



Trent stiffened when a man with an ugly black automatic stalked into the room

Too Many Angles

By CALVIN L. BOSWELL

Branded as the chief suspect in a bowling alley murder, Jim Trent matches wits with a crafty killer!

THE room was stuffy and small, and the business of being confined in it was obviously getting on Jim Trent's nerves. There was a dour look about his mouth, and his gray eyes were brooding and restless as he stood at the window and watched the rain make a mobile pattern on the wetly gleaming asphalt of the street below.

Abruptly, he let out an explosive, angry breath and turned away. He moved to the center of the room with quick, nervous strides. He got out a cigarette, lit

it, and absently picked up a heavy glass ash tray from the scarred table.

Sound made him jerk around. Footsteps mounted the creaky stairs. They scuffed on the worn hall runner. The dour look became a little grim as the footsteps ceased outside his door. There was a staccato rap on the panel.

"Come in," he called very gently.

His right hand moved backward beyond his shoulder, and the ash tray was suddenly converted into an efficient weapon. When the door swung open he

was poised on one bent leg, like a baseball pitcher.

He relaxed, let the ash tray swing to his side and said with studied calmness:

“Say something next time, Sam. You nearly walked into a mickey.”

The thin fellow’s sandy brows lifted.

“Next time I’ll announce myself with bells and sirens. How’s the fugitive?”

Trent scowled, moved his big shoulders in a gesture of irritation.

“Even coming from a press agent that’s no joke. And I’m slowly going nuts, hiding out from the cops in this rooming house. Has anything turned up?”

Moody closed the door, took off his soggy hat and slapped the water out of it against his thigh. He crossed the room, carefully lifted the tails of his wet overcoat and sat down on the bed.

“I had a bad time getting up here,” he grunted. “Santa Monica’s alive with cops. What a stormy night! Gimme a cigarette, will you?” Trent extended one and Moody lit it, shook the match out and added, “They found out about that five-grand insurance policy you had on Stan Kovacs.”

“So what?” Trent demanded. “A sport manager’s got to protect his interests, doesn’t he? I’ve always taken out insurance on my boys. Why I shouldn’t I do the same thing with Kovacs?”

Moody had little shoe button eyes in a narrow, pointed face. They went almost shut as he grimaced wryly.

“Why ask me? All I know is that the police have gotten their teeth in the fact like a litter of pups with an old shoe, and they’re having one honey of a time making a motive out of it.”

JIM TRENT shook his head and swore softly. Strain was very real on his cheeks. “I guess I don’t live right. Six months ago I run into this big Finn, Stan Kovacs, in a Chicago bowling alley. A guy

who can make a sixteen-pound ball sit up and do tricks for him. A two-forty average bowler! I talk him into giving exhibitions, sign him up and tour the country with him. Then along comes this offer to bowl a match series in the Santa Monica Recreation Center with the west coast champion, George Whitbread.

“The movie crowd are behind it. They offer a nice, fat purse and a full house with a percentage of the take. And what happens? Kovacs trims the daylights out of Whitbread in the first string, and in the middle of the second he drops dead.”

“Poisoned,” Moody murmured curtly.

“Yeah, poisoned. And the bulls are convinced that I murdered him! So I lay low, waitin’ for you to turn up some evidence that’ll clear me or put us on the track of the real killer. And what happens? Your luck’s no good and every day I’m gettin’ closer to a murder rap for a killin’ I didn’t do.”

“I’ve got a little news,” said Moody. “The cops found out how it was done. He had a tiny scratch on the ball of his thumb. The chemist said the stuff got into his blood that way. Curare, I think they called it. The police figure the killer saturated the thumb hole in Kovacs’ bowling ball with the poison and stuck something in the bottom of it to scratch him.”

“Did they find the ball?” Trent demanded.

Moody shook his head. “You remember when he collapsed, and dropped it, and everybody crowded down on the alley? Well, it disappeared. It must still be at the alley somewhere. A guy couldn’t hide one of those big mineralite balls under his coat and walk away with it; the thing would stick out like a watermelon in a snake. So the cops put a padlock and a watchman on the place. The killer evidently stuck the ball in one of the racks among the others, figuring to go back and

get it out, somehow. The police chemist is going over tomorrow to try and identify it.”

