

GUNS ARE HANDY THINGS



by
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boss," the lump of
lard said

Chet Lacey takes on a tough and dangerous chore when he attempts to bring the straying Alec Keltner home!

THREE times I watched the office doorknob turn a little, and then turn back. The fourth time was just once too many. I got up from my desk fast and yanked the door open. I don't know what I expected to see out in the hall, but it certainly wasn't that old woman. She was knee high to a grasshopper, with a sweet face lined deep with toil and worry, and hair as white as snow.

"Looking for somebody, Mother?" I asked gently with a smile.

She clutched her shoddy handbag tightly, nodded, and tried to return my smile, but without much success.

"Are you Chet Lacey?" she wanted to know. And as I started to nod, she added quickly, "I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Lacey. It's about Alec. I'm his mother."

Who Alec was I had no idea, but I couldn't pop questions at her while she was standing in the hall. I ushered her in and over to my most comfortable chair. She sank into it as though she hoped she

never would have to get out of it again. I sat down behind the desk again and smiled some more.

“Alec who?” I asked. “I know quite a few men by that name.”

“Alec Keltner,” she replied. “He used to work in the Union Garage where you keep your car. Alec has often spoken of you, so I thought maybe—”

She hesitated, stopped, and fumbled with her bag. I did a quick bit of checking. Alec Keltner was a good looking kid about eighteen or nineteen, and a sweetheart on cars. He could fix anything anytime, and he often had my heap of junk. And, come to think of it, I hadn’t seen Alec around for a few days.

“Yes, Mrs. Keltner?” I murmured as she went on staring down at her bag.

When she raised her eyes the look in them went straight to my heart.

“I’m worried about Alec, Mr. Lacey, terribly worried,” she said. “Four days ago he told me he was taking a new job, a job that would pay him twice the money he’d been getting. He explained it was driving for a man who had several cars, and keeping them in good working order. He said he might not be home that night, but it’s four nights, now. I—I don’t want to go to the police. I thought that you knowing Alec, maybe you’d—”

SHE let the words slide again, and fiddled with her bag some more.

“I wouldn’t worry, Mrs. Keltner,” I soothed her. “Maybe Alec had to take a trip for his new boss, and couldn’t let you know.”

“Yes, yes, that’s what I thought,” she said and bobbed her head. “But I was telling a friend about Alec’s new job, and she said that the man who hired him was a no good and that I shouldn’t let Alec have anything to do with him. But Alec is a good boy, Mr. Lacey, and so I shouldn’t

really worry, I suppose. Only it’s been four days and nights. Alec’s never been away that long before, without letting me know. What do you think Mr. Lacey?”

“What’s his new boss’ name?” I asked. “Maybe I know him.”

“A Mr. Danny Donnigan,” was the reply I got. “My friend says he runs a pool hall and is always in trouble with the police. But how could a man who just runs a pool hall own lots of cars?”

I didn’t answer that one. She’d handed me a jolt, all right. Danny Donnigan? Make a snake, a rat, and a skunk into one animal, and you have Danny Donnigan. There wasn’t a single thing rotten or crooked in town that he didn’t have a finger in. But only a finger, mind you, which he could always jerk out when things went wrong. Danny Donnigan had a slick craftiness you’d find in very few members of the underworld. He also had strings that led to high places, too, which often helped. Danny Donnigan and I had never tangled—yet.

“Donnigan runs several kinds of businesses, Mrs. Keltner,” I said. “And what your friend thinks about him is true. He’s certainly no boss for Alec. But, what do you want me to do?”

She opened her purse and pulled out a tight little roll of much used bills. She held it out to me.

“Here is thirty-six dollars, Mr. Lacey,” she said. “I have a little more in my savings account. Find Alec, and get him away from that Donnigan man. Alec likes you, and I know he’ll do what you say. Please, Mr. Lacey! Alec is all I have. He’s a good boy. He’s—he’s just terribly ambitious, that’s all.”

The sight of that sweet old lady holding out that roll of worn bills made something choke up in my throat. If Alec had walked in at that moment I believe I would have tanned his hide for a solid

hour. I shook my head, waved the money away, and got control of my voice.

"Never mind any money, Mrs. Keltner," I said, maybe a little gruffly. "Alec's a friend of mine. I'll look and ask around, and let you know. Just give me your address and phone number, if you have one, and I'll get in touch with you later. Meantime, don't worry. I know that Alec's a good kid, too. And maybe his being away for a few days doesn't mean a thing. I'll get in touch with you. Okay?"

