details. Nevertheless, the result will be the same. For reasons best known to the powers that be, Inspector Tressiger is to be removed from the head of the detective department. And if he doesn't retire gracefully, means will be found to force his retirement."*

For the third time Tressiger read the article, mumbling the last paragraphs aloud, after the fashion of those whose early education has been neglected and who have had to make up deficiencies late in life.

Inspector Tressiger had been working hard these past four weeks. Captain of detectives though he had been for three years, until a month ago when promoted to the head of the bureau, being chief, he had learned, is a mighty different thing from being subordinate. A million details, more or less, had to be learned by an inspector who ruled the detective bureau. Of course, it was easier than if he had not served so long in the branch of the Force, but Tressiger was a mighty methodical man. Everything that the head of the bureau should or could know, Tressiger wanted to know. Hence, his days and his nights had been filled with labors.

Today he had planned to take off, the first little vacation in the month. Carpet slippers were on his feet; a frayed but warm old bathrobe enveloped his stocky form; a pile of magazines, several much-used pipes, and a jar of tobacco were on a table in the room which he called his "office," and which another man might have termed his study. He looked longingly from the breakfast where he read the *Star* to the open door of the office. Then he sighed, left the room and entered his bedroom, where he arrayed him-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

self in a quiet business suit and cloth hat. From the inner coat pocket of the uniform hanging in a closet he drew a little notebook. He found there the address of Tom Griffith, Headquarters man of the *Star*.

With a word to the motherly old Irish-woman who was his housekeeper, he left the little flat where he had planned to spend a day of rest, and set forth for the neighborhood of Washington Square.

They were lax in certain things in the lodging house where Tom Griffith abode. The maid who answered Tressiger's ring told him the location of Griffith's room and said to go right up without any formality. Tressiger did so. He tried the knob of the reporter's door, found that it was not locked and entered with a softness of tread that was amazing considering his bulkiness.

By the window, in a cot-bed, Griffith lay slumbering. Tressiger did not disturb him until he had swept the bedroom with observing eyes. He noted everything, especially a round blue article on the bureau. He smiled a trifle at sight of this. Then he walked to the bed and shook the sleeper into wakefulness.

Griffith sat up, grumbling. But, as his eyes cleared and he recognized his caller, Tressiger noted that the reporter's muscles went tense for a fraction of a second. Then Griffith grinned, stretched his arms above his head, yawned, and frankly and pleasantly cursed his visitor.

"Don't you know a reporter wants his rest on the day after his day off?" he asked. "You big heartless bull, whaddayamean, ye lost your dog?"

"It's my goat, Tom," said Tressiger, genially. "Had to find him as soon as possible. Thought you and I were little pals together, Tom?"

"Huh? I haven't stolen any candy out of your desk, Mike."

"No, it was somebody else's desk. Wake up, Tom! Give

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

it to me straight. Why did you write that yarn about me going to get the gate? And where did you get it?"

"What yarn?"

"In this morning's *Star*, of course."

Griffith lifted his pajama-ed legs to the floor; his feet groped for slippers. He put his hands to his head.

"An awful night, Mike," he groaned. "Before you use the third degree let me get a little jolt."

Tressiger breathed deeply. "Go to it, Tom," he said genially.

The reporter shuffled across the room to a closet. There he got a flask of whiskey and a tumbler. He poured himself a small drink and downed it. He turned, smacking his lips.

"A hair of the dog," he grinned. "Now I can listen to the riddle. What's all this about a story in the *Star*?"

Tressiger silently handed him the newspaper. Griffith read it carefully. He handed it back. "Tough luck if they do intend to put the rollers under you, Mike," he said sympathetically. "But—yesterday was my day off."

"Who relieves you? Thought Sunday was your loafing day?"

"Was, until this week. Relieves me? Nobody; we take a chance on the City News looking after us. If anything breaks we shoot a man over to Headquarters."

"Then you couldn't tell who wrote this?"

"Oh, well, now, that's different," hedged Griffith. "I could make a pretty close guess, but—newspapermen don't do that sort of thing, Mike. You ought to know that. Professional secrecy—all that sort of stuff. I couldn't tell you his name. But what's worrying you? If a cop was transferred every time the papers said so—"

"It sounded like whoever wrote it had the inside dope," interrupted Tressiger. "And your paper must have thought the 'info' was right from the feed box, to print it. I've done

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

you several good turns."

"You sure have, Mike," assented the reporter. "But if I asked you to tell me the contents of a secret order the Commish handed you, what then?"

"Yup. I suppose it's the same idea," grunted Tressiger.

He picked up his hat from the bureau where he had deposited it on entering the room. Considering the stubbornness of his fingers, it must have taken many, many weary hours of practice for him to master the sleight of hand whereby he picked up the blue piece of celluloid while apparently merely reaching for his hat. But the reporter's eyes were very keen and Tressiger did not dare to sweep the chip into the hat. It had to be picked up. And Griffith did not notice.

"Sorry, Mike. Surprised you should worry about a pipe-dream in the paper, though," said Griffith.

"Well, you couldn't exactly call it worrying," said Tressiger. "I just wanted to know, Tom. Well, hop into the hay again. Sorry to disturb you. Better chop the rum, son. Bad game. S'long."

And he walked slowly from the room, closing the door gently behind him. His walk was heavy as he descended the stairs, but once in the street, while it still looked heavy, it was as in reality as light as a dancer's tread. And it was as certain as the march of a file of soldiers; Tressiger knew exactly where he was going.

Ex-Alderman Torney, Democratic leader of the —nth District, and by virtue of the office and various other considerations one of the little group that ruled the "Hall," and thus directed the destinies of the City, was in the private office from where he ran a chain of saloons, dictated the policy of a trust company, and planned various incursions into the field of realty investment. Smoothly plump, a little too fashionably attired, with a diamond in his tie

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

that was perfect in all save good taste, he lounged in a swivel chair, his patent-leathered feet on his desk.

He waved a fleshy hand toward an open box of cigars. "Help yourself, Inspector," he said, "they ain't the kind I give to my constituents."

Tressiger smiled appreciatively at the mild jest. "Much obliged, Alderman," he said. He selected a cigar, bit off the end, and lighted it. He puffed at it nervously, sitting on the extreme edge of the chair to which Torney had motioned him.

"Excuse me, Alderman," he said, hesitatingly, "but would you mind telling me where you was last night?"

Mr. Torney stared at the inspector. Policemen, no matter what their rank, were not in the habit of asking the politician his whereabouts at any given time. Mr. Torney, though he rarely advertised the fact, though, indeed, he denied it in the public prints as regularly as any reform committee made the assertion, made or broke policemen as the whim seized him. To be questioned by one of them—He pursed his fleshy lips and his eyes hardened.

"You ain't tryin' to run a third degree on me in my own office, are you, Inspector?" he demanded.

His manner seemed to say that if such were the case he would have Inspector Tressiger degraded before nightfall.

Tressiger shifted his position uneasily. "Excuse me again, Mr. Torney," he pleaded humbly, "but Benny the Rat has squealed and—"

"Eh? Benny the— Squealed!" With an effort the ex-alderman banished the indignant amazement from his tone. "I don't get you," he said more calmly. "What's Benny the—what'd you call him? The Rat? Well, what's his squealing got to do with me? Seems to me that you're travelin' a short road to a long finish, Inspector Tressiger."

"I was afraid you might take it like that," said Tressiger, meekly. "And I hesitated about seein' you at all. And then

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

I figured that Benny's lawyer would get to the newspaper boys, and there'd be a big hoorah, when if I could get just a word or so out of you I'd be able to show the lawyer that Benny was up against it anyway you look at it, and the best thing he could do is to take a plea, and not try to throw mud. I didn't mean to annoy you, Alderman. It was just to prevent any mud being slung at you."

Torney breathed deeply. "Well, that's more like sense, Inspector," he said, encouragingly. "But what's where I was last night got to do with Benny the Rat?"

"Well, you see, we took him in about one this morning. Gangster job over on the East Side. Benny lost his nerve and offered to give up everything he knew if we'd turn him loose. 'Course, him being nailed with a gat smoking in his hand we couldn't do anything like that. Assault with intent to kill is too serious a matter. But we offered to make it plain assault if he had any good news for the department. Well, he come through with a long story about you being behind him in election frauds last fall. Said he could prove you supplied him with money for repeaters and that you hired him to put the Fusion poll workers in the hospital. If I didn't know you, Alderman, the yarn woulda listened good. And when, to sorter clinch his story—he was pretty scared, being caught with the goods, you know—he said that he'd been with you up to midnight last night, making plans to do some colonizing for the special election to fill Congressman Greening's seat—well, I figured here was an easy way to prove him a liar. If he lied in one thing he lied in all of them. 'Course, I know he lied all the way, but the papers and the reformers—you know, Alderman.

"Well, then, if Benny *wasn't* with you last night—he'd drop his story for good and all. I'd give him an earful that if he sprung stuff like that in court he'd maybe get life. So you see how it is I come up to see you. Charges, even if lies, ain't pleasant, with a special election coming on."



## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

Torney beamed graciously upon the inspector. "You've done well, Inspector Tressiger," he said. "Sorry I got hot a minute ago. Well, I'll prove to you what a liar this Benny the Rat is. Here's the telephone book. Get my number. Ask my wife where I was last night. Yes, go ahead," he added, as Tressiger seemed to hesitate with embarrassment. "God knows I got nothing to hide. And as you say, better quench it at the start than let it grow to a blaze. Repeater charges are bad for the party. And as you say, if this Benny person knows you know he lies, and that lies'll make his case harder for him—I was sick in bed with indigestion all last evening. Went to bed at seven and stayed there till this morning. Now, then, ask my wife where I was. Tell her you're Sam Wolfenstein. Say you had a date with me for last night. Then she'll answer you. Or give her any name at all. See?"

Tressiger saw. He got Torney's wife on the telephone, spoke with her a moment, corroborated her husband's statement, and then turned to the politician with an air of righteous indignation.

"I told Benny the Rat I'd reduce the charge if he had any straight information," he said, heavily. "'Course, when I said that I didn't dream he was going to make any crazy charges against a man like you, Alderman. When he made 'em, of course I had to take the quickest way to disprove 'em. A liar in part, a liar all through. Well, he's made a monkey outa me, and made me offend you. He'll pay."

"Oh, I wouldn't feel that way, Inspector," said Torney. "I suppose the poor guy was desperate, and maybe filled up with hop. Jail ain't a pleasant prospect. And, even, if he did lie about me—well, I don't bear malice. Besides, if you get the limit for him he'll talk anyway, won't he? Nothing to it, but—with a special election coming on we got to think of the party, eh, Inspector? Who did this Benny person bump off, anyway?"

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"Some Armenian. No account. Just wounded him; no killing."

"H'm. No account, eh? No friends, eh? Nobody to raise a row. H'm. And maybe this Armenian only got what was comin' to him, at that."

"Benny says it was self-defense," admitted Tressiger.

"Maybe the man tells the truth," said Torney. "And a scandal in the party—the other side would just hop to it, even if it was a pack of lies. Suppose, Inspector, all things considered, that you let this Benny person go? It isn't in the papers, eh?"

"No," said Tressiger.

"Then suppose you let him go. For the sake of the party."

"Well, if you hadn't proved him such an awful liar, right off the bat, I don't know as I could do that, even for you, Alderman," said Tressiger, slowly, "but under the circumstances—just as you say, Alderman."

"Thanks," said the great man, genially. "You got the right idea about your job, Inspector. And—er—send this Benny person to me."

"Yes, sir," said Tressiger.

Once outside Torney's office, he permitted himself the luxury of a grin. Then with the same light, certain step he set out on a tour of the East Side. It took him three hours to locate Benny the Rat, but only three minutes to do business with that notorious gangster.

"Benny," he said, briskly, "there's a dozen things I could slap you into a cell for. You know it, eh?"

"You ain't got a bit of evidence on me for anything," declared the gangster.

"I could frame it," said Tressiger.

"What's the matter?" whined Benny.

"Nothing—much. I just want you to leave town—leave it—flat—for two weeks. Here's a hundred expense money."

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

You take the first train outa the Grand Central, for anywhere. If you're seen in town inside two weeks I'll frame you. Understand?"

"No," said Benny, "but I'm leavin' town."

Simeon Cranston was known as the "aristocrat of the Hall." Born to high social position, only a very few knew when old Jabez Cranston died he had left behind him little but the memory of a sunny disposition. All of the fortune that John, the grandfather, had left, Jabez the son had dissipated, leaving Simeon the grandson nothing but the family name and place. "Dissipated," perhaps, is not the exact word, too suggestive as it is of fast living. Jabez Cranston had lived, everything considered, in most exemplary fashion. He had not drunk or gambled to excess. But he had lived, everything considered, in most exemplary larger dip into the principal that John had amassed. So, simultaneously, Simeon attained orphanhood and his majority, and the knowledge that he had not a penny to bless himself with. Gone was his dream of entering the diplomatic service, of advancing himself by means of the famous Cranston manner and the Cranston wealth, until at last he should attain an ambassadorial post. He was confronted with the stern necessity of earning a living.

Simeon took stock of himself and his prospects. Friends of his father there doubtless were who would give him a start in their offices. But, with his father dead, how long would such kindly interest continue? Not a minute after young Simeon gave signs of being a business failure. Knowing himself, knowing his hatred for anything that faintly resembled work, young Simeon shuddered. The Cranston manner, justly famed though it was, and transmitted without diminution from Jabez to Simeon, was mighty poor capital wherewith to embark in a commercial career. Simeon looked around.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

It was the era of the climber. From the west was pouring into the metropolis the mining and cattle contingent, flushed with wealth, anxious to spend, with their women more anxious to spend in the right quarter, to enter "Society." These would pay richly for the entree into the circle to which Simeon had been born. Simeon seriously considered adopting the career of a social steerer. Then he looked about him; he remembered the fates of several social steerers. They had "got by" for a while, had flourished exceedingly, and then—their set had dropped them, and now they eked out too precarious existences introducing climbers to other climbers. Soon this sort of thing would be denied. True, they were not Cranstons, with the Cranston manner and the Cranston footing, but— Well, money was dominating society more and more. Cranston manners and Cranston position would not last many more years without money; without much more money than could be wrung from the climbers. Simeon looked farther. This time his eye alighted upon Big Mike Allardyce, the leader of the "Hall."