Trent blew a gob of smoke at the ceiling. His eyes were hooded and thoughtful. “They might have something there, at that. If the murderer was the last one to handle it, he’d sure leave his fingerprints all over the thing.”

“Sure. Well, I’d better drift.”

Moody rose and moved toward the door. Then he snapped his fingers and wheeled toward Trent again.

“Say, there was one other little item, about Joe Reese.”

“The gambler who owns The Casino?” Trent looked interested. “I saw him at the match this afternoon. Heard he had three grand on Whitbread, at four to one.”

“That’s the point. I learned that Eddie Borio got out of San Quentin a month ago. He used to be pretty close to Joe back in the prohibition days. Eddie specialized in mickeys, only the guys that got ‘em didn’t wake up with a hangover; they were buried. Some very lovely funerals they had, too. Eddie’s smart—went to college, studied chemistry, and got interested in poisons. A reporter friend of mine on the *Sentinel* told me Eddie’s staying at a joint down on the front called the Criterion, under the name of Berg. What’s more, he’s been out to see Joe a number of times.”

Trent whistled softly.

“That *is* something. Reese lays a bet on Whitbread; gets heavy odds, and has Borio give Stan Kovacs the business. But wait a minute. Stan was using his own ball. How could Borio have gotten to it?”

A PUZZLED frown ridged Trent’s forehead. He glanced sharply at his companion.

“Easy. Remember when the three of us were in the locker room, just before the

match? Marla Dane, the movie star, sent in word that she wanted to meet Kovacs so we went out. He could have slipped in then and fixed it.”

Trent frowned, shook his head.

“It doesn’t wash, Sam. Killing Kovacs wouldn’t make Reese any money; his death would automatically nullify all bets. Hold on! I’ve got it, now! Kovacs might have been intended to get just enough of the stuff to slow him up, and the plan backfired.”

The guy in the doorway spoke harshly.

“I didn’t get that. How about putting the record on again?”

Moody spun around, his eyes glittering.

“Cripes. I *would* pick up a tail.”

Trent turned slowly, carefully. He found himself looking at the business end of a .38 Police Positive engulfed in the hammy fist of a thick barrel of a man with tiny, pouched eyes and a mouth like a surgical incision.

His name was Cottrell, and he was the main cog in Santa Monica’s Homicide division.

“For a big tub of lard you move pretty quietly. Come in.” There was a rasp to Trent’s voice.

“I’ll do that little thing.”

Cottrell moved ponderously forward, shutting the door with his foot. His bright little eyes flicked from Trent to the dour-faced Moody, then back to Trent.

He looked mighty pleased with himself.

“Well, come on,” he urged. “Let’s have a recap of that little powwow you boys were having. What’s this about something backfiring, and at who?”

“At whom,” Trent corrected equably. He looked relaxed and at ease. He even grinned. “With those big ears of yours you should have heard what was said without any trouble.”

Cottrell's thick brows drew together. He didn't like being made fun of. The fact was amply illustrated in the sullen storminess of his face as he took two steps toward Trent.

"We got a nice little private room in the City Hall for wiseys like you. Suppose we take a ride down there?"

"Rubber hose a la mode, hmh?" Trent sneered. "The inquisition chamber rears its ugly head."

He still held the glass ash tray in his hand, and it was half full of cigarette stubs and ashes. He turned as if to get a coat off a chair behind him. Suddenly his arm shot out in a whipping backhand motion, spewing the contents of the ash tray squarely into the detective's face.

Cottrell's finger squeezed the trigger of the .38. It went off with a blast that enveloped the room in sound. But he was trying to get away from the cloud of ashes and cigarette butts, and the bullet thudded into the floor. An agonized squawk boiled from his lungs as the stuff filled his eyes, forcing him to drop the gun and paw blindly at them. Trent plucked hat and coat out of the open closet and bolted out the door past the openmouthed Moody.