Five minutes later she was gone. I pushed aside some paper work on an insurance fraud I was working on, and reached for my hat. The name, Danny Donnigan, was significant to me.

The fancy sign outside Donnigan's hangout proclaimed that it was "The Victory Billiard Academy," but inside it was just another poolhall and jukebox emporium. Upstairs in back was where Donnigan maintained his office for his various "enterprises." I went inside, ignored the slanted looks I got from some of the punks lounging at the pool tables, and up the back stairs to Donnigan's office door.

As I was reaching for the knob a hamlike hand shot out of nowhere, spun me around, and jerked my face close to a face that was puffy and red, with two lumps of gray clay for ears.

"Where do you think you're going, bud?" The words were sprayed in my face.

I didn't answer. I never do to that kind of a question. I brought up my right knee to his body and buried my left fist in his stomach. As he toppled back I tagged him dead center on the nose with my right. He hit the hall floor as I turned the office door knob, and pushed it open. I walked in.

Head and shoulders bent over a fancy desk straightened up. Mean, black eyes blinked, and then got meaner. Danny Donnigan's trick little jet black mustache

twitched, but his lips hardly moved.

"How'd you get in here, gumshoe?" he snapped. And as he said it a gun came into his hand and got pointed at me.

"Walked in," I said. "If your lump of lard had asked me nice I would have sent in my card. But he—"

AT that moment the door swung open again and the lump of lard appeared.

"I tried to stop him, boss," the lump of lard said.

"Frisk him!" Donnigan snapped. "Then get out of here." The door guard started to protest but thought better of it. He frisked me, took my German-made Walther semi-automatic and placed it on Donnigan's desk. Then he oozed out of there fast. Donnigan waved his gun at me and toward a chair. I sat down and grinned. Donnigan guessed wrong. His grin was a sneer.

"Don't worry, private eye!" he bit off. "I've got a permit to carry this rod and the legal right to shoot anybody who forces his way into my office. Be sort of a sad ending to your career, wouldn't it?"

"Very sad," I admitted, still holding the grin. "So?"

Maybe it wasn't the back-play Donnigan expected. He blinked, scowled, then reached out and snaked my gun over.

"What kind of a thing is this?" he demanded. "And what hock-shop did you pick it up in?"

"That's a German-made Walther," I told him. "Friend of mine brought it back to me from the other side as a souvenir. A neat little gun. Shoots a twenty-two. Eight of them. Want to know anything else?"

Donnigan didn't reply. He picked up my gun, hefted it a little, and gave it a good looking over. Then he took out a handkerchief and wiped the gun and dropped it back on the desk. He wasn't worrying about me, of course. I was too

far away from him. I couldn't have made it in a million years.

"Yeah, I do," he suddenly said, and gently tapped the muzzle of his own gun against the palm of his other hand. "What do you want here?"

"A little information," I said after making him wait a little. "A kid by the name of Alec Keltner went to work for you a few days ago. He hasn't been home to see his mother since. She worried. Where is he?"

I always watch everybody closely when I talk to them, because that kind of sharp attention sometimes pays off. Donnigan gave a start and his coal black eyes flickered. I had jolted him. He scowled, stared at me, and made a little gesture with his gun and other hand.

"You trying to give me something, gum-shoe?" he demanded. "I don't know any kid by that name. Besides, I haven't put anybody on the payroll in a month. Who says that, anyway? The kid's mother? She came to you? Why?"

"Yes, to the first three," I replied. "The last because I'm a good friend of the family. I wouldn't want the kid to get into any trouble, Donnigan."

I put a little meaningful edge to the last, and Donnigan didn't miss it. He broadened his sneer, and tried to chuckle.

"You scare me, Lacey!" he snapped. "But I never heard of any kid by that name. I'll ask the boys, though. All kinds hang around downstairs. If any of them has seen him, I'll give orders for him to be sent home to his old lady."

Now, take that fancy rod of yours, and scam. And next time knock! I wouldn't like it twice. Get me?"

"Sure, sure," I said softly and stood up. "And maybe the kid's mother did get the name wrong. Anyway, if you hear anything, let me know, huh? You like this little thing, pal?"

As I spoke the last I picked up my Walther, but I was very careful not to let the muzzle point in any part of his direction. He still had his own gun in his hand.

"Why should I?" he countered. "What's good about it?"

"A handy little thing," I murmured casually, and thumbed off the safety guard. "Shoots extra straight. Like this!"

