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NIGHT IN HAVANA

By BURNHAM CARTER

ILLUSTRATED BY MATT CLARK

TIO went into the Three Brothers Bar just off the Havana water front on the Street of Pious Works. When he was drinking his beer, he saw, in the mirror, two policemen approaching the doorway. He did not think they were looking for him—for almost three weeks he had been walking about in the freedom of an uncanny virtue—but the police were subject to petulant changes of mind. He took off his straw hat and held it for a moment at his chest; when he put the hat on the counter, it had his automatic pistol underneath it. He was bent over his beer when they entered. One of them he knew—a tough mulatto lieutenant named Ortiz. The latter's hard cruel little eyes swept the room and then met Tio's in the mirror. Tio smiled suavely and said good morning. To his disappointment Ortiz was not content with this salutation, but came toward him so purposefully that Tio swung around to face him.

"Search this one," Ortiz said to his companion.

Tio raised his arms at once, and the policeman clapped him roughly from neck to ankles.

"You see, I lead a dull and peaceful life," Tio said to Ortiz.

For reply the mulatto struck him hard across the mouth with the back of his hand, cutting his lip. Tio said nothing and, rather than be hit again, he dropped his eyes before the other's glare. The two policemen went out. Tio spat the blood on the floor and rinsed his mouth with beer. The bartender said nothing.

Two other customers drinking coffee at a tile-topped table looked at Tio apprehensively. He drank his beer, lifted his hat carefully to his chest, and then put it on. He dropped a nickel on the counter and went out. The two policemen were on the corner, talking. Tio bore them no ill will. They had a hard life too. Most people had a hard life and therefore should not be judged too harshly. Tio turned his back on the policemen and walked up the narrow street toward the city.

Something's up, he told himself. They've been told to get someone for something. The police chief has called them names, and they are angry.

He decided to find out about it, so that he could stay away from the wrong places and the wrong companions. Also, he wanted to get rid of the gun while the police were picking up suspects. He headed for the Café Mosca, where his fiancée, Amelia, the proprietress, would keep the gun for him.

At the café he saw Nicky, the Italian dope peddler, narrow-faced and dark, with nervous fingers; and Sam, the American taxi driver, specializing in tourists, one of the few remaining good rough-and-tumble fighters; and a Chinaman, called simply "the Chink," who traded in those of his people who wanted to be landed on American shores; and a Dutelman named Maru, in from Jamaica, who had a big motor launch of his own, and was important in the smuggling trade; and half a



He did not hesitate, but leaped from a crouching position, like an animal, for Tio's throat.

"It is the jewels of the American turista," he replied. "A very rich one—a very gay one—in a motor cruiser, like mine. They were stolen last night in a cabaret."



"Coffee—small," Tio said to Pepe, Amelia's brother, who was very religious and was to intercede for all of them in heaven.

"I weigh one hundred and ninety-three," Maru said. "When I weigh one hundred and ninety-five I shall stop drinking beer and shall drink coffee. Shortly I shall weigh one hundred and ninety, and shall drink beer again."

"It is like the rise and fall of the tide," Tio murmured. He had the sweet tooth of the Cuban and he poured nearly a third of a cup of sugar in his coffee. "I had the impression this afternoon," he said, "that there is something on the mind of the police."

Maru laughed. Although he had a profound contempt for Cubans, he respected Tio's intelligence and was amused by his polite and elaborate way of talking. "It is the jewels of the American turista," he replied. "A very rich one—a very gay one—in a motor cruiser, like mine. They were stolen last night in a cabaret. She had put them in her handbag."

"That is unfortunate," Tio said. "And so soon after the police chief let it be known that American tourists were not to be robbed!" He drank his coffee and expostulated: "For if we rob the American tourists, then they will come no more; and if they come no more, where will the Cubans get their money? Then there will be none to rob."

"She has a nice cruiser," Maru said, changing the subject, to indicate that robbery, as contrasted with smuggling, did not interest him. "I have seen it. It is the Seabird."

"What were the jewels?" Tio asked.

"An emerald of great size—a pendant. Also, rings. She left the handbag in a night club. So they say."

How foolish to put such things in a handbag, Tio thought wistfully. He put two pennies on the table for his coffee, bowed to Maru and went in the door marked CABALLEROS. Instead of turning to the right to the washroom, however, he pushed open the door ahead of him and came out in a short hallway behind the kitchen. He knocked at another door and entered without waiting for an answer.

He was in a small office where the accounts were kept. Amelia was sitting at her desk. Her husband had died nearly a year ago and had left her a \$2500 debt and a café with the most vicious clientele in Havana. Facing all the difficulties of a woman alone, she had assumed the responsibility with no outward fear; she ran the café with a firm and efficient hand, until Tio, who had found women a help to man's pleasure, but a hindrance to his business, saw that here was a woman who would be helpful in both ways, and, incidentally, would not consent to be helpful in pleasure alone. Somewhat to his surprise, but with the approval of his mind, Tio fell in love with her.

dozen Cuban riffraff who worked at anything from running brothels to stealing clothes with a pole out of second stories. At one table there were six fresh-faced young men talking in low eager tones; they were the only ones in the café not wearing hats, and they were the only ones who were honest. They were students, and Tio frowned to see them there. The students caused unnecessary trouble; they were always plotting revolutions and forming secret societies in public places; and sooner or later they would bring the "paisanos"—the plain-clothes men—into a place, and everybody would be uncomfortable until the day when the paisanos would grab them and shoot one or two on the way to the patrol wagon for trying to escape. Tio did not like schoolboys in the Café Mosca.

He stopped alongside Maru, who was sitting alone at a table and who invited him to sit down.



She was dark, plump and still beautiful—but not for much longer. Soon she would get a little fat—just enough to break the clean curves of her youth. Personally, Tio would prefer her a little fat; from the standpoint of a husband, the aesthetic loss was more than offset by the gain in comfort and security.

"*Madre Mia!*" she exclaimed. "You give me no time to say, Enter."

"I am too impatient to see you," Tio said, kissing her.

"You must have something you want me to do," Amelia scolded.

"Only a little thing. And now that I see your face, I have forgotten what it was."

"Just as you forget my face as soon as you see another."

"Not once in the last three days, as I have gazed on the faces of others, have I forgotten yours," Tio replied, teasing her.

Amelia stood up and put her arms around his neck. One of the reasons she liked Tio was his ability to talk much better than she; sometimes his conversation resembled that of the elegant young gentlemen in romantic novels of old Madrid.