HE SHOT down the stairs and out the back way. Traversing a littered, puddled yard, he negotiated the rickety board fence at the rear and dropped onto a surfaced alley. The rain had petered out to a sullen drizzle that whipped against his face as he moved rapidly toward the cross street. He breathed deeply, like a man who has been freed from prison. It felt good to be out of that cramped, stuffy room in spite of the fact that every cop in the city was on the watch for him.

Emerging from the dark mouth of the alley, he hesitated, looking to right and left. Cottrell was undoubtedly in the middle of a fit of screaming by now, and

as soon as he could get to a telephone this immediate neighborhood would be teeming with cops. Which meant that Mrs. Trent's little boy Jim would be taking a step in the right direction if he promptly made himself scarce.

The street was lined with old-fashioned residences fronted by a parkway dotted with tall, heavy-foliaged evergreens. Parked at an angle under one of these was a shiny, new V-8 convertible with its windows rolled up.

There was just enough light from a nearby standard for Trent to see that the convertible contained a young citizen and his gal friend, both of whom were enthusiastically wrapped up in the business of pitching woo.

They drew quickly apart as the door was yanked open and Trent stuck his head in and drawled:

"Use your car, buddy?"

A smear of lipstick made the boy's mouth an uncertain blur against the frightened, pallid lines of his race. His wide eyes took in what looked like the muzzle or a gun nudging against the cloth of Trent's coat pocket. He reacted as Trent expected, and with precipitate haste. Opening the opposite door, he shoved the paralyzed girl out and scrambled after her.

Trent slid under the wheel. "Be good and don't move for exactly five minutes," he warned them, slamming the door.

A wide grin cracked his features, then, as he took his empty hand out of his pocket, turned on the ignition key and stepped on the starter. The powerful little motor caught with the first turn of the flywheel. He revved it up, spun the wheel hard over in a fast, skidding U turn and roared away at reckless speed.

He reached the Criterion Hotel without mishap. It was a dismal looking four-story brick affair sprawling on the esplanade that fronted the beach near Ocean Park.

“Mr. Berg in?” Trent demanded of the hairless gent behind the counter.

Without looking up, the bald man muttered, “Fourteen. Upstairs to your right.”

Trent negotiated a flight of creaking steps and prowled along the dimly lit hall, squinting at the numbers on the doors. Someone had recently passed through, and left behind the pleasant, lingering odor of cigarette smoke.

NO LIGHT seeped around the edges of number fourteen. This gave fairly certain indication that Borio had gone out. Taking no chances, Trent raised his hand and rapped smartly before he devoted his ingenuity to the old-fashioned lock.

A bit of experimental poking around with a pass-key he carried did the business. He eased the door open, holding his breath so that the sound of it might not interfere with his hearing. Then he stepped in and closed the door gently behind him. Again he caught the smell of burning tobacco. He gave mental thanks to Borio for lighting up before he left. Even if he'd stepped out merely to buy cigarettes, it would take him at least fifteen minutes to visit the nearest store and return. Ample time for Trent to look the place over.

Locating a table lamp back of a large easy chair, he snapped on the light, revealing a rumpled bed, a pine bureau with cigarette burns around the edges, two imitation walnut chairs and a small table. On the table were a glass, an empty beer bottle and a saucer littered with cigarette stubs. Also a newspaper with the pages folded to the story of the Kovacs killing.

Trent squinted thoughtfully at the newspaper, moved past it to rummage through the bureau. He found a lot of shirts and ties and handkerchiefs and socks. In the closet were a couple of suits of the kind dispensed by a local twenty-

five-dollar upstairs clothier, and a scuffed leather suitcase, evidently of pawnshop origin.

Coming out of the closet, Trent undertook a systematic search of the room. He even searched under the mattress and behind the three faded pictures that adorned the walls. Finally, he returned to the center of the room to stare moodily at the folded newspaper.

A dismal sense of failure hit Trent, and he sank down into the easy chair. For a moment he stared silently about the room. Had he overlooked anything? While hardly expecting to find anything that would definitely tie Borio in with Kovacs' murder, he'd hoped at least to uncover a clue that might lead to something else. He grunted his disgust. That lone discovery of the paper added up to exactly zero.

Behind him the door opened softly. A slight draught of cool air, the sudden squeak of a hinge warned him of peril. Trent whirled around in the chair, and stiffened when a man with an ugly black automatic stalked into the room.

