



# *English Studies in Latin America*

## **Hell or High Water**

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**HELL**  
**OR**  
**HIGH WATER**





A Wade Simpson Concoction

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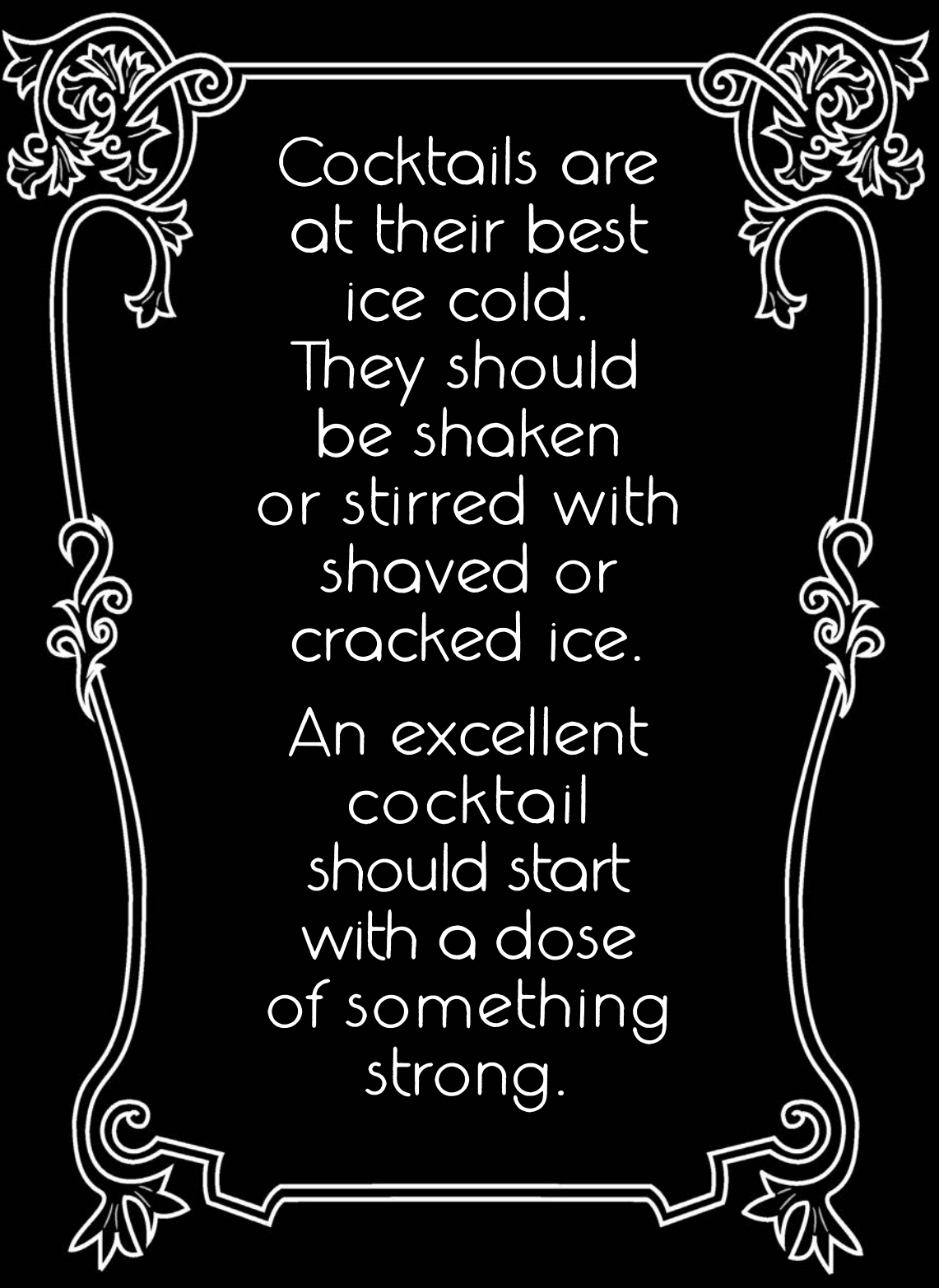
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First Printing.

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This issue is dedicated to Stephen R. Bissette for his never-ending encouragement of me to finish this crime comic. Like other cartoonists before me, I can't say enough good things about this rare treasure of the Green Mountains. He is also one helluva nice guy.

Very special thanks to Saints Peter and Paul Church for allowing access for photo references. It was incredibly helpful to know that the rooms, hallways, trap doors, and secret passages I imagined for this story actually exist. Thanks so much, Lydia.



