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A Package for Mr. Big

*by* **FRANK KANE**

Dalhousie Among Thieves

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**THE MAN FROM MOSCOW**

*A NEW SAINT STORY by* **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

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**a**  
**package**  
**for**  
**mr.**  
**big**

*by . . . Frank Kane*

“You shoot first!” Johnny urged.  
So the dark-eyed girl reached for  
Liddell’s gun—and Al Zito’s crime  
empire crashed down in red ruin!

# I

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 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 re-possessed 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 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?”

“Let’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 pinwheeling display of multi-colored lights refused to go away.

Alter 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.

## II

The Dude Ranch was a sprawling white frame building 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, who stood polishing glasses, studying him. "How are chances of getting inside?"

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 stiff. 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.

“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.”

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.

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 makeup 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 him any particular attention. He waited until the floor show was over and the house lights went 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 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.

### III

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.

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 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 makeup. 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 makeup.

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

## IV

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 anticlimactic. 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?"

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 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.”

“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 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 heavysset 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.”

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

The big man crossed the room, caught Liddell’s arm with a hamlike 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.”

# V

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 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 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 didn’t?”

The fat man sighed. “It would put both of us to a certain amount of discomfort. Yours, to be sure, would be for 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 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, bent it around the other man.

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.

"What's the mat—" The wavy haired man's eye hop-scotched 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.”

# VI

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 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?"

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.”

Liddell looked thoughtful. “Gal like that should know plenty.”

“But plenty. Why do you think she’s still alive? She knows too much.”

“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 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 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.”

## VII

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 sultriness 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 the 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 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 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. 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 makeup 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.”

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.

## THE END

### TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

The cover used for this eBook is the original cover from *The Saint Detective Magazine* September, 1954. Only the one story has been included in the eBook.

[The end of *A Package for Mr. Big* by Frank Kane]