"How wicked you are and how foolish of me to love you," she sighed. "What is it you wish me to do for you?"

There was a large brown envelope, empty, on the desk. He picked it up, slid his automatic deftly into it, sealed it and handed it to her. "Keep this for Tio," he said.

Amelia's manner suddenly became serious. "It is well. The detectives are watching this café."

"That was to be expected."

"An American was robbed last night," Amelia went on. "At some cabaret."

"Yes. I heard. An emerald. Who, probably?"

Amelia shrugged her shoulders. "Sam drove the taxi. That much I know."

"It wasn't Sam," Tio said reflectively. "That ox. He cannot steal. And if he found the jewels in his cab, he would not know what to do with them—except bring them to me."

"Yes," said Amelia.

Suddenly Tio wanted the emerald badly. He had not picked up any real money for weeks. As if reading his mind, Amelia put her hands on his shoulders: "Little one, listen. The police are aroused about this matter. They have orders. It is not as usual. Also"—she dropped her eyes—"in a week my late husband, the unfortunate Enrique, will be dead a year."

Tio understood what she meant: it would then be fitting for him to marry her. "Then, let us marry, my sweet," he said. "Only there is a debt to be paid."

He had promised, when he married her, that he would abandon the extralegal practices by which he lived. He would confine himself to the business of running the café. But she had told him of the café's debt, reduced by careful saving to \$2100. Partly out of vanity, partly out of a sense of obligation, he had sworn that, since he had no other material contribution for their marriage, he would discharge the debt before he wedded her. This was too honorable an intention for her to dispute; she respected him for it, but she was beginning to be afraid; it was always "the one last trick" that failed.

"Let the debt be," she begged. "Little by little we shall pay it."

Since she so rarely pleaded with him for anything, he was moved by this, and might have yielded if no interruption had occurred. But Amelia's face changed and her voice lifted. "So you will not forget to mail it for me?" she inquired.

Reading her face instantly, Tio answered: "May God forbid, señora."

Amelia addressed the detective who had entered: "Good morning, señor."

"Your servant, señora." He looked at Tio carefully and then asked her: "May I see you alone?"

"Adios, little flower," Tio responded promptly and walked away with a wave of his hand.

The detective handed her his card. It said: LIEUTENANT RAOUL MOLINA, POLICÍA SECRETA. "That was Tio Martínez?" he asked.

"Sí, señor."

"He is here often?"

"He is most attentive," Amelia replied with a becoming blush.

"To you—or to business?"

"To me."

"Naturally," the detective replied. The remark was gallant, but the tone was false. He consulted a little notebook. "In the café I also saw—Maru, the Dutehman, Nicky Aricunno, Lu Wong, Sam McCarran, Pepe Rosan —"

"You have many friends," Amelia interrupted with a pleasant smile.

"Not friends," said Lieutenant Molina. "Merely crooks—as you know, señora. Are you not afraid with so many dishonest men about?"

"Nothing has ever been stolen here," Amelia remarked.

The detective laughed. "Perhaps we can help each other," he said briskly, putting his notebook away. "I am not after those crooks. I am not—even—interested in the emerald." He glanced at Amelia to see what effect the last word had upon her, but her face was impassive.

"Perhaps you merely wish some beer," suggested Amelia.

"No. There is a table of students here. I am interested in them. I want some information. I want them to talk freely and mention names and places. And you will make a note of what they say."

"I am so busy here," Amelia began. "I rarely go in the café —"

Lieutenant Molina raised his hand to check her. "It would be too bad if those whose names I have read and others like them should go to some other café because the police were always in this one," he reminded her. "The students bring you no business."

It was true. It would be easy for the police to scare away her trade. And she was particularly anxious that the café should do well, since Tio would shortly enter the business with her.

"If you get me this information, we shall continue to leave you alone. But"—he looked at her sharply—"I want an honest job."

Amelia nodded. She felt sorry for those schoolboys, but they were such fools. After a day or two, she would suggest they go to another café. "Very well," she agreed.

"Many thanks. Until later." He went out by the door in the kitchen.

Amelia joined the crowd in the café, stopping at each table for a word or two and helping in the service. She showed Lieutenant Molina's card to Tio and whispered: "He is not interested in you or your friends—only the students."

Tio nodded. "Give me the card, my sweet. The lieutenant may sometime prove useful." He put it in his vest pocket.

At the student table Amelia exchanged jests with one of them—a blond, cheerful one, not so nervous and intense as the rest. It was easy for her to pick up their conversation. Feeling secure in her café, they paid little attention to her coming and going, and talked incessantly in low tones that burst into shrillness when they were excited. She had noted several names and places by nightfall, and many phrases about "the cause" and "freedom" and a mysterious shipload of arms. She hoped for their sakes that there was no tangible evidence to confirm the indiscretion of their words.

With no guilt on his conscience, not even the illegal possession of a pistol, Tio left the café and walked slowly in the warm bright February sunshine to the Park of Brotherhood. It was nearly lunchtime, and he sat on a bench, waiting for Arturo Jimenez from the customhouse. A number of American tourists went by. They were apt to talk rather loudly, and the women's clothes were too sporty for Tio's conservative taste; but Tio had a rather friendly feeling toward Americans. They were careless by nature, and they drank a lot, and he had robbed so many of them so easily.

Arturo slipped into the seat beside him—a furtive little man in a soiled linen suit, with a slippery, perpetually moving mouth. Tio despised him; but Arturo, in touch with both the police and the customs officials, was one of the best sources of news he had.

"Have we ever had more beautiful weather!" Arturo exclaimed piously. He lit a cigarette and let the smoke drift slowly into the sunlight. Tio noted the yellowed fingers and black-rimmed fingernails with distaste, but his ability to suppress his personal dislikes was partly responsible for his success.

"February is a good month," Tio said. "Many tourists come, and they lend color to our drab lives."

"How true!"

"Such as the one who lost her emerald last night. What was her name, Arturo?"

"I could not be sure of it at the time we were introduced," Arturo said, delicately flicking the ash of his cigarette, "but I believe

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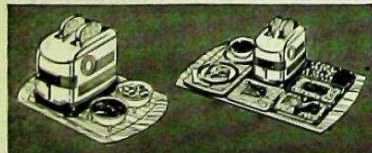
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NIGHT IN HAVANA

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it was a Mr. and Mrs. Sterner—she called him Ducky. Their mahogany cruiser—a mere runabout—lies idly in the harbor. A prominent industrial family, makers of dental equipment. It seems to be profitable—Americans spend a great deal of time on their teeth."