Simeon met Allardyce when the former was escorting a group of ladies on a sight-seeing trip which had wound up at the "Hall." Allardyce, at the time a typical rough-neck, had noticed the group, had been attracted by the ladies, had introduced himself, had volunteered to be their guide, had been accepted and, a new type, had amused the party tremendously. So much so that Simeon invited the boss to be his guest at a dinner-party the following week.

So had begun Allardyce's social career, of which the newspapers had made much, Allardyce, hungry for intercourse with these superior beings, a born toady and snob, for all his money and political power and physical courage, had hinted to Cranston that a mutual friendship might prove mutually profitable. The boss read the money-greed in the young man's face. Other people might not see it

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

there, but Big Mike Allardyce owed his success to his ability to read men. Further, he had his agents look up the Cranston fortune, and they found it non-existent. There was no crude bargaining; Allardyce merely stated that C. and B. stock was going up. It would be a pleasure to carry ten thousand shares for his friend Cranston. In the same breath he went on to explain that the greatest drawback the Hall had to fight was the fact that the "good people" were against it. If, for instance, he continued, he, Mike Allardyce, were known to mingle with the world of fashion, and if a few of the world of fashion should mingle with the folk of the "Hall"—Well?

Cranston made over thirty thousand on the C. and B. stock deal. Mike Allardyce went to the Mannering fancy ball. Cranston made a hundred and forty thousand on the new reservoir project; Allardyce went for a week-end cruise on the Crichton yacht. At first the world smiled, even guffawed. Then it became accustomed to the sight of the boss, no longer a roughneck, but toned down in manner and apparel, vouched-for by Simeon Cranston, entering the world of society, which always looking for amusement, and finding it in the clever Irish wit of Allardyce, welcomed him with open arms.

After all, Cranston had become a social steerer, but—he had also become a power in the world of politics and accordingly, of finance. Between the two men grew up a warm friendship. While Allardyce never fully trusted Cranston, still, Cranston gave him what he wanted, and Cranston was too dependent on Allardyce ever to betray the boss. Allardyce admired Cranston because of the latter's suaveness, wit, bonhomie, absence of "side." Cranston liked Allardyce because the latter had made him rich.

For a decade and half this state of affairs continued. Strangely enough, instead of weakening Allardyce's politi-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

cal power, the fact that he traveled with a fashionable set made him stronger in the "Hall." The "Hall" took a vicarious pride in his social career. It was flattering to the "Hall."

Then Big Mike's doctor thumped his diaphragm, listened with a stethoscope to his heart and lungs, took his blood pressure—and Allardyce took a steamer for the Old Country. He never returned.

His friend Cranston, now graying with middle-age, was one of half a dozen with whom the boss left the destinies of the "Hall." In a little while the half dozen split into two groups, of three each, one headed by Cranston, the other led by Jim Torney. Dissension rent their councils. A reform wave swept the city and for eight years the "Hall" was out of power. Then a public dissatisfaction with the reformers setting in, the "Hall" regained its control of the City government.

Lean years had taught the two groups the folly of internal dissension. At least, they outwardly professed disgust at their bickering and publicly drank to reconciliation—and spoils! Privately, however, with the return to power, the two groups revived the old jealousy. They did not dare to fight, but each planned how it would acquire greater power than the other, how it would retain the major portion of the looted profits of the "Hall's" rule.

And all these matters, reduced to their smallest details, passed in review before Inspector Tressiger's mental sight before he made his next move after getting Benny the Rat out of town in order that Torney might not know of the trick that had been played on him. For Tressiger was as keen a student of affairs political as might have been found even in the highest councils of the "Hall." Early, at the very outset of his police career, Tressiger had discovered that the policeman who fought the politicians must lose all or gain all. There was no halfway measurer.

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

A policeman, if he fought politicians, must fight *politics*. To defeat one politician and stop there meant to be driven from the force. And not to fight politicians meant to be a crook. But the honest man, if he is wise, does not always attack the first dishonesty he finds. He waits until, by tackling something big, the little things are wiped out with the great. So with Tressiger. And now, after twenty years of patient waiting, of futile inward raging at the things he must see and permit to be, Michael Tressiger was ready to strike the big thing—politics, not mere politicians. Though, of course, to strike the thing he had to strike its practitioners.

It was eight o'clock that night when the inspector, accompanied by two men whose plainclothes could not disguise their police connection, mounted the steps of the Cranston mansion.

To the servant who answered his ring he demanded being shown to the master of the house at once. After some demur he was admitted to the library and in a moment Cranston came to him.

"I'm entertaining some of my friends, Inspector," he said crossly. "What is it?"

Like Torney, Cranston knew the inspector, though neither of them knew him at all well.

"Sorry, Mr. Cranston," said Tressiger, humbly. "There's been some sort of a mistake somewhere, but—well, the plain truth of the matter is this: Alderman Henry Pedderman was secretly indicted by the grand jury today, on charges brought by the Civic League. Indicted for accepting a bribe."

"Well, what about it?" snapped Cranston.

Tressiger shuffled uneasily, and seemed afraid to meet Cranston's eyes.

"Well, the Civic League people accused you of giving the bribe. And Pedderman—well, he confessed."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"Confessed?" Honest amazement was in Cranston's eyes. "Why, I hardly know the man. It's an outrageous lie!"

"It looks like a dirty frameup to me," assented Tressiger. "Still, orders is orders. There's a warrant for you, Mr. Cranston. You see, Pedderman's story is full of detail that makes it sound O.K. to people who don't really know you. He even claims that money passed from you to him as recently as last night."

"Last night? That proves what a liar he is. Why last night I was at—"

"Yes?" queried Tressiger, gently.

Cranston laughed and colored slightly. "Well, between friends, Inspector Tressiger, I have a complete alibi for last night. I was at Smilo Brennan's from eight until twelve-thirty."

"Brennan the gambler?"

"Well, let's not be crude in our terms," said Cranston. "I'd not want to have it publicly known. But between us—you'd better not arrest me, Inspector! If Pedderman can be so quickly proven a liar in one thing it stands to reason he will be proved a liar in other things, eh? It will be easy to get hold of Brennan, verify my statement that—"

"Oh, we'll take your word for that end of it, Mr. Cranston," said Tressiger. "In fact, that's all we wanted to know. Mr. Cranston, I arrest you for maintaining a public gambling house, and for bribery. Anything you say will be used against you. Better come along quiet, now."

It was two o'clock in the morning. In the private office of the Commissioner of Police were a group of men, all of them, save Inspector Michael Tressiger, white-faced, strained, angry-looking. There were the Mayor, the Commissioner, District Leader Torney and his lawyer, Abe Grumble, and Simeon Cranston, one of the rulers of the "Hall," and his lawyer, Grenfell Worthington, and Smilo



## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

Brennan, the gambler, and his lawyer, Louis Johnson. A lull had come in the midst of threats, expostulations, profanity. During it the Mayor turned to Tressiger.

"You say you've got the evidence, Inspector," he said. "No, wait," he snapped, as the lawyers began to speak, "let's hear the inspector now. Go ahead, Tressiger, tell us what you have."

Tressiger put his hands on his knees and leaned stiffly toward the Mayor. In the monotone of the policeman making a report he addressed the Mayor.

"On April fifth, Your Honor, in Whelan's restaurant, Brennan here accosted me. He addressed me as Inspector, and I was then only a captain. Hinted I could be an inspector. Hinted I could get twelve and a half percent of a million a year if I kept quiet. I told him I liked that sort of figuring. Two weeks later I was made inspector with full charge of the detective bureau. Smilo Brennan opened up four days after that on West Forty-eighth Street, near Fifth Avenue. I got eight hundred a week later, fourteen hundred the next week, and twelve hundred the week after that. Got it in cash. Still got it. Guess he wasn't doing a million dollars business, but he was doing well, at that. Furthermore, the messenger that brought the money to me stated that Smilo was only going to run one place yet awhile. In the fall he'd open up. I've got that messenger under arrest. He's confessed that Smilo Brennan sent him to me. Also, I got receipts from the Nineteenth National stating that on certain days I deposited certain amounts stating that said amounts were bribes paid to me by Smilo Brennan."

"Why didn't you arrest him after he'd paid the first bribe?" demanded the Mayor.

Tressiger smiled faintly. "Your Honor, I've been on the Force a long time. I wanted to remain a while longer. I knew that the day I got Brennan pinched that day would

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

end me on the Force. Unless I got the men higher up. I coulda turned Brennan down at the go-off. But it struck me here was a chance to really clean this town, to get the men higher up. So I went ahead with him. Well, I did my best to find out who was backing Brennan, but I couldn't learn. It was somebody high, though, for how had they known that I would be made inspector?"

The Mayor cast a quick glance at the Commissioner and the latter gentleman crimsoned. "Go on," said the Mayor quietly.

"This morning I read in the paper that I was to be got rid of and that Grayson was to replace me. Well, that story didn't ring true; it sounded as though it was a game of some sort. I knew who'd written it. I haven't studied the stories of the Headquarters reporters for nothing. I could tell what Tom Griffith wrote if I saw it in a London paper. And I wondered who handed him such a yarn, me knowing that yesterday was his day off. I went to his room. He denied writing the story, but refused to tell me who had written it. He said he'd had a big night last night, been drunk, and he took a swig of whiskey to prove it. He smacked his lips over the drink. Men with a hangover don't do that; they kinda shudder at the mornin's mornin'. I've seen 'em, so I know. Moreover, I found a chip on his bureau. It was a cinch he'd had a big night O.K., but not in cafes. His breath didn't have any trace of liquor on it. But if he'd been in a gambling house, and didn't want me to know it, he didn't have to lie. Why did he lie, then? To steer me wrong, that's all.

"Well, it looked like my big chance to me. That chip was the exact kind of chip that had been ordered for Smilo Brennan's new place a month ago. I'd looked up all necessary little details at the start. There isn't any house in town using that expensive sort of chip except Smilo's. Griffith evidently had been lucky, and held out one chip

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

through a gambler's superstition.

"Well, Griffith had written that story and he'd been at Brennan's. Chances were he'd got the story at Brennan's. Now the question was: who handed the information to Brennan? 'Course Brennan could have faked it, but why? No reason for him to do it. He must have been satisfied with the way things were going. Very soft for him; protected for a twelve and a half percent rake-off. Who could be dissatisfied then? Dissatisfied enough to pass out a hint that things wouldn't continue as nice as they were?

"Well, Smilo Brennan hadn't started his new place on his own bankroll. I'd looked up his bankroll. And his advance information about my promotion—someone in the 'Hall.' Who? Two cliques in the 'Hall.' But neither of them would dare start a big gambling proposition without the other being in on it, too. But there were two cliques. And they weren't as friendly as they pretended to be, either. Could this be a hint from one side to the other? It looked it. Suppose, for instance, one clique wanted to hog most of the profits, but didn't dare come right out and say so? Suppose, instead, it hinted that things weren't going to be easy, and they went on to tell the other clique that the whole business would be smashed unless one side got the biggest bit? It wouldn't dare come right out and say so, but it would blame a change in the detective bureau. But before making any change it would show the other clique that such a change was likely to happen, that it *would* happen unless terms were made right. It would do that by putting a little piece in the paper, then disclaiming having inspired the piece, then pretending that unless a big bit went to an outsider the place would have to close. Plain hoggishness, that's all. But the thing was to find the hog. No doubt about the game; I've seen too many worked in just about that fashion.

"Well, such a hint, such an inspired yarn, could only

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

come from one of two men, Cranston or Torney. It didn't come from Torney. I found *that* out easy enough. It could have come from Cranston; I found that out. I arrested him. I arrested Brennan, too. When I told him that I had Cranston, he came through with everything. He said that Cranston and Torney had backed him in his game. So I pinched Torney, too. Brennan would never have confessed without my pinching either Cranston or Torney beforehand. He'd have thought their pull could beat any charge we laid against him. But with them jailed—he came through. Griffith the newspaperman came through late tonight, too. He got his story from Cranston at Smilo Brennan's, just as I thought. And it don't do any good for Cranston to holler. What was he doing giving out interviews about police policy from Smilo Brennan's gambling house? We've got the goods on him. It won't be hard, now that we've got a case, to prove that money passed from Torney and Cranston to Brennan at the times and places he says it did. The thing is, we're working from the big boys down, this time. Usually we try to work from the little feller up to the guy on top. It don't work. But working from the big guy down—well, when the little feller finds we've nailed the big guy—"

He shrugged his shoulders. The Mayor looked at the Commissioner.

"Is there any explanation of your appointing Inspector Tressiger to the head of the detective bureau?" asked the Mayor harshly.

"Torney and Cranston both recommended him," replied the Commissioner. "They're big in the party; they have influence; Tressiger's record was good."

"Wait a bit, Mr. Mayor," said Tressiger, as the Mayor frowned. "You're blaming the Commissioner. Why? You've taken orders from Cranston and Torney. Now don't get sore. Hear me through. You know you have."

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

'Cause why? Because they made you Mayor and because their orders have been suggestions. They've never asked you to do anything crooked. They've merely pointed out that so-and-so was a good worker for the 'Hall' that nominated and elected you. Same with the Commissioner. He takes hints from them. And they chose me because Brennan told them I'd stand for anything. The Commissioner ain't to blame."

