

No Happy Ending

Paco Ignacio Taibo II

translated by William I. Neuman

Poisoned Pen Press



Copyright © 1981 by Paco Ignacio Taibo II

First Trade Paperback Edition 2003

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2002114512

ISBN: 1-59058-038-9 Trade Paperback

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

Poisoned Pen Press
6962 E. First Ave. Ste 103
Scottsdale, AZ 85251
www.poisonedpenpress.com
info@poisonedpenpress.com

Printed in the United States of America

For Paloma (La Pecas), always

...send me books with happy endings,
where the airplane lands without mishap,
the surgeon leaves the operating room with a smile
 on his face,
the blind boy's eyes are opened,
the young man is saved from the firing squad,
people are reunited,
where there are parties and weddings.

—*Nazim Hikmet*

Deaf country, burned city,
the bonfire calls us,
in these times,
 there will be no happy ending.

—*PIT II*

Chapter I

New times overtake me. Overtake my yearnings.

—*Piero*

There's a dead Roman in the bathroom."

"When he's done pissing tell him to drop by and say hello," said Héctor Belascoarán Shayne.

A late, lazy, hot afternoon lingered outside the window.

"This isn't a joke," said the upholsterer Carlos Vargas from the doorway.

Héctor stared out at the clouds moving slowly over his piece of city. "Does he have a spear? Any Roman worth his salt's got to have a spear."

"I said he's dead!"

Héctor got up from the leather swivel chair where he'd whiled away what was left of the afternoon, and looked carefully at his officemate.

The upholsterer leaned against the doorjamb, his face pale, distractedly swinging a small hammer in one hand.

With a limp that was due partly to an old wound and partly because he'd left one shoe behind him under the desk, Héctor walked toward the door. He raised his left hand to his head and ran it roughly through his hair, as if to physically shake off his drowsiness.

"What about a helmet? Has he got a helmet?" Héctor tried one last joke, but the upholsterer's expression didn't change.

Was there really a dead Roman in the bathroom?

Carlos led the way down the ruined hall, the afternoon light filtering through the doorway onto the peeling walls painted a malignant green.

“Yes, he’s got a helmet,” said Carlos as he pushed open the bathroom door.

A Roman foot soldier sat on the toilet, staring at the tile floor, his throat slashed.

Blood oozed slowly down the brass breastplate, over the short, pleated skirt, the hairy legs, and into one sandal. A helmet with a faded plume rested on his head. A long wooden spear leaned against the wall.

“They’ve gone too far this time,” Héctor muttered, cautiously lifting the Roman’s chin. A four-inch gash cut across his throat.

“Who?”

“The sons of bitches who killed this guy.”

The dead man looked at Héctor through bugged-out eyes. He was about fifty years old, with a stubbly growth of beard above a thick double chin. Héctor couldn’t keep a shiver from running up his spine despite the absurdity of the situation.

He let go of the chin and the head sagged back toward the man’s chest, partly covering the gash across his throat. There was blood on Héctor’s hand. He wiped it off on the Roman’s skirt.

“So what do we do now?”

“We search him,” said Belascoarán, inserting his hand behind the metal breastplate etched with dragons and swords and into the pocket of a shirt cut off at the sleeves to give the Roman an authentic, period look.

“Car keys, a hundred pesos, an advertisement for a tailor’s shop, an electric bill...” he recited as he brought the items out and stashed each one in his pants pocket.

“There’s something in his sock,” said Carlos, pointing.

Héctor pulled a plastic-coated ID card from one of the dead man's incongruous socks and shoved it in his pocket without looking at it.

"Let's go, neighbor."

"Where to?"

"Anywhere but here. I don't like this. You can't just let people go around killing Romans in your bathroom."

The upholsterer, hammer in hand, turned back toward the office. Héctor got there before him.

The afternoon was starting to fade. He found his shoe under the wingback chair, collected his jacket from the coatrack, took his .45 automatic from his desk drawer, and slid it into his shoulder holster. They locked the office door behind them.

At that moment the elevator motor kicked into action.

"Quick! The stairs!"

"What if it's Gilberto?" asked the detective.

The two men eyed the metal grating. A song rose up from the elevator shaft, over the noise from the motor and the stillness of their held-in breath: a *ranchera*, sung loudly and off-key.

"It's Gilberto," said Héctor. Carlos nodded.