Arturo paused, well pleased by this intimate and fluent description.

"Where was the handbag stolen?"

"At the Cabaret Diablo."

"And by whom, do you think?"

"Someone without any patriotic feeling," Arturo asserted indignantly. "Will rich Americans visit Havana if they receive such treatment? A tourist is a guest."

Tio gathered that Arturo knew nothing more about the Sterner robbery. "What else is new?"

"They're going to close the University of Havana," Arturo said. "Too many plots. The students have a secret revolutionary society, the A-B-C, but the police are getting some names. I am going to get lunch." He stood up, pulling at his spotted black pants. Then he chuckled. His lips moved around an obscene phrase as if it were a lollipop. "Here are the Sterners," he said. "I guess the girl is following me around."

The couple passing them belonged to the comedy school of well-to-do American tourists. The man was about forty, with a good-natured homely face. He wore yellow pants, a blue-and-gray checked coat and white shoes. He swung a cane with vigor and walked with the slight swagger of men who have not done any running for years. She was perhaps a few years younger—faintly pretty in a florid way, stocky and cheerful. She wore a close-fitting pink sweater, a white skirt, and no hat.

Tio decided that they were what the Americans called "good sports": noisy, drinkers, free spenders. Probably shrewd at home, they did not quibble on a holiday. There had been a lot of them visiting Havana up until 1932. Now the type was much less common.

After Arturo had gone, Tio walked down to Havana harbor to look at the Sterners' boat—the *Seabird*—a sixty-foot cabin cruiser, dark and powerful-looking. Tio could not get the robbery off his mind; it was just the kind of enterprise in which he should be involved, and it bothered him that no one should be using his valuable services. Apparently the thief was not among Tio's friends. At the café that afternoon he could get no more information; indeed, the activities of the police had forced the best of the underworld news gatherers into less public places. Depressed, Tio walked home after darkness along the Street of Souls, in the old city. The street was almost deserted at night—a narrow, isolated residential street in the business section; he had chosen it for that reason. Half a block from his apartment was the small ancient Convent of El Corazon, and a man's voice spoke to him from the shadow of its gates.

"Tio Martinez?"

Tio stepped into the shadow also, the better to see within it. His hand went to his armpit, and then he remembered that he still had no gun. The voice, however, was young and a little nervous, and he saw that the speaker was only a boy of sixteen or seventeen.

"Your servant," said Tio.

"We have a matter of some importance we would like to discuss with you," the boy said.

"We?"

"My friend is waiting on the other side of the street."

Glancing across, Tio saw a young man against the wall of a building.

"A friend of yours sent us—a Mr. George Young."

Tio ran rapidly through the extraordinarily complete card index of his memory. George Young—he came upon the record in his mind—George Young, a bootlegger in Key West, for whom, in the profitable days of prohibition, Tio had done several profitable favors.

"I have a note from him," the boy went on anxiously.

"Yes," said Tio. "Ask your friend to come across."

The boy whistled. As the other one came over, Tio had a chance to observe him. He was also young in years, but mature in bitterness—a hard, determined face with an ugly scar on the cheekbone and eyes like steel chips. They were students, Tio decided, and one of them had encountered the police at first hand.

"You live at Number Thirty-five," the newcomer stated harshly. "If there's no one there, we'll go there to talk."

Tio nodded. He led the way to the house where he lived, unlocked the front door and proceeded up the stairs to his apartment. He let the two students in first, and noted the bulge in the older one's hip pocket. This must be one of the tough boys—one of those who began by talking politics in the university and then took part in parades against this or that regime, and ended by being beaten up by the police, tortured in prison, hunted from one hiding place to another, and now had become a desperado of the first rank—a bomb-placer, a shooter-to-kill, whose love of freedom was less strong than hatred of all authority.

"So," said Tio, closing the door.

The older one handed him a note, scrawled in pencil:

Tio: These muchachos are a little cracked, but they're O.K. —GEORGE YOUNG. How's business?

Tio lit a match to the paper and burned it. "You know my name," he said. "What's yours?"

There was a moment's hesitation. The young one looked at the older one. "Romero's mine," the older one said. "Roberto Mendin," the younger one added promptly.

"You are Torval Romero?" Tio asked in a carefully casual voice.

"Yes."

Torval Romero was one of the more notorious student terrorists. Tio would not have put a bad peseta on his life if the police got him. "You're sure you were not followed?"

Romero answered grimly: "I have to be sure."

"What is it you want, then?" Tio inquired.

"We have a shipment on the Florida coast, just beyond Key West. We wish it brought here secretly. We were told you could arrange it."

"A shipment of what?"

"Guns," said Romero briefly. "Four hundred rifles—and other things."

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Tio walked to his rear window, from which he could see the harbor. Under the beacon of Morro Castle the Seabird brooded quietly. "Would a boat like that carry it?" he asked.

"Yes."

Maru's boat was nearly that size. It was a good proposition if the pay was right. "It can be done," Tio said, "but it costs money."

"How much?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars." Five hundred for himself, a thousand for Maru. "Guns are a dangerous load. And if one is caught—" Tio shrugged. "That's all right," Romero said. "Cash on delivery."

Tio smiled politely. "Half of it now."

"Three hundred dollars now."

Tio shook his head. The credit of students was notoriously bad.

"That's all the cash I have," Romero said sullenly.

"We have to consider these things," Tio pointed out regretfully. "How do you propose to get more?"

"How much is this worth?" Romero asked. He put his hand in his pocket. When he drew it out, an emerald glowed on his palm.

"The American lady's emerald," Tio said softly. He laughed. The police were hunting the professional crooks, and the schoolboys had stolen it!

Romero was watching him. "Why do you laugh?"

"I hope you got rid of the lady's pocketbook," Tio said.

"We are not thieves," Romero answered angrily. "We needed money for the cause."

"All thieves need money," Tio remarked. It was a mistake. Romero's dark face grew darker.

"I said we were not thieves," he repeated with unpleasant distinctness. "Madre de Dios! You talk too much."

"Neither of us took it," the younger one explained hastily. "A girl—one of us—picked it up in the ladies' room. She did it for the cause."

"Shut your mouth," said Romero. Tio examined the emerald under the light.

"What it is worth is one thing," he said. "What it will bring is another."

"It is worth several thousand dollars," Romero said. "It should bring twelve hundred."

That was true enough. Tio had handled stolen gems before.