"Thanks, Tressiger," said the Commissioner sardonically. "I'm just a child, a babe in the arms of crooks who— By Godfrey, here's a couple of crooks that'll go to jail, no matter how powerful they think they are!"

"Right," cried the Mayor. He looked at Torney and Cranston. "I knew your methods in politics were raw, but—as I never had any evidence against you, and as you had worked for me—why—I thought that the hue and cry about you was inspired by jealousy. Crooked! Blackening my administration! I'll see that your bail is so high—"

"Now, you wait a minute, Your Honor," interrupted Tressiger. "Seems I ought to be considered a bit."

"You will be; you'll be recommended for an increase of pay, and—"

"Shush," said Tressiger. "Give me three minutes, will you? All right, listen. Twenty years I have been watching the 'Hall' stick its nose into the Department. I've seen a-many scandals rise, and seen a-many crooks go to jail. And what happens?"

"New men take their places and the Department is corrupted again. 'Cause why? Because the Mayor is ambitious and needs the help of the politicians, or because he's blind and trusts the Commissioner, and the Commissioner needs the politician's help, or maybe he's blind and the politician's fix the coppers direct. But always politics butts in. Now, here's your chance. Jail these men and what happens? New leaders take their places and acquire new

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

influence. Politicians' money will help an officer caught grafting fight his case for years and probably win out in the end. But suppose we were dead certain that no politician's money would help any copper we found crooked? Suppose I ran the detective bureau on the level, and no one could oust me? What would happen?"

"You'd clean the town, I think, Inspector," said the Mayor.

"Right! And suppose the big guys in the 'Hall' didn't dare interfere with you in any way. Suppose they ordered the alderman they own to support you in everything? I guess there'd not be a nickel's worth of graft in the building department, in the streets, in the parks, eh? Right! But suppose we jail these two men. Other leaders take their places and soon own the aldermen and their officials these guys own! Get it? But if we keep these birds in—if we keep this quiet—"

"Blackmail," interrupted the Mayor.

"If it's blackmail to forgive a guy the evil he's done provided he don't do any more, instead of jamming him into jail and making a place for other grafters to step into his place—We don't do nothing; we simply pat these guys on the head and tell 'em to behave, to let you alone, and the Commissioner alone, and me alone. That's all. What do you think?"

Slowly the Mayor's mouth widened in a smile. "They own the aldermen and we own them, eh? But I'm almost afraid it's compromising a felony."

"Well, I guess our conscience can stand a little thing like that, when it's for the good of the city," grunted Tressiger.

The Mayor was silent for a moment. He thought of the good things he could do for the city, things that the sinister influence of the invisible government had thus far prevented him from doing. He thought of what the police department could do were it rid of politics. Against all

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY

this good was the negligible benefit of sending these men to jail.

"You're right, Tressiger," he said. "You're a great man. You are indeed. You ought to be mayor; I mean it. You've done more for your city than you think. You've accomplished—"

"Nix, nix," said the embarrassed inspector. "I'm just a good cop, that's all. And a sleepy one, if anyone should ask you. G'night, Your Honor and Commissioner."

# CITY IN THE BOTTLE

by Hayden Howard

WHEN the intrushing bus glared its headlights through the cabbage palms, illuminating the bronze Confederate general and his ranks of empty park benches, I was in no condition to make a decision. But I stood up, clutching my bench. Across the street in the sedan with sideswipe scars, those two pale faces were still turned my way. The bus hissed to a stop between us, and I stood shaking, almost crying. I needed a drink so bad.

If I tried to pawn my gabardine raincoat while my cheek was twitching like this, the gnome behind the counter would reply contemptuously: "Feefty cents," knowing I'd take whatever he offered. So I had to get a



## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

drink in me first, to give me the "will-power" to hold out for more money, enough money to drink myself to sleep again.

But if I worked the people flowing from this bus, those two moon-faces might pounce. I was afraid they were Vice-Squad waiting for an excuse to pick me up and pay me off for the tailing job I did for Browne's defense attorney. Pay me off with gun butts in some back-row cell. Thirty days for panhandling on top of that, thirty days without a drink. Unbearable.

It was only because I needed a drink so bad that I'd photographed the Vice-Squad sergeant taking a pay-off from one of Browne's competitors in the bolita racket. That helped sour the sergeant's testimony against Bre'r Browne. That got the sergeant busted. It was going to get me busted apart.

An elderly woman hurrying toward me dropped her package. I acted instinctively, handing it back to her.

"Oh, thank you, suh." Her hand fluttered at her lace fichu.

My gabardine raincoat, relic of past glory, had impressed her. But when my turning face caught the streetlight, she gasped.

I whispered: "Please mam, only a dime for a cup of coffee."

"Young man, you should be 'shamed of yourself. Go to the County Farm. That's what we're *payin'* taxes for."

But I'd served more terms on the County Farm than she had. They don't even taper you off. Man can't live on sowbelly, grits and B<sub>1</sub> capsules alone. "Please mam, only a dime so I can take the bus over the river where I have a fine job waiting for me—"

Her back flounced into the darkness. Without breaking my stride to see what those two pale faces were doing, I dodged through the hedge into Municipal Park and ran like an uprooted scarecrow among the palmetto clumps. When

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

I paused, all I could hear was my breathing—like a ruptured accordion. Then, ahead of me something rustled through the moon-struck bamboo jungle. A pale apparition limped toward me, not D.T.s, rather my bottle-buddy, Crackers, swathed in newspapers.

"Rip," he sighed without anger, "Ah been rolled."

"Rolled? You've been strip-teased! Yeah bo!" If I'd had a drink in me, I could have laughed, but not maliciously, for Crackers' long, dolefully innocent young face always made me feel like laughing, but not at him. His straw-thatched head, ducking with embarrassment, his gentle eyes, hopeful as a calf's, was a reminder that the world is not all venom and bayonets, nightsticks and broken bottles. "Here, long-shanks," I laughed, "put on my raincoat."

"Youah shuah you won't need it, Rip?"

"I just need what it represents," I cracked bitterly, helping him into the sleeves. "You're my size, Cracker-boy. We'll cut across the park and work the people coming out of the early shows."

"Aw-aw, Ah don't want to." He studied his overlapping toes.

"No law against barefoot," I laughed. "You could charm a dollar from a police judge." His innocent face would have earned me a case of scotch a day if it were mine. "A dollar will get you another set of relievers." That would be old tennis sneakers, sweatshirt, dungarees, what they give you when you pawn your clothes. "A dollar will buy such a fire for my belly I'll argue five bucks for my very fine imported English gabardine raincoat."

When we stepped upon the sidewalk, the lights of a slowing car stretched our shadows back into the park. Before the car could graze the curb I recognized the side-swipe marks on the fenders. Yell "Run!" and a bum automatically runs, and I was close behind him. But grits and alcohol take the poop out of your legs. Mine tangled.

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

As one of the two burly shadows ran at me, bullet-headed, and suddenly raising a moon face peculiarly white, I realized he was no cop and lashed out with my feet, yelling for the police. I dropped him across my legs. His face squirmed up my body and he rolled me over with a deftness of a wrestler. Startlingly, his knuckles ground into my spine. It felt as though my legs had twitched off like lizards' tails. An habitual drunk has one burst of strength and then he's a punching bag, and I faded through a sound-world of thuds, gasps and screeching bus brakes.

From a distance, a thick, fruity voice called: "Wheah's 'is shoes?" And then, though no time had elapsed for me, I was crawling on the sidewalk and the sedan was gone. My legs wouldn't work. I lay staring at the ten-dollar bill in my fist, which was another way of saying: Forget it, buddy, hop a freight.

A man with a brief case strode by.

"Police," I called. "My buddy's been kidnapped."

It is possible that man didn't hear me. Two couples skirted me and I gasped as loudly as I could: "Paralyzed, got to go to the hospital."

"Drunk," a girl's bubbling voice giggled.

After a while I heard sirens. Not an ambulance, a police car squealed against the curb. Hastily I wadded the ten-spot into my cheek, alongside my back teeth.

A flashlight dazzled at my face. "Holy saints," laughed the shadowy cop. "Get out and give me a hand, Joe. 'Tis the great detective, hit bottom again. Observe the scar on the bridge of the nose. Sure, the drinking from fruit jars they tell me. And the baby-blue eyes peeking out of their pus-pots. 'Twould be better to drink prussic acid and die all in one gulp."

I managed to gurgle: "My buddy's been snatched," as they dragged me erect and an electric prickling ran through my legs.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"Kidnapped now? And worth a fifty thousand ransom? 'Twas the little men on pink elephants, sent by the D.A. to persecute you—?" They slid me on to the back seat; it was only three blocks to the Station, and they walked me up the endless concrete steps while the numbness left my legs and ringed around my brain.

"Look what we brought you! 'Tis Rip Collins, America's foremost private investigator, come to make Mister Wales give him back his license—"

"My buddy's been kidnapped," I whispered, and the Desk Sergeant tipped back to rest his shoe on the desk while he thumbed carelessly through my official file-folder.

"Vag, vag, vag, D and D, thirty-two times this year. Let him sleep it off," he said gently. "I guess the reason the D.A. doesn't want him run out of town is as an example to the rest of the ops."

"I'm not drunk," I yelled, about as loud as a wheeze. "Listen flatfoot. Crackers, Liberty McCoy, you know who he is—he's been kidnapped, slugged anyway. How about at least checking the receiving hospitals!"

The sergeant took his foot off the desk. "Don't get pushy with me, Rip. You're not the big principal op with the fancy office anymore. For a couple of years now, your label in this city has been: common drunk. In this last election when you turned stoolie for the newspapers, that was your last chance. You lost. Mr. Wales is still D.A. and you're just another wino in the park, and don't forget it again!"

"Dammit, I can pass your blood test!"

"You couldn't pass an alk test after six months in solitary. They had to carry you in here. And watch your language," he snapped as they prodded me toward the door.

In the big cage, I stumbled groaning among the other

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

drunks. Every nerve in my body was jittering like a short-circuited wire. My need for a drink blotted out everything else. Desperately I rubbed my knuckles up and down on the unexplainable white grease on my shirt. An ex-bail-bonder crawled over, ferret-faced, and sold me two yellow-jackets, sleeping capsules. When he took all of my ten-spot, I was too sick, too weak to resist; oblivion seemed to last but a moment.

In the gray dawn the bums were clutching the wire, jabbering. Something big had happened. Someone laughed and laughed. Then they came, they came for me; I couldn't understand what I'd done. Groggy.

Along the corridor smelling of latrine soap, they hustled me toward the D.A.'s office in the County part of the building, and one cop said dimly: "He called off the raid, huh?" "Yeah," said the other. "Looks like this new regime wets its pants as quick as the old. Grunemadd's gotten too big to pinch."

To my surprise, it was the Assistant D.A., a youngish squirt with corkscrew red hair around a tremendous dome-forehead, like some mad scientist on the T.V., who was sitting behind Wales' littered desk. He squinted through his owlsh horn-rims at me as if the sight of me pained him, but his eyelids spread, and suddenly he seemed fascinated by my chest, though it had slipped a good deal recently. Even I peered down at the white smears on my shirt.

Chief Loe started to say something, but that squirt Assistant D.A. silenced him with a gesture you'd expect from Napoleon but not from a squirt lawyer pulling down a couple of hundred a month from the County. "Don't tell him, Chief, let him see it," he sneered. "Collins, can you read?" He hurled the morning paper at my face.

"Make him pick it up," he hissed, and a harness-bul nudged me, but I didn't move. "Pick it up," the squirt screamed, turning crimson and banging his little fist on

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

the desk. When I smiled stupidly, still motionless, for those yellow-jackets had left me with the bemused feeling I was watching a movie, the cop must have got scared he meant him and hastily picked up the newspaper and opened it for me.

**D.A. MURDERED BY DEAD MAN.** That was quite a headline.

My blurry gaze struggled along the black bug-tracks.—  
*"Near midnight last night, long-time D.A. Fred 'Baldy' Wales was shot down as he left a party at the home of turf enthusiast S. M. Savoyard. According to Wales' bodyguard, Abner N. Wilhoite, a dark sedan with scratched fenders was parked opposite the house with a man leaning against it. Ignoring Wilhoite's warning, the D.A. started across the street, demanding that the man tell him what he was doing there. The man fired twice. As Wales fell, his bodyguard returned the fire, riddling the killer, who pitched forward on the street as the sedan drove off at high speed.*

*"Wilhoite is quoted: 'It seemed like that car started off while the gunman beside it was still shooting. By the time he dropped, the car was gone.'*

*"County Coroner R. D. Woods, M.D., who was at the party, pronounced Wales dead. Noticing a peculiar lack of bleeding on the part of the gunman, Woods began an autopsy in the wee hours of the morning and announced in his opinion that, due to a massive cerebral hemorrhage incurred from a blow by a blunt instrument, the killer had been dead for at least fifteen minutes BEFORE he was shot by Wilhoite. He was medically dead at the time D.A. was murdered. It would seem that Fred 'Baldy' Wales was shot down by a dead man."*

"Lucky I was in jail," I laughed thickly. "You can't 'cuse me of knocking that nine-lived gunsel on the crock." I looked around for a place to lie down.

Through my sleepy fog came the Assistant D.A.'s shrill

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

yell of rage, and Chief Loe's soft voice: "Rip, boy, you didn't read faah enough. The young boy who shot Mistuh Wales didn't have no clothes on, just your raincoat, and the desk sergeant remembers last night you was asking for him, your buddy, Crackers. He's been fingerprinted as Liberty Nathaniel McCoy. Your friend, Crackers, that's who."

I couldn't speak.