"What's up?" asked the plumber—the third member of that strange community that occupied the fourth-floor office of the building on the corner of Bucareli and Artículo 123—as the elevator door slid open.

"Let's go," said Héctor, pushing Gilberto back into the elevator, with Carlos right behind him.

"What's the big hurry? A guy comes into work feeling like getting something done for a change, and they won't even let him into his own office," Gilberto protested unsuccessfully.

"There's a dead Roman in the bathroom," said Carlos.

“Roman? Like a Roman orgy kind of Roman?” Gilberto Gómez Letras asked with sudden interest.

“He’s got his fucking throat cut from here to here,” said Carlos, with an appropriately emphatic gesture.

“Yeah, right. What’re you guys trying to pull? Let’s see... what’d you do, go and hire a secretary behind my back and you’ve been up there balling her all afternoon...”

Héctor leaned silently in one corner of the elevator. Who would want to get him mixed up in a murder like this? And what for? What was the idea of killing a guy dressed up like a Roman soldier?

“...what’s her name, Amber Eden, Graciela Putricia?”

The elevator door opened and the three men went out, Gilberto still trying to convince his friends to let him go up and meet the new secretary.

Dodging traffic, they crossed the street and went into a Chinese restaurant. Héctor chose a booth where he could watch the door to their building. It was starting to get dark.

“Two *café con leche*, donuts, and a hot chocolate,” said Héctor to the restaurant’s owner. “Now let me think for a minute.”

“It’s no joke, Gilberto, there really is a dead Roman up there.”

“Yeah, right. So what’s her name?”

“Forget it, Gilberto. You don’t have what it takes. All you’ll ever have is those hookers you like so much out in Nezahualcóyotl. You want a secretary, you got to show some class.”

The traffic got heavier. A pair of shoeshine boys played soccer between the cars with a ball of wadded-up paper.

“There goes El Gallo. Go get him and bring him over here,” said Héctor. The upholsterer, who was sitting closest to the door, jumped up and ran out into the street. A car braked noisily.

A moment later, the sewer engineer Javier Villareal, alias El Gallo, sat in the booth with his three officemates.

“What’s going on around here?”

“Will you believe me if I tell you there’s a dead Roman in our bathroom?” asked Héctor.

“What can I say? In the two years since I’ve been sharing an office with you, I’ve seen two shootouts, a case of poisoned soft drinks, and a kindergarten party. One time Gilberto rented it out as a practice space for a salsa band, and another time some old geezer tried to stab me with a knife. What’s a dead Roman to me?”

“You guys aren’t fooling, are you?” asked Gilberto.

“Hot chocolate and donuts,” ordered El Gallo.



Early the next morning a motorcycle messenger delivered a manila envelope to Héctor Belascoarán Shayne’s apartment, pocketed his tip, and drove away. Héctor stood watching after him in the open doorway, bleary-eyed, the envelope in his hand.

After gulping down two glasses of grapefruit juice mixed from a greenish powder, he sat down at the kitchen table and tore open the envelope: there was a half sheet of paper with the typewritten message, “Don’t get involved,” an airplane ticket to New York made out in his name, and a Polaroid snapshot of a man whose throat had been hacked open with a knife.

Death. All over again.

He spent the next ten minutes looking for his cigarettes. He finally found them under his pillow on his bed, then he shut the door to his apartment, which he’d left open, and went back to the kitchen table to stare at the photograph.

It was too early in the morning. This time of day always threw him off balance, the way it was so empty, sluggish,

unreal somehow. It made it so that he didn't know who he was, couldn't recognize himself.

Even with his graying crew cut the dead man in the picture was still a little younger than the Roman had been. He had a square face and a hard jaw. That's all Héctor could tell, with the head thrown backward like that. The man sat on a chair with his hands tied behind him to the chair back, with something that didn't look like rope. Wire maybe.

A cop, thought Héctor, without knowing why. Maybe because of the crew cut, or the cheap gray suit that gave him the vague look of the secret police. Or a doorman in a four-star hotel. Or a loan shark.

What the hell did all this have to do with him? He wasn't working on anything, he'd spent the last two months in a kind of quasi-Buddhist contemplation of the downtown streets, going on endless, meandering walks, poking around tenement buildings, hunting for bargains in second-hand bookstores, watching the clouds or the traffic from his office window. Two months waiting for something that was worth getting excited about. And now this: two dead men and a plane ticket to New York to keep him from sticking his nose in where somebody thought it didn't belong. But if they didn't want him to get involved, then why the hell had they gone and dumped a dead Roman in his bathroom, and then sent him the photograph of this other guy?