"That is all right," he said. "I'll handle the job for you."

Romero nodded. He handed over two new one-hundred-dollar bills and two fifties. The American lady, Tio thought, did not believe in small change. He listened with some admiration to Romero's swift and clear exposition of the plan. They would pick up at Key West and discharge on the shore by Marianao, not far from Havana. Romero would be guide. It could be done in a night—three hours to Key West, half an hour to load; start back at midnight. Tomorrow, if possible.

"Have your friend meet me at the Café Mosca at noon," Tio said.

"O.K.," said Romero. He got up and walked to the door. Then he turned. The expression on his face was menacing. "You know what we do with long tongues?" he asked. "We slit the throat so that they may have plenty of air."

Tio did not lose his polite smile. "Among us ordinary thieves," he said, "there are no long tongues."

It was too late to find Maru that night. Maru was an early retiree except for his rare and incredible gin parties, when he would drink the clock

around with no effect except an increasing solemnity. Tio found him at the Mosca in the morning. They chatted over the coffee.

"If you're not busy tonight," Tio said, "there's a little shipment to be moved from Florida."

"I haven't anything particular on hand."

"From Key West to the Marianao shore. Guns—a shipment just the size for your boat."

Maru's eyes narrowed. "Guns!"

"A thousand dollars. It wouldn't take more than five or six hours."

"Guns is bad business."

Tio was indifferent. "I didn't know if it would interest you."

Maru looked at him with his small suspicious eyes. "How much are you getting?"

"Two hundred," replied Tio blandly. After a minute or two Maru grunted, "O.K."

Tio explained the plans. He didn't say anything about the emerald. In view of the intensity of the police search, the emerald might alarm Maru; and also it might well be worth much more than the \$1200 for which it was collateral. He would get cash for Maru and keep the emerald himself. Because of this peculiar financial arrangement, he decided to accompany the expedition. Ordinarily he preferred to avoid an active part in these ventures; he spun the plot and let others handle the execution.

When he had finished with Maru, he went in to see Amelia. "How much do they say the American lady's emerald is worth?" he asked her.

"Ah, very much."

"How much?"

"Molina, the detective—the pink-shirted one, you remember?—he sees me about the students. He told me that the lady valued it at fourteen thousand dollars."

"I am buying it for a thousand dollars," Tio said. "In effect."

Amelia's eyes widened.

"But first you must lend me seven hundred."

"Ay, chico! I have only eight hundred saved."

"And then we shall pay off the debt on the café and we shall marry and I shall be an honest restaurant keeper."

"For that," replied Amelia simply, "I would give you all the money I have."

Tio was moved. He kissed her.

In the café he saw the student—the very young one with the anxious eyes. He was sitting with the group of five or six in the corner. Tio caught his eye and went into the washroom. The student followed.

"It is arranged," Tio said. "Romero should meet me tonight at my house. We shall drive to—a certain beach where we pick up the boat. Is it clear?"

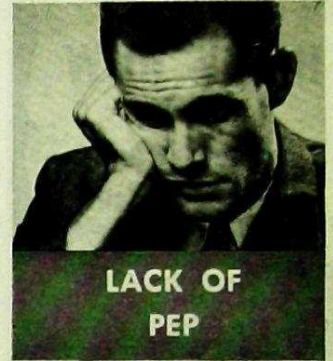
"It is clear," said the boy eagerly.

"One thing more. Whoever meets us at Marianao should bring the emerald. That must be paid before we unload."

"It will be done. I'll be there with the others."

Walking away from the café, Tio saw Mr. and Mrs. Sterner turning down the Street of the Bishop to the harbor. It occurred to him that he should find out what would be the "cash consideration" for the return of the emerald; it would probably be too little, but it was a possibility to be kept in reserve, in case he were prevented from selling the emerald in a better market. He promptly followed them. They walked to the private boat owners' dock, where they picked up their dinghy and

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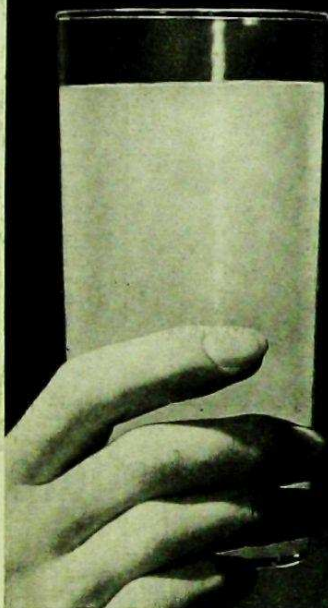


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motored out to the middle of the harbor to the Seabird. Tio went to the public docks and hired a small open motor launch. Alongside the Seabird, he called, "Ship ahoy!" in English, and mounted the hanging ladder. Mr. Sterner emerged in his undershirt.

"Good-afternoon," Tio said. He spoke English well; no part of his education had been more useful. "I am Lieutenant Molina, of the Secret Police." He handed the other the lieutenant's card which Amelia had given him.

Mr. Sterner was impressed. He shook hands. "Good of you to come," he said. "You want to talk some more about the emerald, I expect."

"If you will be so kind," Tio said. "Why, sure. I'll call my wife. Lucille!"

"Here I am," Lucille said. "Don't yell so, Ducky."

"This is Lieutenant Molina," Mr. Sterner explained. He added with some satisfaction: "Of the Secret Police."

Tio bowed. "It is a great honor, señora."

Lucille gave him a beaming smile. "Pleased to meet you, I'm sure."

"Let's sit in the back here," Sterner suggested.

"Afterdeck," Lucille corrected. "He can never remember nautical terms, lieutenant."

"I don't forget the whisky, though," Sterner answered cheerfully. "How about a spot, lieutenant?"

Tio declined, knowing he would be given it anyway. He discussed the robbery and then remarked: "There are two possibilities, señora. We can catch the thief; but here, where there are a thousand rat holes and the rats of many nations, that may take some time. Or perhaps we can pay a little money to a go-between and get the jewel back quickly."

"Pay the money," Sterner advised wisely. "Grease the wheels. I know. Everybody's human."

"Besides, we are leaving in two days," Lucille said.

"How much would you be willing to pay—in case it were necessary?" Tio asked.

"That's the point," Sterner said. "It's a question of how much we got to fork out. I'm reasonable, but no sucker."

Tio understood that Sterner thought that the money—or at least a split—

would go to Tio himself. That Sterner should realize this filled Tio with indignation. However, he concealed his emotion.