“Hop out of that seat, my friend,” came the hissed, tight-lipped warning. “Looks like you're a little out of bounds.”

The muzzle of the automatic jerked ominously. Trent grimaced at being caught flat-footed. Slowly, warily he hauled himself upright, keeping his hands well in view. The chap behind the gun was small and dark, with slick, rain-wet hair and a shine in his eyes. Gesturing curtly with the gun, he ordered Trent into the gloomy corridor and closed the door.

“You might be a smart copper, but a smart copper wouldn't prowl a room without a search warrant,” the man murmured tartly. He snapped the fingers of his left hand and looked suddenly interested. “I got it. Your Kovacs' manager, the guy the bulls are looking for. I seen your description in the paper.”

Trent grinned crookedly. "Bright boy. I got my A's in school, too. You're Eddie Borio."

"So now we're introduced," Borio said in that peculiarly harsh voice of his. "And just what were you doing in my room?"

Trent moved his big shoulders, "Between you and me, Eddie, I've always had a hankering to see how other people live."

The muzzle of the automatic probed Trent's mid-section. "Looking for something to tie me up with that Kovacs killing, wasn't you?"

Borio's hand moved smoothly, disappeared in his coat pocket, and the gun made a significant bulge in the cloth even as Trent's brain began to telegraph an impulse of explosive action to his muscles.

Borio grinned nastily, his glance altogether cold.

"Gunna jump me, huh? You gotta move quicker than that, brother."

TRENT relaxed, let out his breath and shrugged. Danger signals were pumping through him.

"You're playing the cards. Let's see what they look like."

"It'll be a pleasure," snapped Borio and inclined his head. "Trot along, now, and be nice. Just one screwball move, and I blow the whistle on you. Get it?"

"Yeah. Your English is plain enough." Trent swiftly calculated his chances of taking Borio, decided against it in favor of seeing where this would lead him, and moved silently down the hall.

Baldy was up to his ears in a newspaper and hardly glanced up as they crossed the lobby and went out.

On a dim side street around from the hotel Borio indicated a Dodge coupe with a motion of his head.

"Get in. Behind the wheel."

Trent got in. Borio slid after him, handed him the ignition key. The gun came out of his pocket. It snaked under his left elbow and made itself intimately acquainted with Trent's lower rib.

Trent started the car, drove over to Main and craned his head toward Borio. "Where to?"

"Over Ocean and down the beach highway. I'll tell you where to stop."

Trent drifted the Dodge to Ocean, took the driveway that spilled over the Palisades and onto Highway 101, and headed northward at a sedate forty-five miles an hour. They passed beach clubs, rows of ornate homes, a couple of flamboyant drive-ins. Then came several miles of dark road that skirted the open beach and more houses.

"That white one ahead," said Borio sharply, extending one finger. "Turn into the garage."

Trent obediently angled the car in toward a sprawling rancho-style residence of eleven rooms or so. The garage doors automatically swung open as he approached them.

"Electric eyes and everything. Some service. This Reese's dump?"

Borio nodded. "You ought to get on one of them quiz programs, brother; you know all the answers."

The door went smoothly shut behind them, and lights sprang on in the garage. There was a big twelve-cylinder job in one of the stalls.

Borio got out, waggled his gun and Trent slid from behind the wheel. At Borio's nod he went up a half-dozen tile steps to a sort of patio floored in blue cement and scattered with beach umbrellas, blue lacquered tables and a blue lawn swing with gigantic white dots. On the other side of it were French doors that gave Trent a glimpse of a richly furnished living room.

A man in a Chinese robe crossed the living room, came to the French doors. He was short, enormously fat and bald except for a fringe of black hair that encircled his head, giving him the appearance of an evil, thick-lipped Billiken.

"Hello, Joe," Borio greeted the man as he opened one of the doors. "We got a visitor."

Reese saw the gun and scowled. "What the devil is this? You trying to get me in Dutch, bringing this lug here?"

Trent grinned sourly and glanced at Reese. "Well, well. The sure-thing gambler himself. You fixing many bowling matches these days?"