The red-haired Assistant D.A. cocked his eye at the electric clock. "Chief," he announced as significantly as if he was in a radio play, "my plane takes off for the State Capitol in twelve minutes and I expect to return late this afternoon. I expect you to produce some encouraging leads in press-time for the evening editions. This mess can make or break all of us, depending on how fast it's cleaned up."

Someone tittered nervously, and the Assistant D.A. whirled. His gleaming lenses paused at me. "This ex-private investigator's revenge motive and underworld connections make him an obvious suspect as an instigator or go-between. His filthy rags are unsanitary; before you begin interrogation, burn them, delouse him."

*I'll kill you, kill you, kill you,* my thoughts hammered.

"No, you won't," Chief Loe sighed when the door had closed behind this latest Napoleon.

The chief's shrewd gray eyes engulfed me. A leathery skeleton inside, his grease-spotted, gray, double-breasted suit; a bean-pole of a man, who moved as though he fed six tape-worms; the newspapers called him "The Chief Without Force." Twice before he'd been Chief. A reform victory ousted him the first time. But after a year their fine banners were in the mud, the Police Force in chaos. A delegation of citizens waited upon Chief Loe.

The second time he got the boot was when the "open city" boys bought the next election and paid off one of their cronies with the post. But after five months, in

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

desperation they, too, called back Chief Loe. He at least made sure the patrolmen shined their shoes, that suspected street-walkers were not detained in the squad-room, that bodies weren't left lying on the street to frighten children on their way to school.

He'd nod at whatever conflicting orders he received from above and continue his own subterranean maneuvers. He believed in reasonable arbitration, a restrained slicing of the pie rather than gang warfare and futile arrests and highly publicized raids whose only effect was on the city's reputation. "As mah daddy used to tell my Maw, that ant poison you're sprinkling costs more than the ants eat and it's liable to make the baby sick," he'd drawl, wagging his gray head in relaxed hopelessness.

Now, he wagged his gray head for me to precede him downstairs.

"I like that 'long-time D.A.' stuff," I muttered. "How long was Wales in, two years?"

"Twenny-two months 'n eleven days." Chief Loe and I were old friends for a reason that will emerge. I wondered if he would dare to squash Grunemadd, now that Wales was dead, and revive the democratic order of bookies, bootleggers and bolita operators.

It was Chief Loe who made them see that less greed, thus less scandal, more peace was to their best interests. At that time they helped him squeeze out the protection-racket boys, the mad-dog gunmen and a good share of the thieves. The Chief became a sort of underworld mediator, and never were the citizens safer. But the then D.A., a lazy politician who stirred up no trouble, was caught by the newspapers in some minor graft, and Fred "Baldy" Wales was brought down from New York.

Appointed by the governor, naturally he wanted to start out in a fanfare of trumpets that would be remembered at election time. He broke up Loe's democratic confederation



## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

of moderate parasites, indicting the top boys. Without casting any direct aspersions at Chief Loe, he "took over" the Vice-Squad, which was at that time a small and starveling stepchild. There was a moment of anarchy, but before too many bystanders were felled by stray bullets "Baldy" Wales proved himself also an organizer.

For, one day there stepped from a canary-yellow Cadillac with New York license plates a pear-hipped little gentleman currently calling himself Mr. Grunemadd. He was accompanied by half-a-dozen well-known New York gunmen. It soon developed that when they shot people, they gladly submitted to Chief Loe's arrest, for the D.A., Wales, always knew a case of self-defense when he saw it. Overnight, the city, the parasitical element of it, was re-organized in a peaceful pay-off pyramid with Mr. Grunemadd at the apex, and "Baldy" Wales was enabled to send his daughters to college, among other things.

Over my shoulder, as we went down to the basement, I said bleakly, trying to shut Crackers' long face out of my mind: "Two-bits that red-haired squirt talks the governor into appointing him D.A. In this city, the way to get elected is to be the incumbent."

In spite of the photographs, depositions, I had gathered for the newspapers, "Baldy" Wales had been re-elected. One of Grunemadd's fronts had paid Crackers a dollar for each time he voted, presumably for Wales. Chief Loe had continued to mournfully eye the sky and even declare himself "not concerned with politics." Apparently he went on being a poor man. His wife acquired a dyed muskrat coat. Off-duty, he drove a second-hand car. He was reputedly banking considerable of his not-too-generous salary, preparing to retire, it was said. The other two times he'd been out of office, he'd been caught short. The first time, he'd even worked as an occasional op for me.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

I sat down in the straight chair under the lights. Chief Loe shrugged in apology for the melodramatic stage-setting. The stenog crossed his knees. Hulking Lt. Beardon asked: "Should we burn his clothes? Lice? Bacteria?" He was burlesquing the Assistant D.A. "Underarm perspiration? Deadly alcohol vapors?"

"No," I said.

"Why?" said Loe.

"Because I'm a walking clue," I replied, feeling my cheek beginning to misbehave itself. "One drink and I'll explain why my clothes are your number one lead."

"Here we go again," Lt. Beardon groaned, taking off his coat.

"No, get it fough him," Loe sighed.

"None of your confiscated corn whiskey," I bluffed hopefully.

"Now look who's getting choosy," Lt. Beardon laughed.

"At the package-store on the cornah," the Chief said. "Put it down to miscel-something expense. Ah'm going upstairs. Theah's a Retail Merchants' parade this afternoon and sixteen cross streets got to be blocked off," his voice died away up the stairs; he didn't like to watch me get drunk. As for my story, he would read the stenog's transcript in the quiet of his office. He was not going to get rushed, no matter who'd been murdered. Patience was his strong suit; he was the best shadow artist who ever worked for me, patience, patient as the heron who fishes as motionless as a jagged stick.

After a long pull on the bottle, I felt less like a jitters case. Lt. Beardon disengaged me from it without spilling a drop and stood it in the corner where he wouldn't have to look at it. I licked my lips at him; I can spot a fellow lush a mile away.

With subtle motive, I told Beardon about those two pale faces in the scratched sedan without mentioning the loan

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

of my raincoat to Crackers. "This white goo on my shirt must have got there when those two strong-boys jumped us in the park, where they grabbed Crackers and fixed me with judo or chiropractic. Your chemist ought to test this gunk. It's whiter than cold-cream."

"What about your raincoat? The chief recognized it as yours."

"Never saw it before unless I get another drink."

"You think you're pretty cute!" But he passed it to me.

Finally I muttered: "It was dark and Crackers had been rolled and I loaned him my raincoat. Those stupid gunsels, they were looking for a raincoat instead of a face. But whoever cooked this up was no square.—If it had been me they held against the car door, unconscious but alive, if it had been my hand they squeezed around the gun, my arm those dumbos aimed along, you cops wouldn't even know you had a problem. I would have bled convincingly for the coroner. I had the motive, all right; every bartender in town has heard that I'm going to get even with Wales. You would have assumed it was my show, and yanked bums out of the park, worked them over until some poor slob confessed to driving the car just so you'd stop hitting him. Then everybody would pat everybody else on the back, maybe go down and grin at me in my refrigeration drawer in the morgue. The case is solved, all the loose ends tied up. Typically brilliant police work scores again!"

"I would have figured you were hired," Lt. Beardon replied with a hurt note in his voice. "My theory is, to prevent local leaks, the instigator of this thing had a couple of torpedoes flown down from New York especially for this job, then flown back again just as quick."

"And they were half-wits or hopped to the gills," I coughed.

His ruddy face spread in a toothy grin. "Yeah, yeah, they did blow it like amateurs. I don't know; I guess this

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

thing may give us a bad time." His grin slid off his face, leaving a vacant, tired, pouchy-eyed expression; he was only three years from retirement and would never make captain now. His dull eyes settled on the bottle.

*The newspapers will give you a bad time*, I thought, hurriedly tipping that bottle, gulping like a baby who suspects it will be taken away from him.

My suspicion was well-founded, for Lt. Beardon promptly told the short-hand expert to hurry my story upstairs to the Chief, and reached for the bottle, which I maneuvered behind me, displeasing him.

"You loaned your raincoat to Crackers because you'd been tipped off those gunmen were looking for you!"

"No," I yelled. "Damn you! What do you take me for? A Judas? Putting my overcoat on my own buddy so he'll be killed? I wish they'd taken me."

"Yeah?" he croaked, his ruddy face shimmering in the light.

Alcohol puts the gas back in my engine, gives me the Superman delusion that made me a pretty tough baby as a private op. I swung smack at his face. Only he'd ducked. He helped me back into my chair, saying apologetically: "I didn't realize he was that good a friend of yours," and proffered me the bottle.

"I wish," I gasped, "you people would let me out to work on this thing. I still have a lot of contacts."

"Such as Browne," he replied somewhat stiffly. "Someone's liable to catch you up a lonely alley on that score. Sergeant Almond, the fall-guy you sneak-photoed, was only four years from retirement. With the salaries this city pays, it's tougher than hell to serve on the Vice-Squad. The temptation gets too much for a normal guy, say, when his wife needs an operation."

"When you've got to have a drink," I retorted, "the temptation is not so easy either. Browne's defense shyster

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

hunted me up in the park with a fifth of bonded Scotch and a fistful of small bills."

I'd felt ashamed of working for Browne, even if he was the only surviving fly on Grunemadd's pie, and wondered if my next downward step would be working for Mr. Grunemadd like the rest of the yellow-bellies. Grunemadd, with an assist from Wales, the D.A., was muscling Browne's traditional bolita runners out of the business district. The Vice-Squad, under Wales' thumb, not Chief Loe's, was harrassing the boys, and blind to the white ticket salesmen Grunemadd's number-one muscle, Mike Railley, was installing in all the cigar stores. Unless Wales' assassination had thrown a wrench into the machinery, Grunemadd would soon have the city sewed up tight, except for uptown. I could picture Browne's leathery old mug, topped with white wool, breaking into a big ivory grin when he heard Mr. Wales was as dead as a pork chop.

A young cop peered into the room. Before he could step back, Lt. Beardon snapped: "Bring your nose in all the way. Now, take this guy's shirt to the chemist. Tell him the white stuff. And hit the light switch on the way out, and close the door after you."

His hand closed on my bottle. I knew how easy it was for him to convince himself the confiding share-the-bottle approach was the way to make me contradict myself about what happened in the park. In the best interest of Justice, the Police Force and so.forth, he swallowed like a partly clogged sink.

"I wasn't tipped off," I laughed suddenly, and a long, innocent, woebegone face rose before me so that I felt like crying but continued the laughing sounds. "If I'd known I was the goat, I wouldn't have let Crackers come near me.—Hell, this new D.A. should be a weird one. I never even heard of the guy. Gimme back the bottle. Does he have a name?"

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"Henry Morgan. Guess Wales imported him about the time you fell off the water wagon."

"Which time?" I laughed, sputtering as I tossed one off.

"Strictly a pencil-pusher until the D.A. let him win a few easy convictions.—Don't drink it all!—Bingo, he blows big talk. Thinks he's another Tom Dewey, is going to clean up the town, he says, which is not so very subtle a dig at his boss, old Baldy Wales. He's young, Henry is, and red-headed."

"Pass it back," I muttered. "What did he have on Wales? Wales doesn't take that kind of guff. Look what he did to me."

"He would have canned Morgan, I think. Only he died, remember? Shot down by your raincoat. Drink it up, drink it up. That's what finished you in this town. Not Wales, not Grunemadd. Go on, fill your snoot!"

"I would of been awright," I yelled. "I woulda' never touched another drop. Only here I go and PROVE Wales is taking hush from Grunemadd. I get photos, photostats, depositions, and the newspapers, they pay me off, they give me a bonus, they page-one it for a week before election, a story no one can deny. And the people, lazy damn fools, thirty-two percent go to the polls because it's only a city election. Stupid or bought, damn 'em all. They vote Wales in again anyway!"

"Hey, Loot," a cop yelled hollowly down the stairs. "You there? The Chief says lock Collins if you ain't already and c'mere."

Soon, my private cell acquired a couple of unmatched eyes at the peek-a-boo slot so they'd recognize me again. I felt myself giggling and pulled the blanket over my face. I was to be tailed, therefore, let out. The door clacked open.

"Rip," Beardon blurted, swaying a little, "the Chief's decided you're only a ping-pong ball in this case, not

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

worth saving. Here's a suit that may fit you."

"Haw," I laughed, standing up eight or nine feet tall. "This is a dead man's suit. The cleaner did a good job sewing up these holes in the lapel." I struggled into the expensive brown check trousers. "Good fit. But how come Loe is not here to give me Y.M.C.A. lecture number ninety-nine? He job-hunting again? Between Henry Morgan and those hungry newspapers, he better be. Wales is no dead bum in the park. Bye-bye, Beardon."

The alley leading from the cell-block was dazzling bright. In my coat pocket, my hand found a dollar bill, and I rubbed my chin. Needed a shave. I was coming to the package liquor store at the end of the alley, thinking: *What gives with Loe, all of a sudden a philanthropist? Down boy, don't go in there.*

When I walked reluctantly into the beguiling crystal entrance of the liquor store, to my astonishment, Chief Loe was staked-out there. "Do youah old friend a favor, Rip. Don't go in."

"You haven't got much faith in me," I blurted in angry surprise. "I was just looking. I got better things to do!"

"Youah thinks that Browne is responsible fouah your buddy's death?"

"Up to your old tricks," I gritted. "Takes a thief to catch a thief and so forth. You want me to blunder around, looking for revenge, and get shot. Reasoning: you figure whoever intended for me to shoot down Wales, me being unconscious at the time, has since figured I was tipped off, that I planted my coat on Crackers to let him take the bullets. Therefore, the big toad who planned this deal thinks I know more than I do, and he knows me for a trouble-maker from way back. To protect himself he's going to have me bumped. All you have to do is tail me and grab the bumper and you're hot on the main trail. Only I'll be too dead to congratulate the mighty Chief

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Loe. Nothing doing!"