"They would probably ask fifteen hundred dollars," Tio said deprecatingly, "but that's too much."

"Exorbitant," Sterner said.

"Twelve-fifty is plenty."

"I wouldn't pay more than five hundred."

This was what Tio expected to get, but Lucille came out for a thousand. "If we can leave by Friday with it all settled, it's worth it," she said. "And we've got that big party at Miami Beach over the week end."

"We'll make it the outside limit," Tio said, rising. "Keep it in cash in a safe place. It's only an alternative in an emergency, you understand?"

"Oh, sure," said Sterner jovially. "I understand. What I say is, Lucille shouldn't wear 'em in the first place—not at cabarets."

"It is hard to resist, I know," Tio said, smiling at the lady. After a moment's hesitation, he kissed her hand. His guess was correct: The action charmed her. He had learned its efficacy from an Italian swindler.

"You are staying at the Seville Hotel at night?" Tio said to the husband. "I'll keep in touch with you." He departed in an aura of romantic glory.

Late in the afternoon Tio called on Amelia for his pistol, but he did not discuss his project with her. She asked no questions and showed none of the agitation in her heart. It was bad luck to care too much about anything; when one's plans lacked only one step—one night—of achievement, that was the time to pray and take care. She said only: "Mario came for the interest payment today. I told him we might pay him off soon."

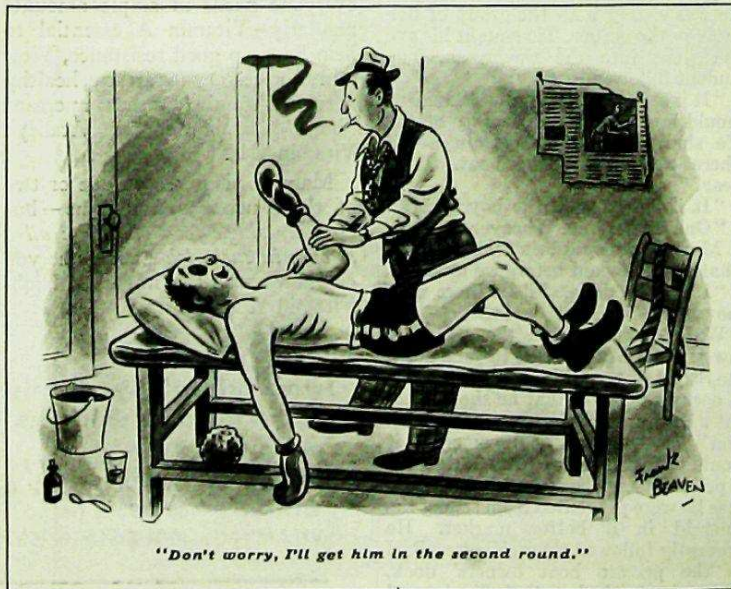
"That is what I go for," Tio said. He, too, was cautious just before an expedition. "These students, my little one—we must get rid of them here."

"I was about to tell them," Amelia said.

"Good. Be of good cheer, *queridísima*."

"Go with God," Amelia said.

She decided to speak to the students now. Tio was right—they should go. She did not know he had noticed them. The students spent practically no money, and they made others uneasy. She hovered over the table. That young



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fellow with anxious eyes was with them again today, talking excitedly about guns. This time, apparently, the shipment was really coming—tonight, on the coast, not far from Havana. "Soon we shall be ready to fight," the boy said. "We shall kill the Butcher!" That's what they always said, year after year, but it never seemed to make any difference. She did not want to spy on them any more; she would warn them to leave the café. She signaled with her hand to the blond, joking one, and he rose and went over to her.

"I should tell you," she said. "You boys are being watched. A detective comes here."

He nodded with boyish importance. "I was afraid of that."

"It would be better for you if you went somewhere else. But do not let anyone know I told you."

"No. Thank you, señora."

Later Lieutenant Molina called on her in her office. She had had no information for him yesterday. She would have to tell him something today, particularly since the boys would be moving, and this would be her last report. Also, she was doubly anxious to please the police, now that Tio was really going to join with her. She told the detective that the boys had been talking about an arms shipment to be landed that night near Havana. "But I think it means nothing," she said.

"It is less than the wind," said Molina, making a mental note of it.

Tio drove down to his apartment in an old touring car which was normally Sam's taxi. It was just dusk. He put on a light sweater, as the night boat trip would be cool, and sneakers. He inspected his flashlight and his automatic and put a box of cartridges in his pocket. Then he took the box out. He was constitutionally opposed to any extended shooting, and in any event an automatic was no good for that. It spoke quickly, and finished. You disappeared, regretting that it had had to speak at all.

A car drove up in the street and paused; the bell rang. Tio went down to the front door. It was Romero. The ferocity on the young man's face was really disturbing; the police must have been very severe with him. He did not carry an automatic, but two large .38-caliber revolvers, which he examined as they drove rapidly out of Havana.

"Where do we meet the boat?" he asked indifferently.

"The other side of the harbor—near Guanabacoa beach. There is a little road, and no one lives there now."

Romero grunted. He opened his mouth only twice more on the hour ride—once to ask: "How many knots can this boat make?" to which Tio replied "Thirty"—and to say: "If there is any trick, I'll certainly kill you and probably others," to which Tio said nothing.

On the other side of the harbor they turned off the highway on a rough dirt road. It was already dark, and the holes and gullies in the road looked monstrous under their headlights. It was a relief to leave the road for a lane that was little more than two car tracks in the fields. Shortly they could see the deeper black of the ocean ahead of them. Then the wind suddenly blew more salt, and they were riding down to the sea and could glimpse the thin white uneven lines of the small waves.

"Here we are," said Tio.

"You go first," Romero ordered.

Tio was stiff from so much jolting. He stretched, and led the way off the field to the sand. They walked to the water's edge. Above the gurgle and

whisper of the waves on the sand there was no sound; and no sight of anything in the heavy blackness of the sea. Tio flashed his flashlight three times; the blackness sprang instantly to life with three tiny answering gleams.

Tio sat down on the sand. Romero crouched beside him with his revolver in his hand. After several minutes they heard the faint rattle of the dinghy, and then it grated on the sand.

"O.K.?" asked Tio.

"O.K.," said Maru. "Got the dough?"

Tio handed him a thousand dollars in bills.

The three got in and shoved off. One corner of the sky was clear, but the rest was overcast. The sea was quiet. It was a good night.