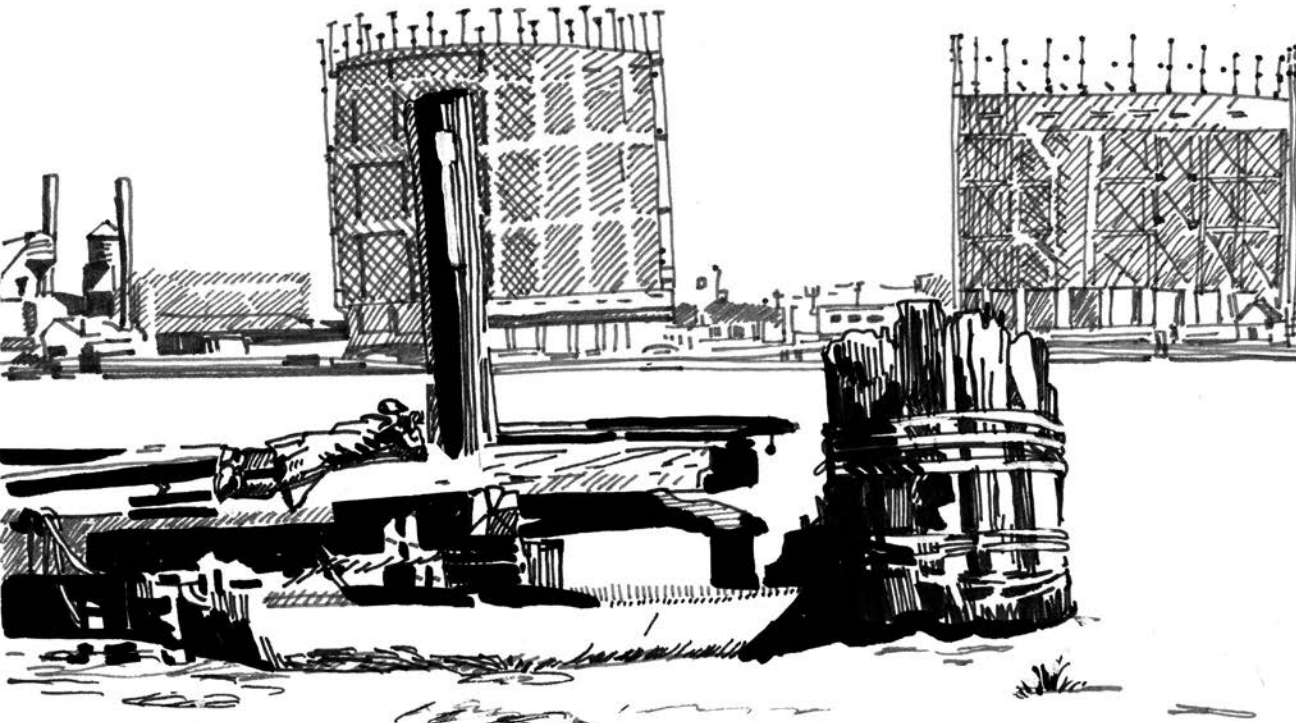
Cocktails are  
at their best  
ice cold.  
They should  
be shaken  
or stirred with  
shaved or  
cracked ice.  
An excellent  
cocktail  
should start  
with a dose  
of something  
strong.

# Chapter Two

## **STRONG**

Detroit, 13 years ago, a drunk-driving Father Joe Kirkpatrick hit Mr. and Mrs. Maupassant with his car, killing the wife and leaving the husband a double amputee. He was too drunk to notice that their five-year-old daughter, Lula, was buried alive in the wreckage.

New Year's Eve, 1930. Earlier this evening, Lula and her father, both alcoholics, discuss her plan to secure their favorite liquor, absinthe. Meanwhile, two rumrunners, Harrison and Jonas, drive from Windsor, Canada into the US via the newly constructed Ambassador Bridge. At the border, they are turned away by two double-crossing guards, Rhorry and Cherry. After killing the border patrolmen to avoid arrest, Harrison and Jonas stage a bold escape back into Canada. Undeterred, they attempt to enter Detroit by driving across the frozen river. Their truck gets caught in a snow drift, they abandon their cargo, and Harrison vows to fetch two River Gang members, Blackie and Wingtip, who "will know what to do."









Any sign of Harry or that new kid Jonas?

Thanks.