Loe's face shrank a little thinner. "Aw now, Rip, Ah'm waiting fouah New York Homicide to check which professionals just been south. But Ah thought you'd like to know; one of my pigeons says Grunemadd's boy, Mike Railley, been making secret talk with Browne.—But Ah got no intention of you getting killed."

"Thank you, General MacArthur!" I walked down the main drag like a sailor, rolling from foot to foot and looking for a bar. Over my shoulder I caught Loe still standing there, small, discouraged and gray, as I ducked into Jockey Jerome's, showed him my dollar.

"You owe me thirty or forty of those," the jockey squeaked, but I think he would have poured me one, only a big, fat hand slapped down on the mahogany. It turned palm up, showing a badge, and the plainclothesman growled: "Nothing for this lush today, Jock."

"I'll remember that," I told them both, and, walking fast, crossed the street as the light turned red, ducked into a five-and-ten and out the side entrance. With brakes squealing, drivers cursing I crossed in the middle of the block to Sheila's and ogled Sheila and her rows of shiny bottles. But then I heard my shadow breathing hard behind me. "Another day, Sheila-girl," I muttered and stalked past him to the curb; I was being persecuted by the police, but I knew there was more to it than that.

At the corner, I slipped through the pneumatic door of the bus as it closed, and waved bye-bye. A dime's worth toward the river, I got off at the Seaman's Anchor, which contained familiar faces, bums; no sailors here since the big stabbing two years ago. I barely made it to the bar, feeling woozy. I knew Chief Loe didn't want me to get soused out, because he needed me, he wanted me to scurry around until I got shot. But I was going to hop a freight.

*I'm not going to help you, Loe, I thought. You never*



## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

*gave me a cent when I was down and out, and now you try to keep me from buying a drink. You were the wise guy who had me locked up in that private cure-all sanatorium, "and what happens, I come out dry, dry in the head and bump heads with the D.A. Very smart, investigating Wales and Grunemadd, like investigating a tiger's back teeth. I deserve to lose my license."*

"What did you say, bud?" the lush next to me mumbled.

"Nothing to you, let's have a little service here!" The pug bartender was trying very hard not to see me. My knees began to fold and I wondered vaguely how long it had been since I ate. That made me feel sicker, the thought of food, but something had happened to my body chemistry; I didn't want that drink any more. "Hey, Canvasback, a fish sandwich, huh?"

He stood there, scratching beneath his cauliflower ear.

"Get over your surprise," I said. "I eat as well as drink."

"Duh, I can't serve you. Lil' while ago the phone is really ringin'. Cops. He asts if I know Rip Collins. I says maybe. He says if I sell you anything, I get closed up."

"He meant whiskey, not sandwiches, you fall-guy. My order is a fish sandwich, and I got money to prove it!"

"He says not to serve you nothin'." And when I insisted on my rights the ignorant pug gave me the bum's rush!

As I crawled over to the lamp post to pull myself erect, I spotted a young man, neatly dressed, step backward around the corner. So they used radio cars and I had a new tail, I thought sourly. "Well, I'll give you shadow lessons, sonny boy."

But I was in no condition. He was still with me when I walked between the pillars of the great bridge that swoops upward, over the antique buildings and high above the river. Among the heavy shadows of the main girders, against the fish sheds, leaned shabby men who would sell me a fruit jar of corn or Pink Lady if I could only shake

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

this cop. What Loe didn't understand was that even if I wanted to help him I couldn't unless I was pretty well fueled.

My feet were dragging and my heart was pounding so that I was near being an ambulance case. I didn't want a drink, but I had to have one, and fast. I could feel my cheek twitching as I shambled into the Number 9 shed, through the semi-darkness, along the creaking boards. Where they were gone, the river rolled bronze and silver and shadowy, waiting for drunks.

When my tail had had time to take a look-see and step back as I turned, I put my head into an empty fish box from the top of the pile and screamed, dropping the box into the river. A nice, hollow scream, a nice, hollow splash, I shrank quickly behind the boxes and listened to his thudding feet. When he knelt at the edge of the boards, bending in to see if I had managed to grab a piling a little way downstream, I put my foot to his behind. The powerful way he splashed and yet had breath for cursing showed he had not forgotten his swimming lessons.

It didn't take me long to locate a poor man's bootlegger, and I ran heavily up an alley with my jar of corn and crouched behind a garbage can to do my drinking in seclusion. The cops were undoubtedly radioing back and forth between their cars by now, wondering where in hell I'd gone to. I had an uneasy feeling on the back of my neck that someone else was looking for me, too. But after a couple of long, scalding gushes of corn, setting my stomach to grumbling like a volcano, starting the heat flowing in my veins, chemical courage, I didn't give a damn. I was Rip Collins, Ripper Collins, bigshot investigator and local political muscle, razor-sharp brain and bullet-proof skin; I was anything I wanted to be. "Say your prayers, boys; here I come," I muttered, but I squatted there, drinking.

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

*The real trick, I thought, isn't to find out who got Crackers killed and grind my heel in his face. It's to let go of this bottle before I pass out.* I took a smaller mouthful and swished it around in my cheek. It seemed wasteful not to swallow it.

Over the top of the garbage can, over the top of the laundry across the street, I could see that arrogant brick building, five stories high, with its spider-web shadows from the bridge cables contrasting with the diamond glint of the big picture windows on its top floor. I knew if I crossed the street, walked one block, turned half a block right, I would be standing close, looking up at that insulting pile of brick, at that new brass plate over the entrance, ornate with brass olive-leaf clusters, shades of Mussolini, what confident gall! **THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING.**

I took a good healthy swallow. There was something about that little cherub Grunemadd's round and beaming face I couldn't stand. "You damn Cheshire Cat!"

The drainpipe across the alley began to wriggle lazily up the wall. *But there's no reason for Grunemadd to have the D.A. gunned, I thought. Wales is the reason Grunemadd is where he is today, a prosperous business man, hah! Browne is the boy they've been pushing into a corner till he's ready to risk violence. He figures when they get his bolita runners out of the business district, they won't stop there. Grunemadd will find himself a boy-Friday and muscle into uptown.*

Studying the silhouetted bridge, I let a trickle of corn run down my throat. *Browne is the boy I should be visiting. A little while ago, when I did the photo job for his lawyer, we were pals. Now we'll see what his expression is. If he was the one who hired those New York gunmen to frame me, dead, he's not going to be too happy meeting me face to face.*

"He'll think he's been squealed on, dead to rights," I

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

laughed, "that I've come to kill him!"

I pictured all his strong-boys popping up around me, and quick-firing their revolvers like Fourth of July. It didn't worry me a bit. I was invulnerable. But I couldn't stand up.

*If I throw away this jar of gut-acid, I'll be lighter,* I mused. But I couldn't do it. I took a little swig and watched that drainpipe snake up the wall. And very cautiously, so that I wouldn't disagree with what I was doing, I hid the rest of the jar of corn behind the garbage can. It would give me strength, knowing it was there to come back to.

Crawling across the alley, I climbed the drainpipe until I was standing on my feet. By the time I reached the sidewalk, I wondered where I was going. "Got no bus fare to get me to uptown, huh. Grunemadd's no good for a touch, throw me out, huh. What am I doing by the river? Going to see Grunemadd and tell him what I think of him! Squeezing my—my town!"

I knew there was something else I wanted to tell him, but I couldn't think what it was as I wandered across the street, down the block, turned the corner and squinted up at that shiny brass plaque. **THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING.**

A newsboy grinned at me, long-headed kid, and Crackers' face appeared. "Murderers!" I yelled, and the buy jumped three feet. I guessed I'd better keep my mouth shut; I had better things to do than a trip to the observation ward.

Above my head, traffic roared and hooted on the bridge, five stories up, on a level with the shimmering glass of Grunemadd's office and penthouse floor, and I had a disturbing thought. *Suppose Grunemadd's up there dead? Wales and he were like siamese twins, controlling the town together. If some new mob wanted to beef their way in, they'd kill both. Without our little cherub, this*

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

*city can be in for some bloody old gang wars, yeah bo!*

"We shall see what we shall see!" I lurched boldly into the lobby of Grunemadd's hotel for thugs, storehouse for slot-machines, telephone jungle for bookies, offices for operations illegal and legit. I could have used another stiff one. For the lobby was as empty as a dice room the minute before the cops arrive. The sofas and over-stuffed chairs of the local political fixers, ward-heelers, loungers, New York exiles and prominent horse-players were empty. The bar was locked up. The flies buzzed loudly, while I tried to make out who was sighting a gun on me through the wall ventilator grill.

When I leaned on the reception-desk buzzer, one of Grunemadd's fronts, a florid, Kentucky Colonel sort of fellow, stepped jerkily from a side door and paused on the balls of his feet, regarding me as though I was a bomb with the fuse burning short. His lips parted but he didn't make any noise.

"I have uh hot infer-informa-tip for your boss," I heard my voice laugh.

His lips made a round O beneath his pepper-and-salt mustache, and he picked up the house-phone, talking into it behind his hand. When his head began nodding like a pump-handle, I knew some big toad was still full of life and giving orders. I draped against a pillar and watched the arrow-indicator above the elevator entry unwind.

The elevator "boy" frisked me until I began to know how a girl feels when enough is enough. But I felt a little surprised, too; it seemed unbelievable that Ripper Collins wasn't carrying hardware. It was hard to remember that I was only Rip the Bum.

The elevator accelerated with my stomach trailing behind, and the "boy" let me walk in front of him to that impressive mahogany-parquet door on the fifth floor, which opened itself, apparently. Inside it was surprisingly

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

dark as I peered across the vista of antique furniture, oriental rugs, buxom Greek statuary and stuffed flamingoes to the abruptly modernistic leather and chromium desk that underlined Mr. Grunemadd's shiny, bald scalp. He was smiling contentedly at his glossy finger-tips. Eventually he bothered to glance up at me.

No one said anything.

Over his shoulder stood Mike Railley, his number-one boy, a dull-witted New York black-Irishman with a darkly handsome face as puzzled as a monkey's its first day at the zoo.

Behind my back I heard the door close.

I could see why the room was so dark. The big, curving picture window that had 'looked out at the bridge traffic was boarded, shards of broken glass still glistened on the rug, and above and to the right of Grunemadd's scalp was an oval crater in the plaster. I was conscious how markedly I was swaying, how drunk I must be, and I watched that cherub's smile curve upward. I couldn't remember what I was supposed to say.

"Ah hah," Grunemadd exhaled. "Can be you are wanting to work for me, now the plot has failed? Of cawss you can't. Drunks, they are not dependable, no? Horrid stuff you fellows drink! You don't know whether you're standing up or laying down. Look at Mike here. He don't drink excessive and look where it's got him." This last carried a faint undertone of sarcasm.

Grunemadd's smile swivelled around. The phone jangled, and the young Irishman stiffened as though someone had put a finger to his back. His hand jumped at the phone like a cornered octopus. When he'd listened a moment, he blurted: "Like I said, Mr. Grunemadd, this bum has cops covering him. There's a dick in the coffee shop across the street."

"They don't touch me," Grunemadd muttered, trying to

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

sound happy. "They're my friends. Even that Chief Loe knows what's good for the city. This new D.A., I don't know, but I do know he's gonna' want to get re-elected. See, I told you he'd call off the raid when it gets around I'm still alive. You're nervous, Mike."

And so was he. A mobster like Grunemadd wouldn't trust his own mother to give him birth; he'd kick out Morse code for some gunman to hold a gun on her head to make sure she didn't change her mind. I had to laugh; I remembered what I was going to say, and I had to admire Chief Loe. Here I was doing just what he'd intended me to. I was another pawn on his chessboard.

"Say something, you," Grunemadd said smoothly. "When you say something? You too drunk to talk? You come up here to put the touch on me? Yes? You forget, you the bum who made all the trouble for me last election? I'm no philanthropy."

"Where ish everybody?" I managed obliquely.

"Where is everybody?" he echoed. "They'll be back for more cheese." He shrugged. "Tomorrow maybe. But you, you sure you in the right building?"

"You should've had bullet-proof glash."

"No, no;" he waved his hand, smiling again. "Glass don't stop high-power rifle bullets. Curviness makes them miss, yes?"

"You mean dish-tish-tortion from curve windowsh." My tongue was thick, but I was sharpening upstairs; I knew how I was going to play this for both me and Chief Loe.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I'm lucky, no? Last night they pop at me from the bridge with a rifle and I climb under my desk crying, 'What have I done to deserve this? Someone is not very civic-minded.'"

"My friendsh don't like me either," I replied. "Now I'm gonna' tell you something thatsh worth money. You decide how much. I was scheduled to shoot Welsh."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

He shrugged.

"Only I wass tipped off," I added. "The man says, 'Mike Railley has picked you for the sacra-fice-ficel sheep!'"

"I beg your pahdon?" Grunemadd exclaimed, while Mike's cheek twitched as if I was using it to stub out a cigarette.

"So I got shmart and loan my raincoat to Crackersh, see, cause I hear around that Browne and Mike been having talksh, and all that fits. They get rid of you. They get rid of Walesh. What better man to get rid of Wales than me, who been saying I'm going to get him? So I loan my raincoat to Crackers. Dig me?"

Mike's face was the color of cheap red wine, as he stepped forward.

"Course," I suggested slyly, "Mike is doing this on your ordersh?"

To my surprise and chagrin, Grunemadd squeaked: "Trouble-making lush! Don't dirty your hands on him, Mike. He's a drunk after a handout. Any lie for a drink."