The hot water heater was broken, but he went and took a shower anyway. He stood under the cold spray, and came to a decision that was out of character for him: he would wait one more day, and then decide whether to step aside, or to dig deeper into the story. Two minutes later he changed his mind.

"New York my ass!" he said, shivering with cold.



He walked cautiously down the hall and opened the door to the bathroom only to discover the obvious (who knows why,

who knows how, but obvious enough in the end): the dead Roman had disappeared. All that was left was a brownish bloodstain on the floor, and a certain vague smell that Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, independent detective, would forever after associate with the smell left behind by death.

He shut the door again and turned to look at his three officemates watching curiously from the far end of the hall.

“He’s not there. Must have gone for a walk,” Belascoarán said laconically.

“I never even got to see him,” complained Gilberto.

“You didn’t miss much. What good’s a Roman with socks?” observed the upholsterer.

Héctor left them in the hall and went into the office.

The night before, he’d kept watch from the Chinese restaurant across the street until after midnight, when fatigue had gotten the better of him and he’d gone home. All the same, it made him feel good; at least his intuition was still working.

He took his coat from the rack and was about to head out again when the telephone rang. El Gallo Villareal looked up from his drawing table, where he sat doodling a naked woman perched on a tall stool.

“Aren’t you here kind of early, Gallo?”

“I wanted to see the Roman.”

“Sorry to disappoint you,” said Héctor, picking up the phone.

On the other end, his sister, Elisa, asked him over for lunch. He said yes without thinking twice, then went down to the street.

He felt the cool air on his face as he left the building, and a muscle tensed near the scar that trailed away from his bad eye. It was always with him, unseeing, useless, reminding him how close a man could come, how easy it was, how quickly

everything could go to hell, how tremendously screwed up this country was. Not to mention his job.

Methodically, he set about finding a witness to the dead Roman's disappearance. He came up empty-handed at the record store, the Chinese restaurant across the street, and with Doña Concha, the woman who cleaned their building. But he hit gold with Salustio, the one-eyed man who ran the newspaper kiosk on the corner.

At six A.M. two men had come out of the building carrying a box, "like for a small refrigerator," and loaded it into a moving van. At the same time the picture of the second victim had been delivered to the detective's apartment. But Salustio couldn't give him a description of the men or their vehicle. He said he was sorry.

"With just one eye I don't see too good at six in the morning, and with the hangover I had this morning, you're lucky I saw as much as I did."

Héctor slipped off into the passing human torrent, hoping that the rhythm of his walking would help to put his thoughts in order. He lit a cigarette and set off at a brisk pace through the downtown streets.

What was going on? If they didn't want him to get involved, what were they doing sending him dead bodies? And what did the Roman have to do with it?

Ixtapalapa? The passion play? No, this was December, not Holy Week. No connection there.

He walked across the Alameda park, watching two small children tag along after a balloonman. At Avenida Hidalgo he joined a crowd gathered around a police van that had caught fire from a short circuit under the hood.

Two policemen were trying to put out the fire while the crowd watched. No one volunteered to lend a hand. Mexicans love a spectacle as much as they hate the law, he thought, as the fire flared up with a beautiful explosion of flame and

fireworks. The hundred or so onlookers broke into applause, then started to retreat before the hateful stare of one of the policemen, who held a Mauser in his hands.

“Helluva show,” said a lottery ticket seller.

Héctor nodded.

“Too bad it didn’t blow up and take those two sons of bitches with it,” said a high school student loaded down with books, as he hurried past Héctor to catch his bus.

“Too bad,” said the woman who sold ears of boiled corn from a pushcart, whom the two cops had been shaking down when their van caught fire.

“Too bad,” repeated Héctor. He lit another cigarette and went off to keep his lunch date.



“You know him better than I do. You tell me. Should I be worried, or am I just imagining things?”

“What the hell do I know? I can’t figure him out either. Him and his friends, they talk in a language I can’t understand. They’re dealing with bigger things than anything I could ever lay claim to. I’ve got nothing—”

“Okay, Héctor, that’s enough. The complaints window is closed for the afternoon,” said Elisa, as she set the table with plates, glasses, salt and pepper shakers, paper napkins, and a tureen of hearty beef stew. Héctor laughed, really laughed, for the first time in a couple of days. He’d been working so hard at keeping his emotions under control that his face had become frozen into a sort of crooked sneer.