Not since that first gun battle I heard. The cruisers finally rolled up though.



No hurry call? The D.P.D. usually responds under two minutes, yah?



Must be a busy night for the shamuses. I've got a bird-watcher set up if you want to sneak a peek.



The usual suspects?

Detroit's finest uniforms. Cruisers Twenty-one and Nine.



Wahl and Proust. They are on Bernstein's payroll... What about the plain clothes?

Not yet.



Douse the Edisons.

The investigation seems to have moved to the middle of the bridge.



I see the coffee sergeant Dwayne Resnick. Ha! He's even got a cup o' Joe with 'em. It's seven in the evening... What a light weight.



Now, the one I don't recognize is the shadow. Who's the clean cut fella?





It's New Year's Eve, Agent Concannon.

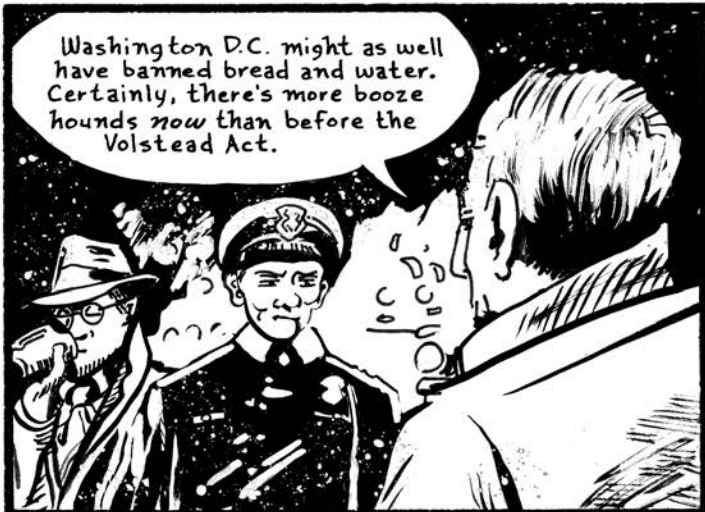


With all due respect, sir, nobody cares.



You think we're on a fool's errand?

I must admit, it makes no sense to me why it's on the books at all.



Washington D.C. might as well have banned bread and water. Certainly, there's more booze hounds now than before the Volstead Act.



And I know everyone's talking about repealing...

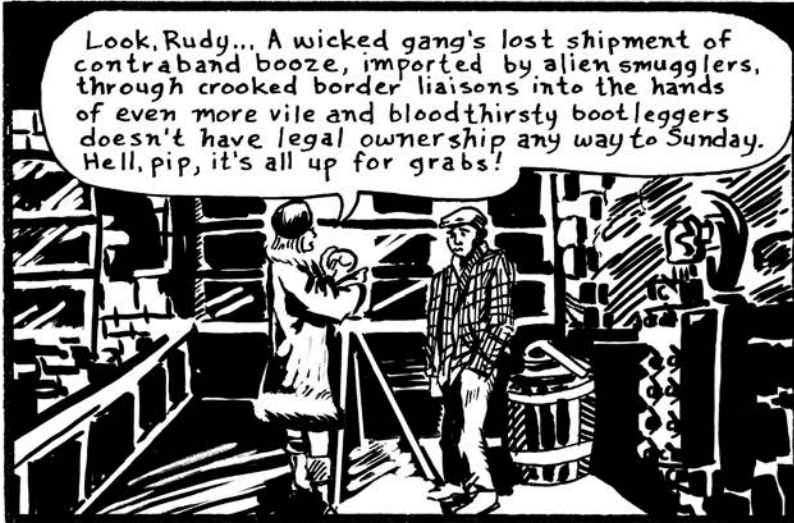
I get it. I do. But for now, it's the law. And we're the law.



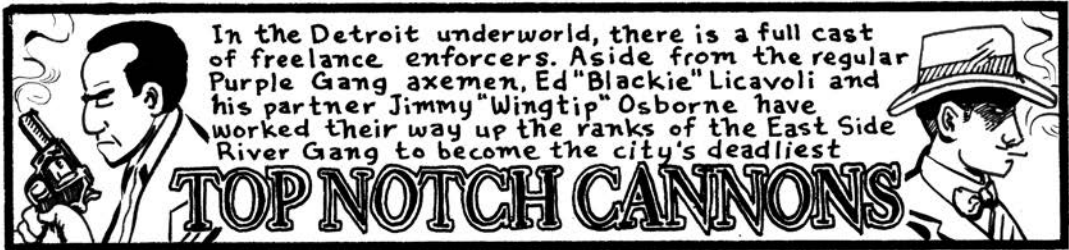
And they cannot hide from us. After all, they are a band of drunkards! And we are stone-cold sober. I'll be damned if these lush-heads escape retribution.