Mike and I stood chest to chest on the oriental rug, breathing hard, while Grunemadd began to laugh squeakily like a mouse in a roomful of cheese. "Fine trick for a drink, eh Collins? Even in the gutter you play all or nothing. I think you've earned something for effort." He opened a desk drawer and smilingly drew out, not a gun, but a ten-dollar bill and smoothed it both ways. "For that you testify to anything, no?"

I tried to step around Mike for the ten-spot, but he moved with me, wheezing; his face said he was going to kill me, that I had hurt his feelings, that he didn't like the odor of my breath. I had to snicker, though it was my head on the chopping block; this was not the first time one of Loe's informants had manufactured some really high-priced pigeon droppings. Then again, they could still be pure gold.



## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

Grunemadd stood up behind his desk, which didn't make him much taller, and pushed forward some sort of large, horizontal bottle. "You can play with this bum later, Mike. —Now I want to make a speech. This bottle isn't for drinking, Collins. I want to say you been one of the mugs which is wrong with this city. You been a troublemaker, a stoolie from the word go."

"Proud to be of shervice," I laughed, edging toward the ten-spot and also curiously eyeing that bottle; it lay on a carved wood cradle as though it should contain a model clipper ship.

"I want to say, Collins, that I got this city's interests at heart. Look at my little city in the bottle"; bulging eyes, passionately open lips, he stared at the miniature city with an expression that would have seemed normal if he were staring at a beautiful chorus girl stark naked on his bed. "A perfect little city, all neat and in order, with little people and houses and trees, everything where it should be. That's the way we all want the city to be, orderly. That's why I like looking at this bottle, yes, yes. But troublemakers such as you, always trying dig things up. Collins, if this was Heaven you'd be yapping that a brick was missing from the Golden Streets. You'd blow us all to Hell, just to find that one brick!"

I stared at the model city in the bottle, but the ten-spot was more impressive.

"With a ten, you can skip this town," Grunemadd said, solemn as a fat man at his mother's funeral. "I want to say, Wales was my friend. He run a quiet city, and I'm not lightly taking his death. But you stop making trouble, you stop playing spy for certain soreheads in the Police Department, or I'll squash you like an ant trying to get in my bottle."

He took a big breath to say more, but my attention span is even shorter drunk than sober, and I laughed, which

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

froze him like I'd hurt his feelings.

"For anyone else," I said, "a city in a bottle is a curio. For you, it's bughouse bait. You should crawl inside and find eternal happiness."

I took the moment while he sputtered, his eyebrows high and uncomprehending, to capture those ten bucks and lurch toward the door. "Bye, bye, Mike," I said. "Touch me and I'll stain his oriental rug."

I came out of THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING softly laughing, my fingers chafing on that ten-spot. On the plate glass window of the liquor store across the street my reflection got bigger and bigger until my face grinned back at me like Satan's, fogging the glass. *Ten dollars will buy me enough revolver to hole that high-and-mighty pair*, I thought, feeling high as Jupiter myself, the god, not the planet. *Ten dollars will smash his lousy bottle, let the air in to his model city.*

But those were some mighty pretty bottles behind the liquor store window-glass. *After coming out of the lion's den, I deserve some good stuff*, I rationalized, *and those two didn't shape up any guiltier than anyone else in this town. I've got to lay bigger traps, and for that Rip Collins needs fuel.*

Inside, I discovered, to my pleasure, fifths of bourbon which, if I bought two instead of one, would leave me exactly the bus-fare I needed to get uptown. I couldn't pass up a deal like that, and on the bus I held them tight against my chest so they wouldn't clink, in deference to the lady passengers, and chuckled because not only was I wearing a dead man's suit, I lacked bus fare to get back.

I wondered if I had put a flea in Grunemadd's ear; even if Mike had been faithful as Old Dog Tray, Grunemadd would be wondering. And I wondered whether Grunemadd did have a motive for rubbing the D.A.; for instance, Wales might have raised his price too high. Bre'r Browne

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

might drop a few pearls on that score, being as how the D.A.'s office had janitors with big ears, and Wales himself had a cook from uptown. But Bre'r Browne might also drop me in the river, for a number of reasons.

The bus went no farther than Nineteenth, for reasons of city politics, and I walked beneath the noon sun, heavy-footed, light-headed and watching for a car to slow down; the moonlike faces of that pale pair, or Mike and one of Grunemadd's torpedoes, or even Chief Loe and Lt. Beardon, who could guess? I did know I was wearing my tail again, a blocky yokel in a light suit who changed the shape of his hat every couple of blocks and even turned his coat inside out, giving a brown sport-coat effect from that distance; he thought he was pretty tricky, a regular chameleon.

A gal glanced at me strangely and I realized all the faces had become darker than mine. Past rows of apartment houses with gay window-boxes and big new cars parked out in front, I trudged with tan faces, brown faces, black faces glinting curiously in my direction. This was the section of town where their doctors, lawyers, merchants lived, and no one would molest me. But gradually the homes blended with grocery stores, fish stores, liquor stores, anonymous cafes; and confident young bucks lounged on rooming-house steps, interrogating me with their eyes.

Old houses, unpainted, with sagging porches and sun-warped scroll work that was considered quite elegant back about 1900, gave way to shed-roofed hovels with coal-oil lanterns on the window sills. Children scampered and whirled like leaves in the wind, shouting: "White man, white man," as though I was a freakish, probably dangerous beast from interstellar space.

A block behind me I could hear them shouting, too. I had to smile. My police tail was shortening the distance

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

between us as if in mutual defense. We were out of bounds, on foreign soil. If you get in trouble uptown, white boy, that's just too bad; the police attitude is that you shouldn't have been there. Segregation is a two-way proposition.

Browne's DELUXE MEETING HALL had the lights on, even in the daytime, and upstairs, staring moodily out the window with his white poll making him look deceptively like Massa's most faithful retainer, was Browne. He spotted me, at least he stepped behind the curtain quickly enough. This made me wonder if he was the boy with the guilty conscience.

When I peered in the main entrance, a man with the quick grace of a rhino barred my path. "You ain't wanted in heah, Mistuh Collins."

"I want to talk to Browne."

"You been paid. Theah is no cause for you bein' heah."

"I've got news for Browne."

"Ah've got news for you. Mistuh Browne ain't in."

I shrugged, clinking my bottles, and ambled around to the window. "Hey, Browne," I yelled. "Grunemadd has a message for you."

Inside, the dice stopped rattling. The rhino started toward me with a sawed-off pool cue looking no bigger than a pencil in his fist. To avoid breakage to my bottles, I circled prudently across the street.

"Looka' out!" the rhino bellowed.

I ducked into the cover of a hole-in-the-wall fish store as a coupe squealed its tires against the curb. With blacking on his handsome face, Mike Railley still looked exactly like Mike Railley as he lunged from the car with a glint of metal projecting from his fist. There was a heart-stopping click-click-click as I bellied heavily over the counter. As I rolled over on the sawdust, I heard his feet coming and tried to run out the back way, colliding with a

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

woman in a bloody apron who picked that moment to wake up with a screech. My bottles went one way; I landed on my hip in a basket of fish, threw up my hand, a fine way to stop a bullet. His face loomed across the counter, twitching with each violent click of the trigger.

"Lying, stinkin' Grunemadd," he screamed, hurling the doctored gun at my head, and came over after it, gasping and sobbing as if his entire world had come apart.

I got up from the basket with my fist around the tail of one of the river catfish that the woman should have been cleaning. Its horned head was as big and heavy as a bulldog's, with a spiked collar on, and the body whipped like a leather blackjack handle as I clubbed his enlarging face. He staggered backward against the counter. As he warded off my next blow with his forearms, I kicked him where it hurts, doubling him forward, and slammed the fish to the back of his head. My knee came up and I felt his nose collapse. As his head snapped back, I sidearmed the catfish head against his cheek. He slid sideways from the counter and I landed another, feeling the gill spines rake his flesh, before he hit the sawdust, where I crowded over him, bludgeoning with diminishing strength as he began to crawl.

Every time I landed that fish on the back of his head, his face rooted into the sawdust to his eyes. He groped for my ankles, and I stumbled back, slamming down the horned head on his wrist. His face lurched up, black and scarlet and sawdust-freckled, giving me a target to swing that ugly fish underhand like a golf club. It bounced back, leaving him with a bloody, corpselike grin I would have driven into the sawdust, but my police tail had an armlock on me. I couldn't hold the fish and fell to my knees with the room shimmering.

The counter was lining with angry brown faces. As they started climbing over, I saw a spidery man with a bebop

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

goatee lift a safety razor blade from his hatband. The sound of the mob became an angry animal growl. My plainclothesman was yelling shrilly for them to keep back and flashing his badge. I crawled over and rubbed my handkerchief across Mike's stunned and bleeding face, saving us from being mobbed. The cry: "He's another white man blacked up," swept backward through the crowd and they milled around, looking sheepish, curious, giggling.

Browne's pet rhino leaned over the counter. As he stared at Mike, I saw his forehead wrinkle upward in startled recognition. He ducked away through the crowd fast.

By the time the plainclothesman, my tail, had telephoned for a radio car I could see Browne's "boys" running from the meeting hall across the street like rats from a sinking garbage scow. The plainclothesman hauled Mike erect and started him around the counter.

"Hey, don't take him out to the curb," I gasped.

"Well, there's a car coming for us," the dick replied innocently.

Mike made a whimpering sound and tried to twist out of the plainclothesman's arms. They teetered, interlocked like a couple at the last dance. When the rifle exploded somewhere with a high-velocity crack, there was a tinkle of glass and a simultaneous splat against the wall above my head. A chunk of Mike's head was gone. It came dripping down the wall. The plainclothesman fell away from the corpse, clawing for his gun, and crouched behind the counter with me, wheezing, and I didn't make any jocular remarks.

I retrieved Mike's gun, but something had been done to the firing pin; I couldn't fix it with a pencil and an ice pick. I had a feeling, however, that the rifleman had done his job and was lamming out of there by now. I backed up my intuition with a peek over the counter, in time to see Browne doing a solo down the meeting hall steps to his

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

limousine. He wasn't waiting for his chauffeur, or vice versa. The trouble with me, so many pieces of the puzzle were fitting together I felt a hotly confident wave of being Ye Olde Rip Collins again, and pounded out into the street, dud gun in one hand, icepick in the other.

As Browne got in one door of the car, I got in the other, and I was in the driver's seat. Browne managed a sickly smile. I laughed. I knew he was too smart to carry a gun. I cuddled up beside him with the icepick against his belly-button.

"Mistuh Browne," I panted, "you just stay close to me now and signal your boys not to try anymore fancy shooting. You and I know your lawyers are more dependable."

Once a surprising host of radio cars had extricated us from there, and we were driving out through police road-blocks toward the City Hall-County Courthouse again, I had a sinking feeling, as though my last pint of blood was leaking out; my two fifths of bourbon were still back there on that sawdust floor and I'd never see them again.

"This deal still doesn't add up," I told Chief Loe as I sagged into an easy chair in his office, my nerves twisting, my head clear and hurried, my tongue magically limber, agile enough for my thoughts again as if I was the old Rip Collins, the big-operator. "Yeah, it's plain the two who grabbed Crackers and gunned Wales were uptown muscle. I was considering that even before Mike did the reverse and attacked me black-face. He had no brains of his own; if he'd had imagination, Grunemadd never would have dared raise him to a position of power. I bet the only reason black-face occurred to him was because he knew those two gunmen had gone white-face with zinc oxide. The chemist did tag it zinc oxide, didn't he?"

Chief Loe nodded cautiously as if he was listening for something to explode somewhere back in the cell-blocks.

"Yeah, Mike had a deal with Browne," I rushed. "Elimi-

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

nate Wales and Grunemadd, and he'd take over Grunemadd's function and let Browne regain his bolita business, maybe a cash payment to Browne besides. But who brought them together? Who arbitrated? I don't even think those two were capable of cooking such a neat murder scheme. Number-three did that!"

Chief Loe ducked his gray head, he scratched his greasy suit front. "We is going to run a show-up on all the boys we grabbed on theah way out of there. An Henry Morgan will be theah; he is back and talking to Browne in his cell right now. You think you can recognize the boy who throwed you?"

I laughed. "O.K., change the subject. I can identify him if you nudge me. I trust you help the witness as though I was any honest and unobserving citizen?"

"We found one of them," Chief Loe sighed, "by going down the line testing fouah zinc oxide in theah pores. Has a record, and used to work as a rubbah in a turkish bath. Ah'll nudge you when the spotlight hits him."

"He won't even know who paid him," I laughed. "But Browne, if the bail is set so high he knows he's stuck and you get him all alone without his lawyers, you won't even need to work him over. That old man's afraid of pain. He'll lie until you piece out the whole story."

Chief Loe nodded, not looking very happy for a cop who was cracking the most newsworthy crime in years. "Shuah, he's the stah witness. Ah want to thank you, Rip. Ah'll send out fouah a bottle after you recognize that gunman."

A cop stuck his head in the door, we got up and went into the hollow-noisy hall, where I was relieved to see a crowd of newspapermen. While a sergeant put a new globe in the spotlight, Henry Morgan expanded to the reporters, demonstrating with his hands how the invincible forces of the law had closed in.



## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

"I've finally backed Browne in a corner," his voice came shrilly, and his horn-rimmed glasses flashed like mirrors, "which is something preceding District Attorneys failed to accomplish. I've talked to the judge, and even all of up-town won't be able to make Browne's bail. When I left that racketeer, he was wringing his hands and snivelling like a little old lady. I complimented him on a fiendishly clever plan for eliminating Mr. Wales, which it was, if I hadn't seen through it, and he giggled hysterically. I wouldn't be surprised if he was considering an insanity plea."