I PULLED the trigger and the Walther banged, but not loudly. On the sill of a window that looked out on a brick wall was an ash tray. On the edge of the ash tray was a cigarette half smoked. Right after my Walther went bang the half smoked cigarette flew off the edge of the ash tray and disappeared down out of sight.

"See what I mean?" I grunted as Donnigan's eyes flicked from my gun to the ash tray on the sill. "It shoots extra straight. Be seeing you, maybe, Donnigan."

A grandstand play? Well, maybe so. But sometimes little exhibitions like that impress people. A couple of things were beginning to turn over in the Lacey brain and I had wanted to make an impression on Danny Donnigan which he wouldn't forget, I hoped.

I walked out of there leaving him blinking a little, and went down the stairs to the poolhall. I was pretty sure the sound of my single shot hadn't been heard and I was positive when nobody gave me more than a passing glance. Just as I got to the door I noticed out the corner of my eye a cheap little punk ducking into the men's room. He was a young no-good I had nailed a couple of times myself and if the cops ever nailed him he'd probably go up for life. He went by the name of Fin Ryan, with sharp eyes, keen ears, and a long memory. If the police could have gotten

Fin Ryan to tell all he knew they could have cleaned up our town spick and span, almost over night.

I stopped abruptly and took a half step toward the men's room. On second thought I changed my mind. If I wanted Fin Ryan later I knew where I could get to him. Right then, there was something else I wanted, and the best place to get it was at Police Headquarters.

I took a cab down there but I was out of luck. Sol Bierman, Chief of Detectives, was off on a week's vacation. However, Sergeant Finkle was on the desk. I went in and asked if I could take a good look at the blotter for the last four or five days. Finkle beefed but presently gave in. Finkle loves Scotch, and there's always some at my place.

Well, there weren't any murders jotted down on the blotter, but there was practically every other kind of crime, mostly stick-ups. One of them was a jewel store robbery that had been pulled off four nights ago, just as the owner was closing up. Two men had entered the store, and before he'd had the chance to get so much as a glimpse of their faces, he'd been slugged into dreamland. The two gents had picked up twenty thousand dollars worth of uncut stones, and walked out.

That was all on the blotter but I got Finkle to tell me the rest. The store owner had been slugged too hard. He was in the hospital with the chances of living all against him. There had been witnesses but what they had to tell didn't help at all. The two men, seen coming out of the store, were both average height and build and wore dark topcoats, and dark felt hats. They had been seen getting into a car parked near the store. A third person had driven them away. There was no description of the car and no one had taken the license number.

"Another slick job," Finkle summed it up, "pulled smooth, and neat, and fast. We haven't got a thing to work on, and chances are we never will."

Finkle didn't realize he hit the nail right on the head. I didn't have much to go on either. At the moment all I was doing was turning over rocks to see what was underneath.

"Yeah," I said. "Say, about this third guy, the one waiting at the wheel—got any report about him?"

Finkle shook his head. "Nope. Not a thing. And now you tell me, pal. Whatcha got on the fire?"

"Just fishing around, Sarge." I nodded to him and walked out of there.

ON the sidewalk out in front I took stock. It didn't take long, for it all added up to nothing but cobwebs. But there was one solid fact. The discovery that I was looking for Alec Keltner had given Danny Donnigan a jolt. I knew this because Donnigan had lied to me. Had Alec disappeared because he had found out something about Donnigan—something that Donnigan didn't want him to know? I held hard onto that last, knowing Donnigan as I did. His name had been mentioned in connection with a couple of big jewel lifts a few years back but he hadn't been tagged for anything. Another item was that this wouldn't be the first time Donnigan had used a young fellow to his own advantage, and then left the youth holding the bag.

However, adding something up and proving it, is a tough job. No one knows that better than a private detective. How was I going to get the proof I needed? Since no bright ideas were forthcoming, I decided to go back to my office, finish the paper work on that insurance fraud case, and then go on fishing around.

But, of course, I didn't go back to my office. When something is bothering me, I can't just shelve it and give my attention to other things. I just have to get the thing untangled, that's all. So I retraced my steps to a spot across from the Victory Billiard Academy where I could see what was going on. The observation post I selected was a little gin mill with a front window that wasn't clean, but clean enough to see out. Not wanting to die of carburetor poisoning I drank beer, and stuck to it.

After sipping three goblets of bad brew, I got a break. Fin Ryan came out of the poolhall, turned right and started along the sidewalk. I gave him a half a block lead and followed.