Tio had been on Maru's boat—El Lobo—before, and it gave him pleasure to hear the engines. They started instantly, with a deep, rich throb. At full speed they made plenty of noise, but they could move the boat slowly with impressive quiet. Even Romero relaxed a little, under their influence, and when the throttle was wide open and they were roaring over the open sea, his face, in the dashboard light in the cabin—they were traveling without lights—was almost smiling.

"It's a good boat," he said to Maru.

"You'll never ride in a better one," Maru said.

In three hours they were passing through the Florida keys. Maru, who knew by heart that jigsaw puzzle of little islands, had no difficulty in following Romero's directions. There was a place where a finger of water cut into the land, to a dock of planks—an old rumrunners' landing base. The truck that waited there was completely screened from sea or land by thorn bushes and scraggly trees. Romero identified the three waiting young men by a brief exchange of words. They loaded in a whispering silence, without even seeing one another's faces. In ten minutes they were off again, clearing the land quietly at low speed and then roaring into the open.

Romero was sitting on the cabin roof in the bow, his legs off the side. That was too windy and cold for Tio, who was stretched out on the bench in the cockpit, his head on his arms, gazing into the depth of night and soothed by the steady, powerful hum of the engines. He was thinking of Amelia and how soft and comfortable she was, and that they were both at the right age for marrying—steady people who knew that a warm bed and meat on the table were worth a dozen romantic flights to the moon, with a headache in the morning and a room that was strange. Also, he had always thought that an honest life was better than a dishonest one—if you could make a living out of it. He would have been honest from the start if there had been any money in it. Now there would be a little money in the café, and there would be Amelia. Tio smiled happily.

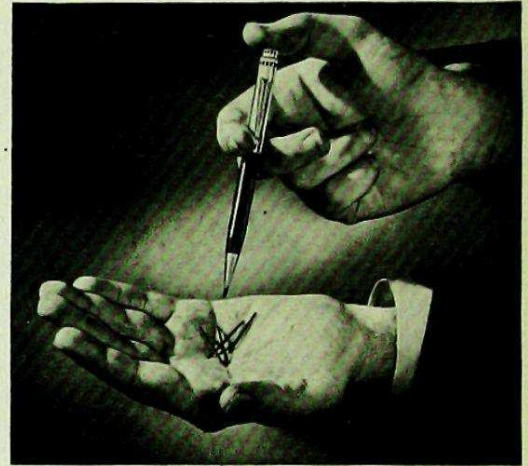
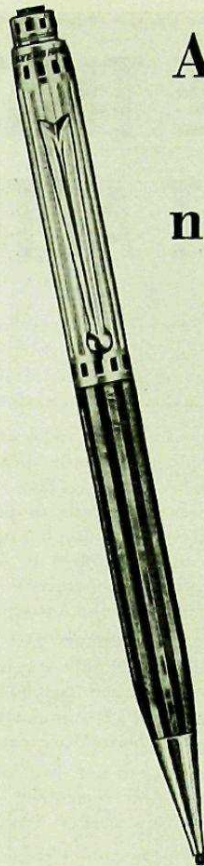
The engines dropped abruptly to silence, and El Lobo pitched from the sudden loss of forward motion. The silence was immense. It made the slapping of the water on the boat seem loud, like a voice in a restaurant when by chance the other diners are simultaneously silent. Tio sat up. Maru came to the cockpit. Romero approached along the deck. "What's the matter?" he asked harshly.

"Quiet," commanded Maru.

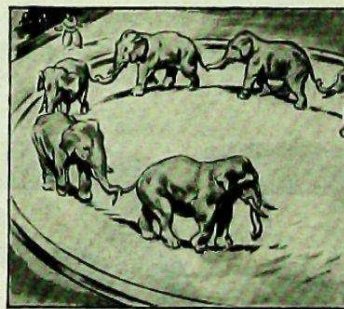
After a minute Tio's ears detected a very faint thrumming—so faint that his ears would miss it for a second and

(Continued on Page 93)

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(Continued from Page 91)

pick it up again. Maru got the binoculars and trained them on the darkness, his powerful bulk planted securely on the uneven floor of the boat.

"Mother of God," growled Romero. "What are we looking for?"

"Coast guard," said Maru. "I guess we can get inside them, and hug the shore."

They had come due south from Key West and were about two miles off the Cuban coast, between Matanzas and Havana. The coast guard was a little to the west and about the same distance out. Tio himself could see a tiny dot of light now.

El Lobo moved ahead slowly, toward the shore, with the engines throttled down. Tio knew better than to ask Maru questions at this point, but, unfortunately, Romero did not. He was in the cabin expostulating with Maru at the helm. Tio could hear Romero's snarl, Maru's deep, wrathful grunts. On a long trip these two would be at each other's throats; the Dutchman was used to his own way and brooked no questioning of his decisions. He throttled the engines down again and came out to the cockpit, swearing. He turned his glasses on the dot of light. "Which way are they heading?" Tio asked.

Maru started to reply when a pencil light flickered across the sky; then it wheeled again and leveled out for a moment in a long pale beam.

"They've been warned!" Maru shouted. "They're looking for us!" He turned toward Romero, coming out of the cabin, and cursed him and his friends. "Long tongues that wag like girls!" he roared.

"No one of us, you insolent pig," Romero answered, his hand on his gun.

"Why not run in to shore? They may skip us," Tio suggested amiably.

At that moment a pale, misty light enveloped them. They could see one another, strained and ghostly-looking. Their situation had abruptly changed. They had been secure in the darkness and loneliness of the sea; now, through more than a mile of that darkness, the finger of light had searched and touched them. They were no longer alone.

The darkness came again, but it was insecure. The luminous finger swung away—wavered—and came back—wavered—stayed.

"They've got us," Maru whispered. His square, pugnacious face was touched with fear.

Then he straightened and took command. "Dump the guns," he said. "When they come, we've been fishing. You, Romero—you can swim for it if you like. It's not too far. We'll get rid of the evidence."

He took one end of a long box of guns and motioned to Tio to take the other.

"No," said Romero.

Maru turned on him. "I said dump the guns," he repeated in a menacing voice.

"And I said no," Romero answered. "We can make a run for it. This boat's faster than that one."

Maru drew in his breath sharply. "At this angle they have us cut off from the open sea. If we go west, we pass Havana; east, Matanzas. As soon as we move, they radio for help. We're caught."

"I say, let's run for it. We've got a chance. Even if we haven't, we'll keep going."

Maru poured profanity over him like a bucket of slops and ordered Tio to take the box end.