“So he’s been drinking. What else is going on?”

“Isn’t that enough? What’s he need to drink so much for?”

“What are you getting at, Elisa? Do you think he’s in some kind of trouble? What is it?”

“I think he’s gotten himself involved in something really heavy this time. I don’t know anything for sure, it’s just

a feeling. The two times I saw him this week he seemed depressed, down, you know. Once he was drunk, and the other time I went by his apartment and he was sleeping. The whole place smelled like rum.”

“Are you sure?”

“I didn’t dare say anything. I mean, it’s not my business, really...I feel like an idiot, but I can’t even talk to my own kid brother.”

“The same thing happens to me when I try and talk to you, silly.”

Elisa gave Héctor a hug. Her freckles shone in the sunlight angling through the window into the small apartment.

“I asked him to come and have lunch with us. He said he was busy but he’d try and get here in time for coffee.”

“Listen, if *you* can’t talk to him, then forget it, because I’m a hundred times worse than you are. I’m sure that...”

The doorbell rang as they were drinking coffee, remembering afternoons spent in the old house in Coyoacán, and their father, old man Belascoarán, with his leftist-inspired stories of life in the Wild West, Wild Bill Hickock, Billy the Kid.

“*Jefe!*” howled a blond, freckled shadow as it threw itself into the arms of a disconcerted, shy, but happy Héctor Belascoarán Shayne.

After Marina came their brother, Carlos Brian. Three or four years younger than Héctor, he had his mother’s Irish genes, a thick mop of red hair, and extraordinarily blue eyes. Extraordinarily blue and extraordinarily tired, thought Héctor, taking a second, closer look at his brother, while he tried to disentangle himself from Marina.

“Well if it isn’t my big brother,” said Carlos, patting him softly on the cheek.

“How long has it been, *jefe?*”

“A couple of years, Marina.”

The three of them went into the dining room, which doubled occasionally as a guest bedroom. Elisa had gone into the kitchen to make more coffee.

“What are you up to these days, brother?” asked Carlos.

“The worst part of it is I don’t even know myself.”

Héctor hesitated, caught between the urge to tell them about the dead Roman in the office bathroom and the dead man in the photograph—and the temptation to retreat into his habitual reticence.

“What about you guys?” he asked, opting to take himself out of the ring.

“We’re going to have a baby,” said Marina, placing her hand on a stomach just beginning to grow big.

“Seriously?” asked Elisa, returning with a steaming pot of coffee.

“Seriously,” said Carlos.

Héctor took out his pack of Delicado filters and lit one.

I’m going to be an uncle, he thought. He didn’t feel like getting involved in his brother’s life, he didn’t need any more problems. Suddenly he realized that he was tired too. Tired of what? he asked himself.

“I’m tired too,” he announced, as though someone there could tell him why.

“You and who else?” asked Carlos.

“You, apparently,” Elisa cut in.

“Wait a minute. If this is what you guys have in mind, then I’m out of here. If we’re going to play family Ping-Pong, I’m going to take my paddle and go.”

“Tell it to him straight, Elisa,” said Héctor, picking up his coffee cup and cradling it in his hands, avoiding his brother’s eyes.

“Me? I’m the subject of the family reunion?” asked Carlos with a laugh. “I thought it was you,” he said, pointing at Héctor.

Marina sat down on the rug in a corner of the room.

"I suppose it could just as easily be me," said Elisa, with a warm smile in Marina's direction.

"What's wrong?" Marina asked.

"I guess we're kind of a weird family," said Héctor.

"What you are is a bunch of cowards," said Marina.

They drank their coffee in silence. Out in the street, a child went by pulling a wagon, and the screech of the wheels came to them through the window.

"Something's going on, though, isn't it, Carlos?" asked Elisa. "Besides the baby, I mean."

"Uh-huh."

"Tell them already, dammit. You're acting like you don't trust them," said Marina, looking Carlos in the eye.

"Some other time. I'm not having a very good day today." He stood up. "Thanks for the coffee, Elisa. You coming?" he asked Marina on his way out the door.

Marina got up, kissed Elisa, and held Héctor's hand for a moment.