Reese had tiny eyes that were almost lost in layers of fat. They got hard and bright now. He took a step forward, hunched his thick shoulders and lifted a vicious right from his knees. Trent moved his head to let it slip by, and set himself to counter with a stiff one to the round convexity of Reese's middle. Borio chuckled and shoved Trent from the rear. It threw him off balance just enough to get his jaw squarely into the path of Reese's oncoming fist. . That punch exploded like a bomb against his chin. There was a sudden dull roaring inside his head and the lights went out.

EYES flipping open under the solid beat of a hand that kept slapping his face, Jim Trent was bewildered when he recognized Sam Moody.

"You shy on sleep or something? I thought you'd never come out of it." Concern was very real on Moody's cheeks.

Trent moved experimentally, then groaned and muttered. "From the way I feel, those birds must have used me for a little kicking practice."

Moody nodded, "You look it, too. Can you walk? We're in a hurry."

He got a hand under Trent's shoulder, helped him to his feet. Trent shook his head to clear the ringing bells out of it. Unconsciously he went through the motions of dusting off his clothes, then swore feelingly as his fingers encountered a wide tear at the right knee.

"Sixty-five bucks worth of suit shot to pieces. Of all the rotten—"

Moody interrupted urgently, "Don't worry about it. A good tailor can weave it together so you'd never know it was there. If you're afraid you'll fall apart in the meantime, I've got some copy pins in the car. Give you one when we get there. Come on."

For the first time Trent noticed that Reese was among those present. He was sprawled on his back with his eyes closed and his mouth open, making gentle snoring sounds. The front of his face was a terrible mess, and his nose seeped blood that was rapidly making a ruin of the expensive rug.

"What did you hit him with?" Trent inquired. "A length of pipe? And where's Borio?"

Moody grinned, produced Cottrell's .38. "The cop's gun. I lammed out of that rooming house right after you did, and brought it along. The cop didn't seem to have any use for it. He was too busy trying to dig the ashes out of his eyes. Borio's not here; that's why we're in a hurry."

They went out the front way. Moody had a sedan parked near the garage entrance. They climbed in and he started the motor, swung it around in the middle of the highway, had it in high gear in a breath, and headed it toward Santa Monica. Trent rolled the window down to let the cold, moisture-laden air clear the thumping hammers out of his brain while he listened to Moody's explanation.

"I played a hunch that you'd gone over to pay Borio a visit, and arrived there just

as the two of you came out," Moody told him. "I could have taken Borio then. But I figured if I tailed him instead, I might dig up some proof of his and Reese's implication in Kovacs' murder. I was watching when you drove into Reese's garage, saw Borio exit a little later and went up and rang the bell. When Reese came to the door I shoved my gun in his ribs and walked right in."

"You must have found out where Borio went, or you wouldn't be in such a hurry."

"I did that little thing," said Moody. "Reese clammed up until I bounced the gun off his nose a few times. After he talked I conked him."

"Therefore the mess," Trent observed. "You've got a sadistic streak in you, Sam. I think you actually enjoyed dishing it out to that heel."

Moody grinned, shrugged.

"You can't handle those slugs with kid gloves. I know. I spent too many years on a police beat before I tied up with you two months ago."

Trent grunted. "I always wondered what soured a reporter enough to make him turn press agent. Did you get a confession?"

"No. He wouldn't go that far. But he told me Borio was headed for the bowling alley. He's going to try and get past the copper they've got on watch and snake that ball out somehow, I suppose."

ON WILSHIRE they halted for a traffic signal, shot across the intersection as it changed. Trent noticed a row of heavy wire copy pins with triangular shaped heads stuck in the rubber insulation around the windshield. He reached over and took one of them to tack together the wide rent in his trouser leg.

The Santa Monica Recreation Center was a sprawling, modernistic affair,

painted buff and trimmed with a lot of chromium and glass brick. Classy stuff. Moody angled the car in to the curb a half block below it and they got out, going the rest of the way on foot.

There was no watchman in front of the place. Moody jerked his head at a black slot of an areaway beside the building and they turned in. Halfway through it Trent's out-thrust foot thudded into something soft. He let out a grunt and sprawled forward.