"I said no," stated Romero for the third time.

He was standing up and he had his .38-caliber revolver pointing at Maru's chest. His face was broken into lines of hate. "Take the wheel and speed her up," he commanded. "And don't hold back."

"God," said Maru. He half turned toward the cabin. There was a small fire extinguisher on a hook by the door. He lifted and flung it with a sweep of his arm. It caught Romero in the left shoulder and sent him back against the bench.

Romero shot, sitting down. The bullet struck Maru in the throat just below the chin. His head went back with a click and he fell on his back across a case of guns, the blood bubbling over his throat.

"How do you feel about it?" Romero said to Tio, with a horrible grin on his face.

Tio shrugged. "There is practically no chance," he said. "But if you wish —"

"Take the wheel," said Romero. "Run her full speed up the coast, west. If we draw the cutter in behind us, swing out before we get to Havana. I'm going to unpack a machine gun."

"O.K.," said Tio.

He stepped over Maru. "I guess he's dead," he said.

Romero made a noise that was meant to be laughter. He seemed happier, now that someone was killed.

Tio knew Maru was dead, too, but he knew that a roll of bills would do the dead no good. As he bent over Maru, he took the roll from the Dutchman's hip pocket. Then he went into the cabin.

El Lobo leaped forward under Tio's hand. It shook off the finger of light, and Tio had a moment's pleasure in the magnificent response of its engine. But the light placed its finger inexorably on them once more and held it there more or less steadily as they raced through the water. He had said there was little chance; there was no chance at all. The coast would be warned; other coast-guard boats would join in the chase; the finger would follow them and the implacable radio voice would tell where they were. With Maru rolling in his blood, it was too late to dump the guns and submit to search. But not too late to escape.

Tio strapped the wheel and approached the cockpit. "Listen," he said. "We're caught. What do you say we duck out?"

"Go on back to the wheel," said Romero. He was knocking the boards off a box.

"I'm clearing out."

Romero picked his gun off the floor.

"Did you see what I did to the other one?" he said. "Go on back."

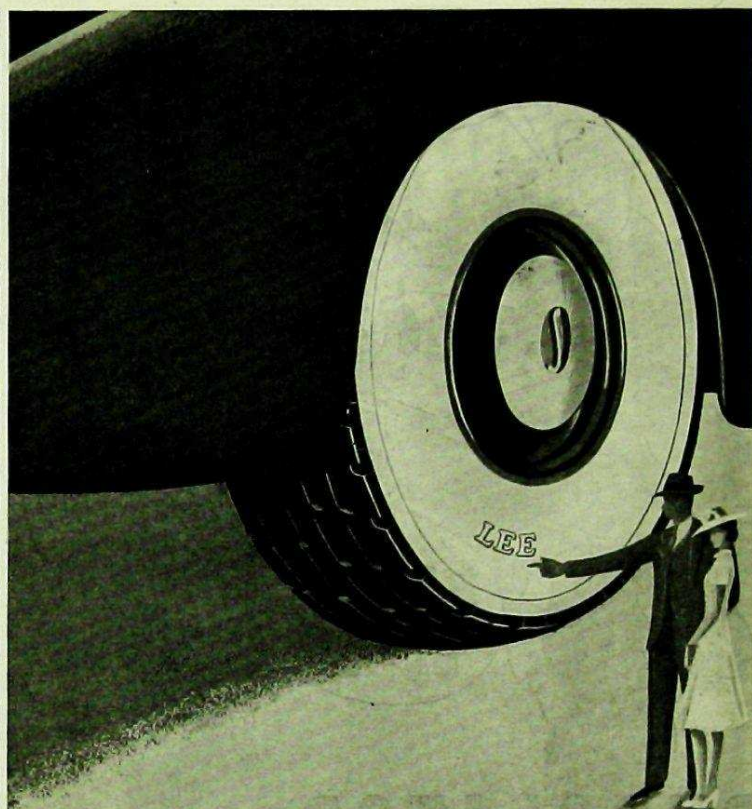
Tio went back, but returned with his automatic in his hand. Romero was busy with the box. It was easy. Tio was sorry, but there wasn't any other way out.

"Put 'em up," Tio said.

In the pale glow from the searchlight Romero's face was frightful. He did not hesitate, but leaped from a crouching position, like an animal, for Tio's throat.

Tio went down under him, but had the gun against the other's body, and fired several times until the limbs were still.

He crawled out from the body. He had to work fast. The lights of Havana harbor were clearly visible now. El Lobo was about half a mile from shore, almost opposite their starting point. He was in luck. That last swift run had helped his present plan. He loosened the dinghy, then swung the motor



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cruiser completely around and headed her north, shoving the throttle open as far as it would go. She would give them a run for their money. As a last protection he put his gun in Maru's lifeless hand. Then he dropped the dinghy and oars into the madly racing water and jumped immediately after them. By the time he had climbed inside and was rowing to shore, El Lobo was half a mile away; the searchlight had picked it up again; it was a dark mass, fringed with white foam, racing north with a dead crew, the coast-guard cutter in pursuit.

Tio had no difficulty rowing to shore, landing only a short distance below the place where the car had been left. On the way back to Havana he was busy casting up accounts. Three men had started on an expedition, each for his special reason. And Romero, who went for rifles, was dead, and the rifles were gone; and Maru, who went for money, was dead, and the money was gone; and he, Tio, who had also gone for money, was living, and had a thousand dollars. That should be enough; he had been very lucky, and it was unwise to stretch one's luck too far. On the other hand, he didn't have the emerald, and that was what he had started out to get; and he needed one thousand dollars more to clear the ownership of the café. He couldn't disappoint Amelia, and on this last venture his pride demanded success. There was a way whereby he could still get the emerald, but it had to be done at once; it would not work after tonight. He checked the plan, and there was no flaw in it.

It was nearly three when he got to Havana. There was only an hour and a half more of darkness. He called the Seville Hotel. "Mr. Sterner," he said. "Are they expecting a call?" the operator asked. "It is very late."

"Police headquarters," Tio said. Sterner's voice sounded thick and uncertain. Perhaps it was from sleep, but Tio doubted it. Shortly the woman took the phone.

"Lieutenant Molina," Tio explained softly. "I give you a thousand apolo-

gies, señora. Only an emergency forces me to do this. We can get your emerald now—tonight—for a small payment. You understand?"

"Sure, I get you," Lucille said.

"Only we need your boat. You and your husband must come with me in your boat."