After trailing him for a half dozen or so blocks I surmised Ryan's destination. Sure enough, he turned, mounted the front stoop of a run-down brownstone rooming house. Evidently he lived there.

I was only a dozen steps behind him when he went through the door and right at his heels as he started up the rickety stairs. He heard me, and whirled around.

"Relax, Fin," I said quietly as the features of his rat-like face began to jump around. "Just want to talk to you. Let's go on up to your room."

"I don't talk to gum-shoes!" he snarled. "Particularly not to ones like you!"

I grinned, and absently rubbed my clenched right in the palm of my left hand.

"Okay, Fin," I said softly. "Suit yourself."

I could see that he didn't just know what I had meant by the remark, and it scared him. A professional criminal always lives in fear, and just saying "Good morning" to a punk like Fin Ryan makes him wonder what's up. Anyway, Ryan changed his mind quick. He ran his tongue across his dry lips, and nodded.

"Okay, come up," he quavered. "It's a free country."

As a matter of routine I was all eyes as Fin Ryan let us into his room, but he didn't try anything funny. And, incidentally, once we were inside I really was all eyes. The place was fixed up real fancy for a rat like Fin. The closet door was open and I counted five nice suits on hangers, plus a snappy beach robe and sport slacks. I glanced at Fin, and grinned.

"Business good, eh?" I murmured. "You must have been doing quite a few odd jobs lately for Danny."

Ryan smirked, flung himself into a chair and fished out a cigarette. The lighter he touched to it was better than the one I've got.

"Okay, okay," he grunted through a cloud of smoke. "What do you think you've got on me?"

"A lot!" I snapped at him. "But I'm saving it for another time, Ryan. This is strictly social. I'm looking for a kid, a good friend of mine. He had a good job, but I guess he got tired of the hours and decided to see the town. His name's Alec Keltner. Have you seen him around? Maybe shooting pool with some of the boys?"

I THOUGHT Ryan's face tightened up, but I couldn't swear for sure. I was still only turning over rocks to see what was underneath.

"Alec Keltner?" he repeated. "Nope. I don't know any kid by that name."

"Different from you, Fin," I said easily. "Well built, and good looking. And plenty of brains. A very sharp boy who could go places on either side of the tracks. Know what I mean?"

Ryan's face quivered with rage, and I thought for a second he was going to fly off the handle, but he didn't.

"Funny guy, ain'tcha!" he snarled.

“Well, what you think doesn’t bother me at all. So scram, gum-shoe! I gotta doll up for a date.”

I could have stepped over and knocked Fin loose from his big ears but that wouldn’t have helped. I knew Fin Ryan. I knew that I could take him apart limb by limb and he would never spill a word I wanted to know. With his kind you have to trap the truth out of them, not bat it out. So I stood up and made a little gesture with one hand.

“Okay, Fin, I was just asking,” I murmured. “I asked Danny Donnigan the same question, but he thought it was funny. He said I should ask you if any kid was horning in on your job. You’ve handled Danny’s cars a long time, haven’t you?”

It was a shot in the dark. I kept my eyes on Fin Ryan’s face. The blood slipped away from under the swell tan he had. His eyes narrowed.

“What do you mean, horning in on my job?” he rasped. “Just because I’ve I been away a couple of weeks resting up don’t mean that some little punk can get me shelved.”

Fin Ryan clamped his thin lips shut, but he had said too much. We both knew it. I walked over close to him.

“Yes, Fin?” I murmured. “Some young kid maybe did a very nice job while you were on that vacation—and Danny’s pretty pleased? Is that why he laughed when I asked, huh?”

Fin Ryan struggled to master his anger.

“Bushwah!” he snapped. “I dunno what you’re talking about. I’m on Donnigan’s payroll, and I’m staying there. Go ask him if that ain’t so! Now, get outa here.”

Another taunting question was on my lips, when suddenly a couple of things rose up and I saw a great light. Yep, dope that I was, I had been admiring Fin’s swell

tan and not giving it a thought. And now that he had mentioned having been away on vacation, lots of things began to click. One was realization that Danny Donnigan owned a beach house down on the East Shore. And another was that Fin Ryan did have one claim to being allowed to live in this world of ours. In short, he knew autos and their engines like nobody’s business! His trouble was that he had never worked at it for honest profit.

I quickly decided to turn over one more rock, just to see.

“Nice place Danny has on the East Shore, isn’t it?” I said. “Calls it the Eagle’s Nest, doesn’t he?”

“The Breakers,” Fin said. “And it’s all right. So what?”