"See you later, *jefe*. Let me know if you ever need a secretary again. I've got lots of free time on my hands."

She went out, leaving the door open behind her. Héctor looked out into the empty hallway in silence, thinking about how he loved them both.

"So much for our family meeting," said Elisa. "More coffee?"

"No thanks, I've got to get moving. I'm going to be an uncle. And you're going to be an aunt. Can you believe it?"



Maybe because he understood that loneliness doesn't kill, but that it's lonely people who go off and die on their own, Héctor had learned to engage himself in an intense internal monologue while he moved through the city, glomming distractedly on to little fragments of the urban landscape as he

went, Christmas decorations, faces, blotches of color, voices, noises, impressions.

Without knowing how he'd got there, he found himself back in the center of town. It was rush hour, all the shops were full, car horns sounded amidst lights and more lights. He felt insulated by the tumult, anonymous in the bustling crowd, and he concentrated his energy inward, inside his head. At Donceles he came to a café where an old man stood playing "Veracruz" on the clarinet. He drank a soda pop and listened to the wistful, romantic melody, observing the unhappy relationship between the musician and his audience. When the old man was done, the detective followed him into a bar, where he played the same song again, only to be met by the same impassive expression on the faces of his accidental listeners. As though the old man wasn't even there, had never been there. He followed him into an oyster bar twenty paces down the street toward San Juan de Letran. And then to a juice bar after that.

For the fourth time, the blind old man passed the hat in front of Héctor, and for the fourth time, Héctor dropped a couple of peso coins inside, the last of his change.

"Excuse me, don't you know how to play anything except 'Veracruz'?"

"Sure I do. But I had a girlfriend from there once, and I've been thinking about her a lot lately," said the old man.

Héctor quit following him. All he had left was a five-hundred-peso bill, and he didn't want to keep on listening if he wasn't going to give something in return. The old man raised his clarinet to his lips, blowing the first few notes of "Veracruz," the song and the instrument both relics of a better time, better memories. No one in the juice bar paid him any attention, despite the fact that there was a long line of people waiting to buy haw-apple juice, the advertised special of the day.

“You learn something new every day,” Héctor told himself. He wasn’t even sure he knew what a haw-apple was, let alone that you could make juice out of it. He headed over to Artículo 123 and his office.

As he climbed the stairs, he could feel the fatigue come over him from so many hours of brisk walking on pavement.

“All’s quiet, neighbor,” said El Gallo Villareal, who sat hunched over his blueprints.

“They didn’t bring any new corpses dressed up like Nezahualcóyotl?”

“They must have the day off.”

Héctor collapsed into the big armchair. Its springs creaked with a delicious intimacy under his weight. I love this fucking chair, Héctor thought.

What the hell is going on?

Héctor sunk even deeper into the old leather. The air was full of smoke from El Gallo’s cigar. Outside, the sweet night. Here, the warm, familiar office, a couple of dead men hovering around out there somewhere. Too peaceful by far. Héctor didn’t want to think about any of it. His thoughts returned to the old blind man, the way he swayed back and forth on the tips of his toes, the out-of-tune, metallic sound of the clarinet in the midst of the traffic noise, the sweet, catchy melody.

“Tell me something. You’re a scientist...”

“I’m only a scientist when it comes to building sewers, neighbor. For the rest of it, I’ve just got a good eye, that’s all.”

“Me, I’m the opposite...I decided to become a detective because I didn’t like the color my wife picked for the new carpet. I got my license by mail for three hundred pesos, and I’ve never read a single British mystery novel. I don’t know a fingerprint from a finger sandwich. I can only shoot

something if it doesn't move very much. All that and I'm only thirty-three years old."

"Well, let's just hope you make it."

"Make what?"

"To thirty-four."

There was a long pause. Héctor lit a cigarette.

"I don't understand a thing. Not one damn thing," he said, throwing the match onto the floor and giving up on his officemate's scientific opinion.



He was becoming quite a talker. He preferred his old style, the taciturn and enigmatic Belascoarán Shayne. The other face of the clueless, uneasy, perennially surprised Belascoarán Shayne. The public face. Because, when all is said and done, a man is a hunter after images. After his own image. Sometimes he's successful in the hunt and he comes up with something consistent, warm, something close to reality. Other times he spends all night pursuing an illusion, clinging to shadows. And sometimes the shadow turns around and comes after him, and everything goes to hell. His only chance for survival was to accept the chaos and quietly become one with it. Take yourself lightly, but take the city seriously, the city, that inscrutable porcupine bristling with quills and soft wrinkles. Shit, he was in love with Mexico City. Another impossible love on his list. A city to love, to love with abandon. Passionately, wildly.