MmmMmm! It looks like they found some absinthe.







In the Detroit underworld, there is a full cast of freelance enforcers. Aside from the regular Purple Gang axemen, Ed "Blackie" Licavoli and his partner Jimmy "Wingtip" Osborne have worked their way up the ranks of the East Side River Gang to become the city's deadliest

# TOP NOTCH CANNONS



Licavoli's called "Blackie" because he's the darkest guy in the Zerilli association. He claims to be pure Sicilian but he can't be trusted on the matter. Ya see, he's sweet on fair Sue Hathaway. She's playing with fire though, cuz Blackie can cut up rough. I'd hate to witness all the bloody Chop Suey once Blackie finds out she has a backdoor man. And his pal Wingtip's even worse.

Tip's nom de guerre is more grim than it might sound at first blush. Once Blackie let someone's air out, and the sap bled all over Wingtip's new shoes. They cost a century but he went right out and bought another pair the very next day. He's a slave to fashion, buying up a closet full because he's in such a messy profession. I'd hate to be on either one's "to do" list.



Tutha will call for them and they will appear like Johnnies-on-the-Spot. Then they'll come for me.



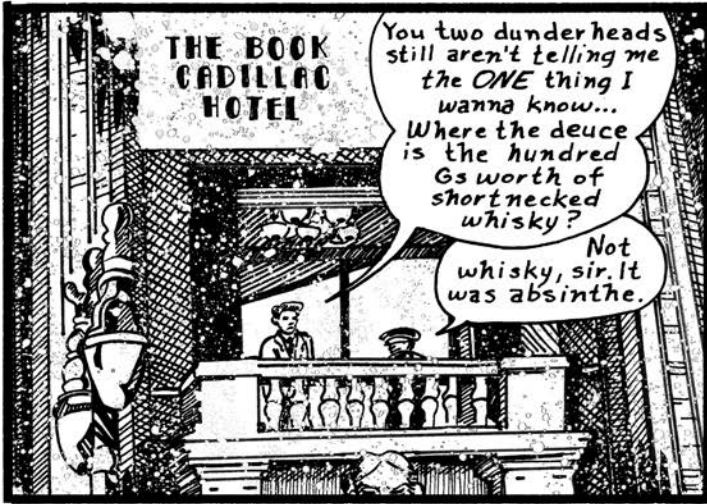
There's been an international incident.



SHAVE AND A HAIR CUT







THE BOOK  
CADILLAC  
HOTEL

You two dunder heads  
still aren't telling me  
the *ONE* thing I  
wanna know...  
Where the deuce  
is the hundred  
Gs worth of  
shortnecked  
whisky?

Not  
whisky, sir. It  
was absinthe.



What the  
France are you  
talking about?  
Absinthe!?

VAP



There was  
a fallen  
crate in  
the road.

With a fancy pants  
french label  
and  
everything.

Absinthe?  
Nobody drinks  
absinthe.

We know  
*ONE*  
person.



Lula  
Maupassant?

Very impressive.  
You twits thinking  
you might make  
detective one day?



Keep your eyes  
peeled for her  
tonight.

Yes sir,  
Mr. Bernstein.

Happy New  
Year, sir.



Will she turn herself into the pigs?



Never!  
She can't trust a cop. Her hands are as dirty as her mouth. That French bird is a liability.



Where would you like me to start searching for her?

Down at the piers. Seems the right chart to take if we're looking for a river rat.

And if I find her, you want me to eliminate the concern?



Oh yes.

Why don't you take Harry Millman with you? He's the best machine-gunner in the Tri-State.



Sure thing. Just don't raffle off that new Pontiac until we get back.



Me too. Since '26, they've engaged in bootlegging, gambling, and profit sharing with border patrol. The man in charge is Chester Tutha. He's affiliated with the River Gang.



They're responsible for the notorious City Hall flooding prank where they irrigated the Detroit River into John Smith's mayoral office. I'm sure the ex-mayor'll want to get a hold of the men behind that one.



I'm sure.



They're also the ones who tried to move that absinthe from Windsor this evening.



Absinthe? The department has yet to release the details of the verboten trade goods.

How did you come by your story? Who is calling?