“So nothing, Fin,” I said with a gesture. “Maybe if I’m down that way some time, I’ll give it a look. Yes, sir, maybe I’ve got a thought there. Keep your own nose clean, Fin. So long!”

Without waiting for Ryan to make a crack, I walked out the door and down the rickety stairs to the ground floor and the street.

Out on the sidewalk I looked at my watch and decided to grab something to eat, and then carry out a plan I had conceived. This was to get out my car and take a quick run down to Danny Donnigan’s East Shore place to see if, just by any chance, somebody else was getting a nice sun tan like Ryan had, and waiting until the boss summoned him back to town.

AFTER paying my dinner check I went on to the Union Garage, had the attendant on duty get out my car and fill it up with gas and oil. Then I slipped the attendant three bucks and started out.

Fifteen minutes later I stopped near the Victory Billiard Academy, got out to buy a package of cigarettes and give Donnigan’s

boys a good chance to spot me and then drove away, heading toward the bridge which is the route to the East Shore.

Well, when I was about a mile the town side of Route 7 I pulled over in front of a sporting goods store that was open. I went in and bought a box of American-made twenty-two bullets. Then I jumped in my car and got going again, keeping a keen eye on the rear view mirror. But I wasn't certain, yet. But when I hit Route 7 and traffic became fast and thin I got my chance to make sure.

Check! A car that had the fender parking lights on, as well as the driving lights, eased up to about two hundred yards behind me, and clung right there. I had seen that combination of lights in the city traffic. It was a tail, all right! Now one other item: how many guys were in the car? I had a hunch there was just one.

Well, when I was five or six miles from where Route 25 branched off from Route 7, I ran into a traffic jam. Everybody had to slow up and get into line. A couple of State Troopers were directing traffic into two lines, beginning with the car directly in back of mine. This was a break for me as they signaled for the driver to swing his car out and speed up. He did, but I got a flash glance at him as he whizzed past. It was Donnigan.

I soon lost him in the traffic beyond. I didn't mind. I really felt good for the first time since Mrs. Keltner had walked into my office.

Well, when I got past the road block, the traffic had thinned out again. And soon I saw that Donnigan had pulled a neat one on me. I didn't know that I had passed him, but I had. There was his car with main and fender lights again, about a hundred yards behind me.

Then, presently, we came to where Route 25 branched off to the right. And on impulse I decided to give Donnigan a

break, if he wanted it. I guess maybe he did. I swung off onto Route 25, the long way to Bayville, but he kept right on Route 7, the short way. Fair enough! My play was to let them have a reception party waiting for me on arrival.

A few miles down Route 25, I pulled over to the side and parked. Taking out my Walther I unloaded it, and then reloaded it with the American made twenty-two slugs I'd bought. Before shoving it back in my pocket I hesitated, and I sweated some, too. Could be the Lacey was the world's prize fool. Yet, I'd have to play it the way I planned. I swore softly and jammed the Walther back into my shoulder holster.

Thirty minutes later I reached Bayville. From the old duffer who ran the drug store I found out that The Breakers was the last place at the end of a three-mile beach road. I went outside and drove those last three miles. Three miles, I might add, I never hope to drive again. Right straight through solid woods that could hide a whole army waiting for you. And as I didn't want to signal my approach too far in advance, I dimmed my lights.

Finally I saw the lights of a cottage up ahead. I pulled off the road, killed my lights and engine, and started walking till I was a stone's throw from the cottage. It wasn't too big, and was a one floor affair. A screened in veranda ran the full length of the front of the house. If you were a good jumper you could jump from the front steps right out onto the wide sandy beach.

The urge to take out my gun was great, but I resisted the temptation. I walked up close to the house, then veered around toward the rear. I had taken maybe a half dozen steps when something blunt and hard was jabbed into the small of my back.

"I told you I wouldn't like it twice, Lacey!" Donnigan said behind me. "Lift them!"

I DID, and he reached over with his free hand and snaked away my Walther. I stood very still, and didn't say a thing. Donnigan chuckled.

"You private-eyes, what dopes!" he sneered. Then prodding me, he added. "Get going into the house. You came looking for a guy, didn't you? Well, let's find him. Maybe he's here."

Donnigan chuckled some more, but I didn't do anything except walk as directed around to the veranda door and through it to the main house door. That led into a combination living and dining room. The rear and the right side were partitioned off into kitchen, bath, and bedrooms I suppose. I didn't look to make sure. What caught my eye and held it was young Alec Keltner sprawled out on the couch. He was dead to the world, and there was a turned over glass near his dangling fingers. Beside it was a bottle of Scotch with the contents half gone.