"You mean—now?"

"Now," said Tio firmly. "I assure you it's our only chance. There's no danger."

"I guess we can make it," Lucille said. "O.K. Sure." There was a scared excitement in her voice.

"I'll be waiting for you across the street from the hotel, in a touring car. And, señora —"

"Yes."

"I have great confidence in you," Tio said earnestly. "Say nothing, come quickly, wear dark clothes, and bring the money."

"We'll be there," Lucille said.

When she appeared she was both pleased and frightened at the idea of the expedition; her husband was somewhat more reluctant. Tio explained to him: "I have made contact with the thieves. But if the police come to get the jewel, they will think it's a trap. I have told them you would go alone, in your boat. But I shall protect you."

"I got a gun in the boat myself," Sterner said. The trip from the docks in the dinghy revived him a little; once on the Seabird he was more lively.

"How much I have to pay?" he asked.

Tio made a lightning-swift analysis of human nature. One thousand dollars was the maximum agreed upon. "Eight hundred dollars," he said.

"Good boy," said Sterner. "You kept 'em down."

As they were going out of the harbor, Tio saw the lights of two boats coming from the east not far away. He tried not to think about them, but he was pretty sure what they were; they were the coast-guard cutter and El Lobo. In his imagination Tio saw the blood bubble from Maru's throat, felt Romero's body slacken over his hand. It

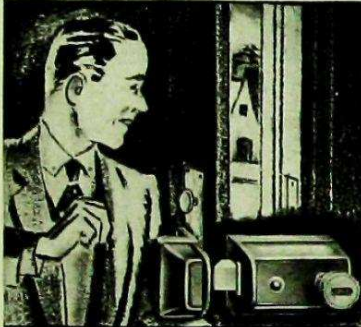
(Continued on Page 96)



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(Continued from Page 94)

made him a little uneasy; but after all it was destiny. Those that lived by the sword died by the sword, he had once read in a newspaper.

"Hold her on this course," he told Sterner, "and speed her up a little."

He went out to the afterdeck and examined the roof. There were awnings which could be dropped. He lowered them and came back to give the directions. It was only a twenty-five-minute run. "We're almost there," he said.

"O.K." Sterner gave the wheel to his wife and went to a small safe set in a cabinet. He took out a wallet; the roll of bills was a cheerful sight to Tio after the recent lean years. He counted out eight hundred dollars and handed the money to Tio. He tossed the wallet back in the safe and twirled the knob.

"Don't you want to give something to the lieutenant for his children?" Lucille asked coquettishly.

"Oh, no, thank you, señora," Tio said quickly. "I could not accept."

"You're a very honest man," Lucille said.

When they were past Jaimanitas, Tio took the wheel and, with the motors revolving softly, headed the Seabird for the land. Their harbor was just beyond a high point of rock. Tio sighted it and flashed his light three times, and the answering flash came from the land.

"O.K.," he muttered.

He turned the boat's nose out, reversed the engines and backed in. There was a wooden pier, and he could dimly make out several shapes. One of them turned a flashlight on the boat.

"Put out the light," Tio called softly. "There is a coast-guard boat not far away."

The flashlight went out, and the stern of the Seabird, with the engines throbbing, touched the pier. Sterner was at the helm with his hand on the throttle—Tio had told him what he should be prepared to do. His wife, now thoroughly frightened, was crouched on the leather cushions in the cabin.

Tio jumped lightly to the pier with a rope cable in his hand.

A light flashed in his face and was turned off. "It is he," said the voice of the student with the anxious eyes. "It is all right."

"Where's Romero?" a voice asked. "At the wheel," said Tio. "You have something for me, señor?"

The boy handed him an envelope. Tio opened it. The green burned like fire under the flashlight. "Good," said Tio. He handed the cable to the boy, saying: "Make her fast," and as he jumped from the dock to the boat, he called softly to Sterner in English: "Full speed ahead."

The Seabird roared and leaped forward. Tio slammed the cabin door behind him and held a leather cushion against it, to stop any bullets. The unfastened cable slid over the side into the water. By the time the first pistol shot rang out, they were a hundred yards away.

"You must lead a very exciting life," Lucille Sterner said. The Seabird was at its mooring in Havana harbor. She and Ducky and Tio were sitting at a table in the cabin, finishing a Scotch-and-soda. They were all very jovial.

"I long to settle down," said Tio.

"Are you married?"

"I marry next week," Tio answered. With eighteen hundred dollars he could almost pay off the debt—close enough to justify a compromise with his pride. But he would have liked two thousand.

"No kidding!" Lucille exclaimed.

"We'll have a drink to that," Sterner said. "My little girl and I have been married eight years and it's still a honeymoon. How about it, Luce?"

"That's right, Ducky."

"I'm nuts about her," Sterner confided over his shoulder. He poured a round of Scotch, somewhat unsteadily. "I got something to confess to you, lieutenant," he said. "At first, I thought you were playing the old come-on game. You know—I pay you, and you split with the crooks. But then, when you got it for eight hundred dollars—and when I heard the shots—I guessed it was straight." He put the bottle down. "I got another idea—"

He moved over to the cabinet where the safe was. He opened it and withdrew the wallet. "You saved me two hundred dollars, and you got a wedding coming. Women are awful expensive." He winked. "Here's two nice new hundred-dollar bills made by Uncle Sam himself."

"Señor!" Tio exclaimed, genuinely taken aback by this unexpected attainment of his quota.

"It's O.K.," Sterner said, pressing them into Tio's hands. "You deserve it."

"I don't know how to thank you," Tio said. There was an expression of confusion on his face.

"You don't have to say a word," Sterner told him, understandingly.

But he had misunderstood Tio's confusion. The latter's deft fingers had counted a third bill stuck to one of the others. A conflict was going on within him—a conflict between the career he was abandoning and the new, strictly honorable life ahead. For a moment he wavered. It was so easy; and then the recollection of Amelia decided him—Amelia flinging her soft arms around his neck and murmuring: "For you to be an honest restaurant keeper, I would give you all the money I have."

"This bill was stuck with the others," Tio said, handing it back and stifling a vague regret. "I cannot thank you enough, señor."

"Ducky," Lucille said, "this man is what you call a square shooter."

"One hundred per cent," Sterner said in admiration. He took a drink in tribute. "But that's what I always say—honesty is the best policy."

"I hope it will continue to be true," Tio commented gravely, gazing into the future.

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PEARLS ON PURPOSE

(Continued from Page 36)

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