May I ask your name please?



Just tell Resnick, one of his trusty dime-droppers.







Looks like she's turned to a *higher power* for help.



I heard a short-termers having spiritual awakenings, but she ain't got a prayer.

The poor dear. Another locked door.



You know what they say about prayer don't 'cha?



They say it's the last refuge of a scoundrel.

And they don't come more desperate or depraved than Lula Maupassant.

CRUNCH CRUNCH GRUNCH



















No.

He's too crippled to stand.



I could never lift him but a regular darb like you could.



For Midnight Mass, friar, it would mean so much.



Let me grab my coat.



Be careful with the brake, Father.




I've been working on it but when it's cold like tonight the brake can seize up!



The Lord will watch over the brake.

And I'll take care of the rest.



After dinner,  
guests may  
be served a  
small glass of  
liqueur as a  
digestif.

The "Coffee  
Pusher" should  
pour the drink  
carefully as to  
show the  
different  
layers.

A black and white still life painting featuring a variety of glassware and bottles. On the left, a tall, dark bottle stands next to a shorter, wider bottle. In the center, a large, elegant wine glass is prominent. To its right, a smaller bottle is visible. In the foreground, there's a small, rounded glass and a plate with a pair of tongs. The background is filled with more glassware, including a large, perforated strainer or colander. The overall style is expressive and textured, with strong contrasts between light and shadow.

Appendix  
**POUSSE-CAFE**



GENERAL NOTE - When I first wrote this story, originally called "Absinthe," it was historically plausible, but many of the physical details of the scenes were left to the readers' imaginations. Once I decided to turn the work into a graphic novel, it became necessary to resume my research in order to maintain historical accuracy. Instead of simply being the author of the story, I also had to become the production designer. It was important for me that every property object, vehicle, roadway and article of clothing was genuine to the period. Needless to say, this commitment to authenticity took a great deal of time and slowed down the artistic production. Hopefully, the small, and sometimes imperceptible, details lend credibility to this story, and a more immersive experience for the reader. Welcome back to 1930.

PAGE 8 - This warehouse district, along Atwater Street, is located against the Detroit River, at the northeast end of the city. For decades, it was the home of Dry Docks Engine Works and Detroit Shipbuilders, but for a brief time, it was abandoned by the boat companies, and eventually Detroit Edison took up residency. This story takes place during the transitional years when the property changed many hands. The dry docks have since been filled with water and years. PAGE 10 - The Bernstein Brothers: Abe, Joe, Ray, and Izzy, were heads of the Jewish mob family, The Purple Gang. The sobriquet came from their rotten reputation, like bad, purple meat. They terrorized Detroit during the 1920s but a decade later, their reign came to a close. The Italian gangs filled the ensuing power vacuum. PAGE 11 - After 10 years of Prohibition, the law was almost universally ignored. Cops and crimi-

nals alike profited from the contraband. Concanon's dedication would be seen as antiquated and corny. Prohibition was steadily losing support and three years hence, was repealed by the Twenty-First Amendment.

PAGE 12 PANEL 7 - "Ice Skating" refers to driving booze across the frozen river from Canada.

PAGE 14 - Polish mobster Chester Tuttha ran a criminal outfit out of Hamtramck called the Lizard Gang, and the Lizard Lounge was an actual speakeasy. Wingtip is fictional, but Blackie was loosely modeled after James Livacoli, who became Cleveland's crime kingpin.

PAGE 16 - The Purple Gang often conducted business in this world-class hotel.

PAGE 17 PANEL 4 - Harry Millman was so violent and hate-filled that he was considered too dangerous by even his own mob family. Although he escaped a car bomb, the rival Sicilian mafia eventually shot him to death in 1937.

PAGE 19 PANEL 2 - Mayor John Smith existed but this prank is pure invention.

PAGE 21 - Saints Peter and Paul's Jesuit Church on Jefferson Ave is one of Detroit's oldest original buildings, founded in 1844. The adjunct, St. Catherine's Chapel, located around the corner at Saint Antoine and Larned, was added to accommodate Detroit's growing faithful population.

PAGE 23 - Alcoholics Anonymous was not started for another five years, but the self-help temperance movement, best illustrated by the Washingtonians, had been active for fifty years.

PAGE 27 PANEL 5 - Carrie Nation was a famous teetotaler/vandal from the late 19th Century. She wielded a booze-bottle-smashing hatchet. Small in stature, she was the scourge of taverns and a hardline Temperance advocate.