And sitting in a near by chair, thoroughly enjoying a drink for himself, was the lump of lard. He leered at me. Danny Donnigan gave him some orders.

"His car is parked down the road," he said. "Go put it where it won't be found for a spell. Then come back. I'll be all through by then. Beat it!"

The lump of lard gulped down the last of his drink, and bounced up out of the chair and was gone. As the door banged shut, Donnigan slid around in front of me. He had put his own gun away, and was holding mine.

"I always said you'd outsmart yourself one day, Lacey," he told me. "And, I guess this is the day. Right?"

"Could be," I said with a shrug. And then nodding at young Keltner, I said, "That angle I didn't guess. He never drank, so why did you drug him? And by the way, that Jewelry store owner died tonight. Who slugged him? You or your

lump of lard?"

HE shouldn't have answered that but it didn't worry Donnigan. He thought he was sitting pretty.

"Little Bobo, who just left," he said in a nasty voice. "And I'm almost tempted to let him hang one on you, Lacey. However, I got a better idea. You had a bum hunch tonight. You played right into my hands, Lacey!"

"Yes?" I murmured.

"Check!" he snapped. "I got lots of nice little jobs for that kid over there. But he needs a bit of training, see? That car job the other day sort of unnerved him, so I sent him down here to relax and realize a few things. One being, that little punks don't walk out on Donnigan once he puts them on the payroll. Then you stuck in your big nose. At first you did have me worried but I got a nice little idea, and I came to love you like a pal."

"What idea?" I said, and looked at my gun in his hand. And I even came up on my toes a little.

"A perfect way to keep that little punk in line!" Donnigan snarled. "He's got hands and brains I need in my business. With a murder rap hanging over his head he won't be any trouble at all. Your murder, Lacey!"

"I don't get it!" I mumbled.

"Simple!" Donnigan laughed. "When he comes out of that he's going to find you dead with your gun in his hand. He won't remember, of course. So Bobo and I will remind him, see? We'll tell him how you got a line on him and trailed him down here. You were his friend so he could catch you off guard. And he wasn't too drunk to do that. Never touched a drop, huh? Well, maybe not until he came down here to relax. I had Bobo show him how to relax.

"Not used to it, he took too much. And

maybe Bobo did help him along. Anyway, he'll stay right in line after we pin your murder rap on him. We'll stick you where you'll never be found. But we'll keep your gun with his prints on it, and—Oh yeah?"

That last was because I was diving forward. He jerked the trigger of my gun, but that was all. He jerked it again, but it didn't go off. Then he started to swing it at me and go for his own gun with his other hand. No dice! It was much too late then. I was all over him like a tent. I got in a bone crusher to the side of his neck. That did it. It momentarily paralyzed him stiff as a board. He went flat to the floor. He had hardly bounced before I'd wrenched my gun from his hand and clouted him behind the ear plenty hard.

Fact is, I gave him a second belt to make very, very sure. Then I took his gun from his pocket and went out front. In about six minutes Bobo, the lump of lard, came out of the shadows. He didn't see me, but I saw him. I also belted him as he walked by, caught him, and carted him back into the cottage. My final step was a phone call to Finkle asking him to send some of the boys out there fast.

After that I tied up Donnigan and Bobo with some rope I found. I didn't bother with Alec Keltner. From long experience I knew that nothing would wake him up for

another seven or eight hours at least. So I sat down to wait.

Well, that's about all, except for a couple of loose ends. Alec's story was just what you'd guess. He thought he was getting a level job at good pay. Sure, he meant to keep straight. He knew his way around, just like lots of kids his age think they do. In court the judge gave him a lecture Alec will remember the rest of his life, then put him on probation, responsible to me.

Being rats, Donnigan and Bobo, of course, went at each other's throats in court. The jeweler didn't die. He got his stones back, and Donnigan and Bobo got fifteen to twenty up the river.

Oh, no, that wasn't any reckless dive I made at Donnigan when he was holding my gun on me. Believe me, the Lacey really does play it safe when he can. I guess I didn't mention it, or maybe you know guns real well, huh? Anyway, for those still wondering, a German made Walther takes twenty-two ammunition that is *center* fire. And American made twenty-two ammunition is *rim* fire. So—you see? Danny Donnigan had a gun that was actually loaded, but he just couldn't fire it off. As I had told him in his office, that Walther was a handy little thing!