Héctor's mind fed off all this and more (the cold air, the *ranchera* music drifting up from the record store, the roofs of buses passing before his eyes without really registering) as he watched the street from the roof of his office building, where he'd gone to smoke a cigarette, to pursue the night, watching from above, keeping his distance.

The best thing was to wait. The killers would show their faces sooner or later. He tossed his cigarette over the edge

and watched the tiny spark's descent with pleasure, a dot of light slowly dropping the seven floors to the street.



“His name is Rataplan,” said the woman with the ponytail.

Héctor, who'd just come from the kitchen with a knife in one hand and a pair of eggs in the other, didn't know quite how to react to the small rabbit that was unceremoniously thrust between his arms.

Smiling and implacable, humming the theme from *Casablanca*, the woman with the ponytail held out the black rabbit.

“Boy or girl?” asked the detective, blocking the door with his body.

“It's a boy, stupid. Obviously. I wouldn't bring you a girl bunny.”

“I guess you can come in then.”

Héctor turned his back on her and retreated into the kitchen.

“Put on the record that's on the record player. Start it on the second song.”

“What is it?”

“Gerry Mulligan.”

The oil smoked in the pan, the onion was starting to burn. He dumped some of the oil into the sink, then broke the eggs into the pan. So much for my omelette, he thought.

Failure alienates, fear destroys one's willingness to try new things and attracts more fear, life runs away. There was a lot to think about, but Héctor wasn't in the mood for licking at his wounds, so he just stood there instead, mumbling incoherently to himself, watching the eggs cook. In the living room, the woman with the ponytail finally figured out how to operate the dilapidated record player and Mulligan's sax filled the air.

“Do you want me to go?”

“What?”

“Do you want me to go away?”

Héctor hesitated. “Yes.”

“I’m leaving you the rabbit,” she said, and disappeared.

Héctor listened to the door close, then hurried into the hallway to bring her back, to shout without shouting for her to not go away, fighting against the urge to take her by the arm and stop her. When he got back to the kitchen his omelette was burned beyond all salvation.

“You know what?” Héctor asked out loud.

The rabbit looked at him for a moment, then went back to nibbling on a stray boot lying in the middle of the floor.

“I’m never going to fall in love with a woman again.”

The rabbit raised its eyes at this macabre declaration, and tilted its ears forward.

“I’m never going to be able to have a stable relationship with anyone again.”

The rabbit directed an appropriately harsh stare in the detective’s direction.

“And the worst of it is that I knew it all along.”

The rabbit turned his back on Héctor and pissed on the rug.

Héctor smiled, laughed, and started to cry.



He had two dead men, one plastic ID card, an electric bill, a photograph, a possible lead in the messenger service that had brought him the photo, and a one-way ticket to New York. That was all. It wasn’t much, but it was better than standing around crying in a corner of the room while he waited for the smoke from the burned omelette to clear. If he got to work right now he’d gain a day, instead of waiting passively for who knows what to happen.

He turned the record player up all the way and tried to think. Mulligan's music was like a soft, fuzzy caress. Like the rabbit, if it could play the saxophone.

The ID card bore the name *Leobardo Martínez Reta*, giving the aforementioned the right to the rather dubious discounts offered to state employees in the government-run stores of the social security system. Why carry it around in his sock? The card didn't give any information about the man's background or employment. He couldn't even be sure that this Leobardo Martínez was actually the dead Roman. Who knows? Maybe he'd picked it up off the floor and stuck it in his sock. The electric bill came from a carpenter's shop on Bolívar Street.

One question bothered him more than the rest. If they'd gone to all the trouble of carting the body away again, why hadn't they thought to remove the ID card and the electric bill in the first place, after they killed him? The messenger service was bound to be a waste of time; he gave up on the hope of finding anything there. The plane ticket was for the next day, at twelve noon.

A good time to fly to New York. A good time not to fly to New York. Mulligan had the air all to himself; the rabbit had taken possession of the rug. What did rabbits eat? What did saxophonists eat? What did dead Romans eat? What could a detective eat, after burning his omelette all to hell?