"What happened?" Moody whispered.

Cursing under his breath, Trent groped around with his hands and experienced a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach when they contacted a face. The face was warm, alive. The odd feeling went away and Trent muttered:

"Watchman. Slugged! His gun's gone. Looks like your hunch about Borio rang the bell."

He got up and they crept toward the rear of the building. It occupied practically the full length of a hundred-foot lot, leaving a strip of concrete about ten feet wide at the back, bounded by a high fence. A door at the far side of the building showed a vertical segment of blackness deeper than the shadow. Moody brought out Cottrell's .38 and moved forward ahead of Trent.

The door gave ingress to a narrow billiard room that ran the length of the building. A half-dozen tables made dark, immobile shapes in the gloom.

At the far end was an archway through which fell a dim shaft of light. They moved silently toward this, passing a snooker table with the balls set up on it. Acting on impulse Trent reached out, slid one of them into his hand, hefted it in the darkness. While not exactly on the deadly side, the thing was at least a weapon.

The twenty bowling lanes gleamed like satin ribbons in the subdued glow of a

night light. At the pit ends hung their identifying numbers, the row of motionless, diamond-shaped pin setting machines. At the forward end lay the ball racks, backed by a rising tier of theater seats split in the middle by a narrow aisle that ran the width of the alleys.

Moody stuck his head out from the side of the archway. "Borio!" he whispered. The word was intended solely for Trent's ears, but the receptive silence of the big place picked up the soft call and magnified it to a sibilant, far-reaching sound.

A dark figure bending over the ball rack on one of the middle alleys jerked up, made a quick movement. A stab of orange flame blossomed in front of him. Lead came out of the flame slash, and made a mess of the fine mahogany finish of a billiard table behind them, and the bowling alley was filled with rolling volumes of sound.

Moody leveled the cop's gun and took a snap shot as Borio ducked behind a towel-hung pedestal at the end of the ball rack. The bullet struck the chalk cone in the shallow howl atop the pedestal and exploded it all over the alley. An idea flashed through Trent's mind.

"You keep him occupied and I'll duck down that aisle between the balcony seats," he husked to Moody. "I think I can bean him with this pool ball."

"No you don't," snapped Moody, "I've got the artillery in this man's army."

He darted out and made the aisle a bare whisper ahead of a winging ounce of hot lead. Trent lost sight of him, but could partially see Borio behind the low pedestal. The latter was squatting down with a harried look on his face as he tried to figure out just where Moody would pop up. It was like a game of cat-and-mouse, with Borio playing the unenvied role of the mouse.

BORIO cracked suddenly. He leaped to his feet with a shrill curse and let go a fusillade that ripped splintery holes in the seat backs along the aisle. Turning, he sprinted for the safety of the pit at the end of the bowling lane. Attempting to zigzag on the slippery hardwood floor, his feet slid out in opposite directions.

He started to go over backward, threshed his arms wildly to regain his balance as the crash of Moody's gun filled the alley with explosive thunder. Borio continued to fall with the limp bonelessness of a puppet whose controlling strings have been severed, skidded on his back almost to the edge of the pit, and lay quiet.

Trent moved forward as Moody yelped in triumph and ran down the alley. He stooped over Borio's immobile form, rose after a moment and came back, grinning and stuffing his gun in his coat pocket.

"Got him," he crowed. "Like knocking over a duck in a shooting gallery. Well, there's your murderer. I'll phone the cops, and tell them to pick up Reese as an accessory."

Trent was standing by the pedestal at the end of the ball rack. He frowned at the remains of the chalk cone wrecked by Moody's bullet, poked into it with an exploring finger and spoke with studied casualness.

"Wait a minute, Sam. You didn't tell me you had a bet on Whitbread. How come?"

His words stopped Moody dead in his tracks. A queer expression fled across the press agent's features.

"That couldn't be an accusation, could it?"

"Might be. You had to have a motive for poisoning Stan Kovacs, you know. Though I don't believe you meant to kill him. The stuff was meant to throw him off

his game so you could clean up, only you were a little green at it.”

Moody forced a laugh. “You’re kidding, Jim,” he said, but his eyes were hard and bright as diamonds.