Henry Morgan raised his eyebrows. He swooped his hand backward through his corkscrew red hair. "Insanity would be laughed out of court. And yet, it may well be, the abrupt end of his illegal empire is proving too much for him. Such power-mad criminal types always walk the thin edge of insanity. I have half a mind to telephone the County Hospital for a strait-jacket."

His glasses blazed as the spotlight came on. A chorus line of hoodlums slouched across the stage. The spotlight began at the left with the spidery guy with the bebop goatee. "Take off your hat," the sergeant's voice grated through the microphone.

They all looked both familiar and unfamiliar until the light searched out burly number-five and the chief nudged me; nothing like a hint to jog the witness' memory.

"That's him," I exclaimed brightly. "One of them."

The examination continued and I couldn't find the other one, which was to be expected, since only one of these had been discovered to carry traces of zinc oxide. And finally the lights in the hall brightened, revealing the red-haired squirt sourly examining his fingernails.

*Damn you, I thought, you've had everything your own way. Can't you at least look happy about it?*

A Vice-Squad sergeant was suddenly at his shoulder,

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

whispering with breathless hissing sounds. He stood up, his domed forehead gleaming, and raised his hand.

"Gentlemen, I have an unfortunate announcement to make. I stand fully responsible. I should have had Browne put in a padded cell. This sergeant reports that while we were having this showup, Browne suddenly began to laugh and scream. Before they could unlock his cell and restrain him, he beat his head repeatedly against the bars. Browne is dead."

I laughed in my throat and kicked the chair in front of me. Chief Loe swiped his forearm across his brow. Above the tumult, Henry Morgan shrilled: "I wish to report however that the department has done a great job. Most of Browne's accomplices have been picked up. Additional arrests will follow. And the case is as complete as we could have made it had Browne remained alive to testify."

A few of the more knowledgeable reporters laughed or indulged in frustrated swear words, and one old-timer shouted: "And whose names would he have mentioned? In this city it happens every time. The last witness had four detectives guarding him and yet he managed to hang himself with his belt. Yeah, we got a great city administration!"

"Quiet please, quiet," Henry Morgan cried. "We all resent such unfounded vilification. The Force does a great job with very little help from the citizenry. How about a hand for them?"

"Sure they do," I shouted, "and they've been getting the back of the hand from the D.A.'s office."

"Shut that dipsomaniac up," the red-head snapped.

Chief Loe shrugged, the reporters quieted, grinning at me; during the battle of Wales' re-election I had thrown them plenty of front page news, and they leaned forward as though it was the old Rip Collins, the sharp-eyed op, who was going to kick some more cats out of the bag.

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

I clutched the chair in front of me to keep from pitching forward. Their faces blurred, elongating as if they were watching me through a bottle of wine, and my ears hummed; the fear that I was going to pass out made the sweat come, and a rising bubble of gas from my stomach wouldn't let me speak. A few of them tittered nervously. I could feel their attention slipping and tried to speak anyway and made a croaking noise. Their laughter began. It was as unreal as a nightmare. I was losing them.

"You all know as well as I do," I managed, and then that belch came rumbling out and they laughed hopelessly, beginning to turn away. "Awright you pencil-pushers," I yelled, "you been mighty fancy watchdogs for this city. As soon as Wales beat you and got re-elected, you gave up and went back to digging your news out of the baseball scores. You know as well as I do what's happened to this city, and if there is a man here who believes Browne beat out his brains all by his little lone self, he should have his own examined. It can be proved, too, if you put the screws on for an outside medical examiner to perform the autopsy instead of that big-bellied politician who calls himself the County Coroner."

"Now one of you asked our public servant," I said, thrusting a forefinger toward Henry Morgan's angry face, "what Browne would have testified. And I'll tell you. Not a thing, until plodding police work traced down his boy who fired a rifle bullet through Mike Railley's head, until his only choice was become a state's witness to dodge the noose. Then Browne would say it was Mike who cooked up the idea of two of his boys going white-face to gun Wales."

I quickly reviewed what a neat little scheme it had been, though a floperoo due to clumsy handling—, Crackers grabbed instead of me and then slugged too hard. "And Browne's rifleman, shooting from the bridge, failed to

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

compensate for the distortion in Grunemadd's curved window glass and missed him, the other half of the combine."

They jabbered at that; they knew Grunemadd was Wales' better half, but not that he'd been fired on.

"Yeah," I shouted, "this city was going to have a complete palace revolution. Mike Railley would have taken over Grunemadd's organization, probably giving back Browne's bolita privileges plus a cash payment for providing the gunmen. Up on the top floor of **THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING**, you know who is sitting smiling at his fingernails. Chief Loe was tipped that Mike was dicker-ing with Browne. Grunemadd also knows the score. He sent Mike after me with a dud gun, figuring I'd pick up one of my own, figuring I'd plug Mike in self-defense and save him the risk of another execution.

"When Browne learned a cop had Mike, he told his rifleman to close his mouth. Poor old Browne was worrying three ways; Mike could talk, Grunemadd could get revenge and, worst of all, number-three would also be scared and feel he had to shut Browne up. You pencil-pushers look sort of stupid and stunned when I say number-three. But this was a three-way deal. It had to be. Mike's and Browne's empire-building would come to nought unless they had their protection arranged. Wales was Grunemadd's protection. Who would be their's?"

I blinked at them, raising my hand to my cheek to stop its trembling. Beside me, Chief Loe was loudly, nervously scratching his coat-front. It was hot in that hall.

"Let's look at this another way," I laughed. "There is indirect evidence of a number-three because Bre'r Browne and Mike were members of hostile organizations, without overlap. Grunemadd has the equivalent of secret police. Mike could hardly risk making first overtures. Browne would need a go-between to deal with the enemy. O.K., so

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

our number-three functioned as messenger boy. But Browne and Mike would have to divide up their world in advance, and they're both greedy. So our number-three would also serve as arbitrator. To effectively arbitrate, one would suspect he held a certain balance of power, that Browne and Mike each believed number-three would influence the other to live up to his part of the agreement. An arbitrator among racketeers usually has a good deal of weight of his own. Number-three is no patrolman pounding a beat."

Someone coughed hollowly.

"Let's examine this from still a third direction," I said. "The scheme to eliminate Wales and Grunemadd was a thing of beautiful intricacy; closely timed, a long range shot, plus untraceable murder by means of a dead man, me. The originator was an ingenious fellow. A scientist of murder. That excuses Mike, nothing subtle about him, strictly a low I.Q. Now, Browne was a brighter mug, but up till now he's bought murders of the crudest sort, strictly boom-boom and run. Why change? He's old, he's set in his ways. So it's likely that number-three conceived this novel scheme."

Lt. Beardon eased toward the door. The red-head's horn-rimmed glasses flashed. Beside me, Chief Loe was scratching harshly. I couldn't help smiling; it was nice to be the center of attention again.

"We've looked for number-three from three directions," I chuckled. "Like three roads they come together. In the middle of the cross-roads are number-three's motives. Most of us want power, money and so forth, but number-three wanted them so badly he tried to turn his wildest day-dreams into reality. And he was spurred because, having already talked bigger than he was, he must act quickly. He was about to lose his position of potential power. He was about to be canned."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"So, he went to Mike and to Browne. He was in a position to know Mike was restless, that Browne was being hounded toward murder anyway. He offered his grand scheme for a palace revolution, and the tactical means for achieving it, the two murder plans. He assured them, all he'd have to do to be appointed Acting District Attorney would be to fly to the State Capitol and ask."

"I'm surprised," Henry Morgan's voice shrilled out with more courage than I'd expected, "that you gentlemen are bothering to take notes. This is libelous material from an irresponsible source."

He knew there was no case against him, yet. But I knew the police would begin their plodding, bumbling, relentless hunt. Little things would turn up, safety-vaults would be opened, minor hoodlums badgered, pigeons interviewed and re-interviewed. The flat feet of cops would trudge from one drugstore to another, any place where zinc oxide is sold. And one by one Browne's boys would be hunted out and worked over; some of them must have seen the Assistant D.A. with their boss; if not, they might remember it anyway. Laboriously, a case would be built.

"One question," I called. "Who guarded Browne?"

"Masterson and Soldavini," Henry Morgan replied calmly.

"Significantly, sergeants on the Vice-Squad," I laughed. "They don't ask questions, they just have fun. I guess you'd say they were under your orders?"

"Mr. Loe is Chief of Police," he retorted.

"Yes, but—," I laughed. "Do you remember early this morning when they dragged me into the D.A.'s office, and you were behind Wales' desk? You stared at those white smears on my shirt and, on the way out the door to catch your plane, you said: 'Burn them, delouse him.' Why should you even look twice at white filth on a bum's chest?"

"I won't subject myself to any more of this," Henry

## CITY IN THE BOTTLE

Morgan shrilled. "Eject him from this building." He turned on his heel and marched like a little Napoleon from the hall.

"The funny part about this," Lt. Beardon said "is the Governor didn't make him D.A. or even Acting D.A. He's still Assistant D.A. The Governor has bigger yaps who rate the patronage."

I didn't laugh. "How about that bottle, Chief?"

It was good stuff, and locked in a hotel room, where they stored me handy to appear before the Grand Jury, I laid back and drank it down like a baby with his bottle. Crackers' long, dolefully innocent face drifted across the ceiling, and I wished he would get those other bottles for me, the two on the sawdust in the fish store, but they'd be gone. The ceiling billowed and shimmered like the ocean, and I knew where another bottle was, behind the garbage can, a jar of corn, with the bridge traffic roaring overhead, toward THE GRUNEMADD BUILDING, and Mr Grunemadd would be staring at his bottle the same way I was staring at mine, each of us wondering what was going to become of us—

# I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

by Richard Deming

THE absorbed expressions of the two men conversing in the rearmost booth of the Brooklyn tavern seemed to indicate they were good friends. A touch of steel in the tone of the older and heavier man, and a hint of wariness in the younger, suggested that this seeming friendship was mostly on the surface.

The younger, a slim, blond, poker-faced man in his mid-twenties, said, "You've come a long way just to hire a gun, Martin. Particularly with all the guns you have at your fingertips in Chicago. What's the matter with using one of them?"

The older man was about forty-five, stocky in frame, but



## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

with a lean, sensitive and intelligent face. He said, "It isn't your gun I'm after, Larry. This one has to be rigged to look like an accident. He's going to fall out a window."

Larry Tower's nearly invisible blond eyebrows raised. "Have your regular boys forgotten how to push people out of windows?"

"My regular boys are also Nick Conti's regular boys. And they're loyal to him. If I approached one of them, I'd end up falling out of a window myself."

The younger man's usually expressionless face broke into a look of astonishment. "You're not planning on rubbing Little Nick, are you? Not Mr. God himself?"

Martin Abel studied his companion a moment before answering. When he did speak, the steel in his voice was unmistakable. "I'm second in command now, Larry. With Nick out of the way, I'd automatically take over. Provided nothing pointed to me. The boys wouldn't like it if they thought I'd promoted myself by scratching Nick. They wouldn't like it so much, there'd be a double funeral."

The blond man's face turned expressionless again. "So all that stuff about tin god Nick Conti inspiring undying loyalty in his men is just feature-article myth, huh? The guy he trusts most is ready to chop him down."

"It isn't myth. Most of the goons in the organization would walk off a cliff in formation if Nick ordered them to. I just don't happen to be a goon."

"No," Larry Tower agreed. "You're one of the smart ones who keeps his fingers clean and lets the hired help take all the risks. I always thought you'd go places, Martin, but I never dreamed you'd work your way up to second spot in as big an organization as Conti's. Why can't you rest on that?"

"Because I want top spot. I didn't travel all this distance for advice. I came to hire you to scratch Nick Conti."

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

Tower's lips curved in a colorless smile. "You've come a long way since you used to master-mind filling-station stickups for young punks like me here in Brooklyn, Martin. But you haven't changed. Twenty-five per cent just for casing the lays and giving the orders wasn't a bad racket. Particularly since you always managed to be sitting in a night club ten miles away whenever we knocked over a place. You're still casing the lays and hiring others to do the dirty work, aren't you?"

"You sound bitter," Abel said with mild sarcasm. "Have you forgotten you took that tumble on a job you planned yourself in order to save my twenty-five per cent? You never got a bum steer from me."

"No," the blond man admitted. "Except I probably wouldn't have been in the racket at all if it wasn't for you."

"You wouldn't have done five years if you'd listened to me."

Larry Tower waved a hand dismissingly. "It's over, so let's forget it. But you puzzle me. You were always so careful about risks, yet you tell me your plans for Nick Conti before you've even got my agreement to go along. What makes you so sure I won't run to Conti for an informer's reward instead of killing him?"

Martin Abel's teeth showed in a humorless smile. "I figured you'd return the favor I did you five years ago. I could have been nasty when you loused things up by trying a job on your own. Remember that Greek you killed during your second stickup?"

Tower merely stared at him warily.

"You slipped me the gun to get rid of," Abel said. "Only I never got around to it. It's still registered in your name, and the slug they took out of the Greek is still probably in storage at the police lab. Five years ago I did you the favor of not mailing it to the police along with an anony-

## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

mous letter. It's time you returned the favor."

Larry Tower asked in a flat voice, "You still have that gun?"

"It's around somewhere. In one of my safe-deposit vaults, I think, with a note tied to the trigger guard explaining what it is. I wouldn't use it as a lever on an old friend like you, Larry. But I guess it would be a little awkward for you if I suddenly dropped dead and the executor of my estate started opening safe-deposit vaults."

The blond man shook his head in a kind of bitter wonder. "How do you manage to always hold all the aces, Martin? Did you ever in your life take a real risk?"

"The cemeteries are full of risk takers. I prefer sure bets. Why do you think I came all the way to Brooklyn after you the minute I heard you'd been sprung?"