“I wish I was.” Trent fished into the mess of broken chalk left in the dish atop the post. He pulled out something and held it up so Moody could see it. “I’ve got a copy pin exactly like this one, holding together that rip in my pants. This came from the bunch you had stuck in the rubber insulation around your windshield, Sam. Moreover, Borio would hardly know that Kovacs was the only one of the two bowlers who used chalk on his thumb, or which of these twenty-four alleys the match was to be held on.”

“You got a new chalk cone and stuck this pin through it just far enough so that it would take a dozen or so wipes before the point of it would be exposed on the inside enough to scratch him. Then you exchanged it for the one on the alley where the match was to occur. Kovacs used his own ball, and you had access to it to put the poison in the thumbhole.”

Moody didn’t say a word. His face twisted and he made a grab for the gun in his pocket. Expecting the move, Trent whipped his right hand around in a circular motion, like a softball pitcher. At the bottom of the circle he let go of the snooker ball he’d been clutching. It shot toward Moody like a bullet. He ducked involuntarily away from it, and the slug from his gun went wide. In the split second it took for Moody to collect his wits and shoot again, Trent launched himself forward in a headlong dive, caught Moody around the middle, and they went down with a thudding crash.

Moody was as deceptively agile as a cat. He lurched around, chopping downward with his gun and almost tearing off Trent’s ear. Mad clear through, Trent

got his right arm free and threw his shoulder into a short, explosive hook. It traveled barely six inches. But Moody’s jawbone snapped like rotten plaster under the devastating impact of the blow.

Sitting in Cottrell’s office in the Santa Monica City Hall, Jim Trent fussed with the bandage around his head. Cottrell’s eyes were red and watery, and he blinked.

“By gosh, Trent, if the city of Santa Monica didn’t owe you a debt of gratitude for clearing this up I’d sure as shooting throw the book at you for almost blinding me. How’d you get wise to Moody in the first place?”

Trent grimaced. “Forget about your eyes. It’s all over now. I began to get ideas when I went over to search Borio’s room. It was wet out, and it’s a cinch Borio wouldn’t have left his room unless he had a definite place to go. But he came back in time to put the bite on me as I was leaving. Which meant that someone had told him his place was being searched. That someone could only have been Moody, who’d followed me over from the rooming house.”

COTTRELL grinned nastily and said, “Which also constitutes illegal entry. You know you can be held for that, don’t you?”

“Sure,” Trent grinned. “And I also know that your job wouldn’t be worth a plugged nickel if you held me. Anyway, Borio took me out to Joe Reese’s place because he didn’t want to turn me over to the police till he was sure there was nothing at the bowling alley that might tie him in with the killing. He knew I’d been casing his room because I suspected him, and knew also that, having recently graduated from San Quentin, he’d be in one heck of a jam if anything turned up that would cast suspicion his way.

“I happen to know Moody had been playing the gambling games at Reese’s casino. Got himself pretty deeply in the hole and I guess Reese has been pressing him for the cash. Doping Kovacs and laying a heavy bet on Whitbread gave Moody his chance for a quick clean-up so he could pay Reese off. However, I don’t think Moody intended to kill Kovacs.”

“What makes you say that?” Cottrell queried.

Trent shrugged. “Just a hunch. However, the way I look at it Moody had the thing all figured out in case his plan went haywire. If it turned out he’d overdosed Kovacs and killed him, suspicion would point to Reese and Borio. Reese had plenty of motive and if he was saddled with the crime Moody could forget the I.O.U.’s Reese held against him.

As for Borio, he was a known poisoner and had worked with Reese before.

“Getting back to today, Borio left me at Reese’s place and headed for the bowling alleys. Moody beefed Reese and got me out of there, then took me to the alleys where he blasted Borio. That made Moody the hero and me the witness.

“He had a perfect set-up. Even my being dragged in as chief suspect by the cops on account of the insurance I had on Kovacs worked in his favor. Moody might have gotten away with it, too, only he knew too many—uh—”

Trent hesitated, groping for the proper word.

“Angles?” Cottrell supplied.

“That’s it,” Trent said with a grin. “Too many angles!”