"Because of that lever you wouldn't use on an old friend like me," Tower said dryly.

Martin Abel shook his head. "Mainly because nobody in Chicago knows you. And the plan I've worked out requires a stranger. The lever isn't to force you into doing the job, Larry. It's just insurance so you won't run to Nick with tales. I'm going to pay you for the job."

"Yeah? How much?"

"Ten grand."

Larry Tower laughed aloud. "For bumping Chicago's top syndicate man? Come again."

"In advance," Abel said. "Plus a second ten afterward."

Tower pursed his lips. "Fair enough. How do I work it?"

The older man relaxed, now that the other had agreed to go along, and the steel went out of his voice. "Little Nick lives in a penthouse on top of the Conti Building. You may have read about it. There was a picture spread in *Life* a couple of years back at the time of his daughter's coming-out party, when all the invited society people stayed away, and nobody but politicians and the racket

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

crowd showed up. Remember? 'Chicago Society Slams Door in Racketeer's Face.'"

"Yeah," Tower said. "I read it in the prison library."

"Well, the rest of the building is office space. Hundreds of people go in and out all day, so no one's likely to pay any attention to your comings and goings. But the penthouse is a fortress. The only way in is by a private elevator that's barred at the top by a steel door three inches thick. Even the fire stairs end at the floor below. No bodyguard lives in the penthouse, although one picks him up every time he leaves it, and sticks with him until he's back. Nick's daughter has gotten married since the coming-out party, and his wife's been dead for years, so he lives all alone. There wouldn't be any witnesses if he fell over the edge of the roof some evening. It would have to go as an accident, because how could anyone get in to push him over?"

"That's a good question," Tower said. "How do I get in?"

"You don't," Abel said. "There aren't a half dozen people in the world Nick would open that steel door for unless his bodyguard was around. I'm one of them, but I plan to be across the street having dinner with some of the boys in the organization at Gangi's Restaurant when it happens. I want to make sure everybody knows I wasn't anywhere near him at the time."

Larry Tower frowned. "How do I push him over if I don't get in?"

"You lure him out of the penthouse down to a room on the next floor. A small office you're going to rent. He's going out the window of your office. It's only going to seem that he fell from the roof."

"Oh? And what do I use for bait?"

"A copy of a book called *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, by Edgar Allan Poe."

## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

The blond man stared at him. "Come again?"

Nick's a nut on rare books. He collects them. He'd climb Mount Everest in a bathing suit for a copy of *Tamerlane*. It's one of the *real* rare ones. There's only something like twelve or fifteen copies in existence, and Nick's offers to buy have been turned down by every owner. He's been after a copy for years."

Larry Tower continued to look unenlightened.

"You're going into business as a dealer in rare books," Abel explained. "You'll rent this small office on the floor below the penthouse, stock it with some books I have in storage for you, and put an ad in the *Tribune*. You won't approach Nick. You'll just keep running the ad until he spots it, even if it takes weeks. He'll drop in to look over your stock the minute he does, because he can't any more pass a book store than most men can pass a blonde in a nightgown. Particularly one right at his front door. Most of the books I've gathered for you are junk, but I've picked up a few interesting pieces for you to show him to whet his appetite. If I know Nick, he'll take full advantage of a book dealer so close to home. He'll fall into the habit of dropping in regularly to see what you've added to your stock."

"Yeah," Tower said dryly. "Accompanied by a big, tough bodyguard."

"Naturally. Until the evening you phone the penthouse and tell him you just got hold of an original *Tamerlane*. He won't be able to wait for a bodyguard to show up and escort him down. He'll come panting in your office door two minutes after you phone him."

The blond man looked at Abel with grudging admiration. "You haven't lost your touch, have you, Martin? You always planned everything to a gnat's eyelash. So then I toss him out the window?"

"It won't be that simple. Nick's small, but he's wiry and

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

he's fast. I have it planned so that he'll practically fall out the window himself, with the help of a small push from you. But I'll explain that when I show you the office."

"This is going to take a long time to set up, isn't it?" Tower asked.

"We have plenty. I want it foolproof. I don't want anyone ever to so much as suspect it could have been anything but an accident." Dipping into his inside breast pocket, Abel produced a typewritten list. Here's a list of reference books you can get at the public library. I want you to spend at least two weeks boning up on rare books before you even come to Chicago, so you'll know how to talk shop with Nick. Otherwise he'd spot you as a phony on his first visit."

Taking the paper, Larry Tower studied it. "Whew! This is going to involve some research."

"Better learn your lines well. Nick is no dummy." Martin Abel rose from the booth. "When you arrive in Chicago, phone me at the Carlton, but don't come to see me. I'll arrange to meet you."

Three weeks later the two men met again, this time in a small, newly-rented office on the eleventh floor of the Conti Building, the floor just below the roof. The office consisted of a single room of about twenty feet by fifteen feet, its walls lined with freshly-built bookshelves. These were empty, but three crates of books lay in one corner. A desk, two chairs and a slant-topped reading stand with a lamp fixed over it were the only furnishings. A telephone stood on the desk.

"The reading stand goes here," Martin Abel said, pushing it to a position next to the single window, so that light from the window fell on its slanting top. "I got a high one on purpose, so you have to stand to use it."

Larry Tower walked over to the stand, stood in front of

## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

it in the position a customer would if he were examining a book, and glanced at the window alongside of him. The bottom sill of the window was no more than a foot from the floor. At the moment the window was closed, but Tower noted that the division between its top and bottom panes was even with his eyes. With the bottom part open, a slight push would send anyone using the reading stand tumbling eleven floors to the street.

"These are the junk books here," Abel said, indicating the two larger crates in the corner. "Shelf fillers. The smaller one contains the collector's items. Better hide away all but a few, then bring the others out one or two at a time whenever Nick drops by, as though you're getting in new shipments all the time."

Larry Tower nodded.

"You'll also find a copy of *Tamerlane* in the small crate. It's a fake, but it will pass examination long enough for our purpose. Nick should be out the window before he gets a really good look."

The blond man nodded again.

"I don't want this rushed," Abel went on. "Either before or afterward. Play it natural. You'll probably get other customers beside Nick, so be sure you don't excite suspicion by giving them the brush-off. Make this look like a legitimate business. And you'd better plan on staying in business for at least a couple of weeks after the kill. Then you can quietly run a closing-out sale and fade away. Any questions?"

"Yeah. How about my advance?"

Abel drew a banded sheaf of hundred-dollar bills from an inner pocket and tossed it on the desk. "Ten thousand. I'll mail you the balance after the kill. Don't try to contact me. I'll phone you here periodically to see how things are going."

"All right," Tower said.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"I won't see you again, because I don't want to chance being spotted coming out of here. All our future contacts will be by phone. Good luck."

"Yeah," Larry Tower said. "I may need it."

Martin Abel allowed the blond man two days to get the office set up before phoning to check on his progress.

"The first ad will be in the *Tribune* tomorrow," Tower told him. "I already have a sign painted on the office door, and a notice on the building directory."

Two days later Abel phoned again.

"The ad's bearing fruit," Tower said. "I've already had five customers. Two browsers and three buyers. Unloaded two pieces of junk and that woodcut Bible. The guy went so nuts over it, you'd have thought it was a Gutenberg. I gigged him for a hundred and fifty bucks."

"No sign of Nick yet?"

"No."

"I'll keep phoning every day about this time."

A full week passed without any change in the situation. Through his daily phone checks Martin Abel learned that business remained slow but steady. A half dozen valueless books moved, plus one more of the rare ones, the latter for fifty dollars.

"Better not unload too many of the good ones," Abel cautioned. "You won't have any left to show Nick."

"There's still a couple of dozen," Tower told him.

In the middle of the second week Nick Conti rose to the bait. When Abel phoned, Tower said with suppressed satisfaction, "He was in today, Martin. Bought that one-syllable child's version of Robinson Crusoe, and showed interest in a couple of other things I showed him. Took his position by the window like a little lamb. Of course it was closed, and his bodyguard was here too, but it's going to work when the time comes. Nick asked me if I'd ever seen a *Tamerlane*."



## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

"What did you tell him?"

"I said no and let it drop there. You told me to play it easy, so I thought I'd better not even drop a hint that I might be able to get him a copy."

"Good," Abel said. "Any advance buildup at all might make him suspect a con game of some kind. Nick's no unshorn sheep. Just keep doling him out the good pieces you have, one or two at a time, until you have his confidence. Don't even mention *Tamerlane* until the evening you call his penthouse."

"That's a question I've been meaning to ask you," Tower said. "How am I going to know when to call him? Suppose I picked a time he had company?"

"You won't," Abel assured him. "Because I'm going to pick the time. I see Nick every day, and I usually know his plans for the evening. I'll phone you about seven some evening when I'm sure he's alone, and you can call the penthouse an hour later. That will give me time to set up my alibi in the restaurant across the street. Meantime you'd better drop the information to him that you stay open till nine p.m., so he won't be surprised at your calling so late."

Larry Tower said, "Check," and rang off.

Another week and a half drifted by. By means of his periodic phone checks, Martin Abel learned that Little Nick had developed the habit of dropping by the book store for a few minutes almost daily. He bought two more books Larry Tower produced from his secret stock and pretended he had just obtained.

At the end of this period, Abel asked, "Think he's ripe yet?"

"I think so. As ripe as he'll ever be."

"Then we'll set it for the first evening I'm sure he's going to be home alone. I won't phone again until then."

He phoned Tower at seven p.m. three evenings later.

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

"This is it," he told the blond man. "Nick had an early dinner, and he's already been delivered to the penthouse by his bodyguard. He plans to spend the evening starting a recatalogue of his library."

"Are you all set?" Tower asked.

"I'm to meet a couple of guys at Gangi's for dinner at a quarter of eight. I reserved a table by the window, so I could see the show. Don't forget to have that window open when Nick gets there."

"Yeah," Tower said. "Good thing it's a warm night."

At exactly a quarter of eight Martin Abel met his two dinner companions at Gangi's Restaurant, which was directly across the street from the Conti Building. The hostess directed them to a table right next to the large plate glass window facing the street. By glancing upward Abel could see the lighted window of Larry Tower's office on the eleventh floor. It was easy to pick out, for most of the offices in the building closed by six at the latest, and there was only a sprinkling of lights from other windows.

Abel noted with satisfaction that the lower pane was pushed wide open.

Martin Abel had chosen his dinner companions carefully. Ed Tousey, boss of the east-side rackets, was one of Little Nick Conti's proteges, and a fanatical admirer of the racketeer. Committeeman Harold Jacobson was one of the important liaisons between Conti's racket empire and organized politics. He was also a lifelong pal of Conti's.

With these two to testify that Abel couldn't possibly have had anything to do with Conti's fall from the roof, there wasn't even a remote chance of his ever being suspected.

By eight o'clock the three men had placed their orders and were sipping cocktails while they waited for dinner to be served them. After his single glance upward, Abel

## I WANT IT FOOLPROOF

carefully kept his gaze from the street, concentrating his attention on his two companions.

At ten after eight, just as a waitress began to set places before them, everyone in the restaurant was startled into silence by an eerie, high-pitched scream from outside. The head of every diner seated by the window swiveled toward the street in time to see a human figure slam onto the top of a parked car, smashing a huge dent in the roof before it bounced off into the street.

"My God!" the waitress said. "Somebody jumped out of that building!"

After a moment of horrified immobility, patrons began to rise from their seats and hurry toward the door, impelled by macabre curiosity to cluster around the broken remains of the dead man. Within seconds the restaurant was nearly empty.

Martin Abel remained where he was, watching the retreating backs of his dinner companions as they scurried after the rest of the crowd. Then he glanced up at the eleventh-floor window. He frowned when he saw it was still open.

Dropping his gaze to street level, he searched for Ed Tousey and Harold Jacobson in the crowd forming around the corpse. He couldn't pick them out, but he was reasonably sure that he wouldn't be missed by either for the moment. Rising, he quickly made his way to the restaurant's phone booth, dropped a coin and dialed.

On the second ring, a whispered voice answered, "Yes?"

"Larry?" Abel said. "Get that window closed. It stands out like a sore thumb with all the dark windows around it. You want some yokel to look up and guess he came from there instead of the roof?"

There was no answer.

"Larry!" Abel said impatiently.

"It isn't Larry, Martin," a quiet voice said. "He wasn't

## THE SAINT MYSTERY LIBRARY

quite fast enough, and I used a little judo. But thanks for calling. I'd never have guessed it was you otherwise. Too bad you have such a distinctive voice over the phone."

Martin Abel's stomach tied in knots. He couldn't think of anything to say. There wasn't anything to say."

"You can run if you want to," Nick Conti said in the same quiet voice. "But you know how much good it will do you."

Abel did know. There was nowhere to run from Little Nick Conti, because his syndicate tie-in spread his reach everywhere. Even to foreign countries. To Martin Abel's knowledge, no one had ever escaped a sentence passed by Little Nick.

Hanging up the phone, he walked back to his table and dully seated himself. He might as well wait right there as anywhere.

He finished his cocktail while he waited.

Page missing

Page missing



**Wenzell Brown**, famous for his novels about juvenile delinquents, including the just published CRY KILL, TEEN-AGE TERROR, THE WICKED STREETS and RUN, CHICO, RUN, turns to the problems of a youngster—*not* a juvenile delinquent, simply inarticulate—who has witnessed a murder and is now himself marked for death . . .

**Arthur Somers Roche**, portrayer of the glittering Twenties, describes a series of events back in the days when the words "Tammany Hall" had a sinister sound . . .

**Hayden Howard** reports on what happens in a captive city as gang interests and ambitions clash . . .

**Frank Kane's** famous detective, Johnny Liddell, urges a girl to shoot—and a crime empire crashes in red ruin . . .